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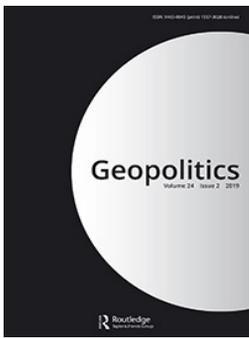
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Reflexivity and Temporality in Researching Violent Settings: Problems with the Replicability and Transparency Regime

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ABSTRACT

Researchers studying conflict, violence, and human rights in dangerous settings across the globe face a complex set of ethical, personal, and professional dilemmas. Especially in more positivist fields and professions, there is pressure to conduct and present research as 'objective'. Yet the reality of field research in violent and conflict-affected settings is much messier than ideals in methodology textbooks or the polished presentation of field data in much published work. I argue that rather than the imposition of blanket positivist standards of replicability and research transparency, research in violent settings needs to draw lessons from interpretivist ideas and methodologies about the researcher's role in the process of data gathering, analysis, and presentation. I focus on three key issues: reflexivity, temporality, and the geography of research between 'field' and 'home,' drawing on personal experiences conducting research on conflict, violence, and postconflict society in Liberia, Nicaragua, South Africa, and Uganda. I show how these three issues practically, theoretically, and ethically conflict with replicability and transparency demands. Through a practice of reflexive openness, however, positivist-leaning researchers can more honestly and ethically reconcile realities of research with professional expectations in the field and after returning.

Beyond the omnipresent ethical imperative to protect human subjects, researchers in violent and conflict-affected settings must engage in various ethical, mental, and professional balancing acts while living in the field, interacting with research participants, recording and analyzing data, and reporting findings. Researchers in more positivist fields must determine how to reconcile their experiences in the field and emotional orientations toward research participants with the 'objectivity' that their disciplines or employers may expect in data gathering and analysis. Balancing these priorities can be a struggle even in more reflexive fields like ethnographic sociology and critical geography (e.g. Nilan 2002; Woon 2013). An

acceptance by positivist-oriented or dominated fields of the contingencies of fieldwork in violent environments and researchers' role in the research process can reduce the ostensible conflict between positivist ideals and the realities of conducting challenging, ethical research.

In this article, I focus on two key issues: how researchers' personal, embodied place in the research process and how the passage of time both affect the conduct of research, how data are analyzed and reported, and how considerations both present and future shape replicability of findings and ethical risks.[1] All of these matters fit uncomfortably within positivist paradigms of social science based around the natural sciences' model of hypothesis testing to generate generalizable, replicable causal inference.[2] Issues of (inter)subjectivity and temporality are heightened when studying conflict and violence, ranging from the interpersonal to the global level, and when working in violent settings. For this reason, I argue that reflexivity is essential for positivist and post-positivist scholars of conflict and violence to accurately represent the research process and field environment, to counter and acknowledge 'bias' effects on not only what we observe, but also how we' estimate and understand biases (Bond 2018, 45).

Anthropologists and ethnographers in other social scientific fields have disciplinary norms of reflexivity and direct discussion of issues of positionality.[3] Here I focus primarily on issues in my home discipline of political science, currently in the throes of debates about 'Data Access and Research Transparency,' or DA-RT (Lupia and Elman 2014; Symposium 2015, 2016). The DA-RT initiative privileges a positivist, Western-oriented conception of social science based on the premise of 'objectivity' and a flawed experimentalist 'gold standard' (Cartwright 2007) of causal identification.[4] The DA-RT vision of best practices holds disadvantages for under-resourced scholars and those facing professional, political, and personal insecurity (e.g. Bleck, Dendere, and Sangaré. 2018; Fujii 2016b; Isaac 2015; Lynch 2016). The DA-RT initiative has also sought to apply a positivist conception of what research and transparency entail, while ignoring the repeated efforts of interpretivist political scientists to encourage greater reflexivity and an 'ethnographic sensibility' across the discipline (Pachirat 2015; Schatz 2009, 2017; Wedeen 2010; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006).[5]

This article is motivated by debates in political science, but the discussion is germane to other social sciences and interdisciplinary fields in which positivism has become the dominant paradigm of inquiry, as well as journalistic and professional research and advocacy in which there are positivist claims and aims of objectivity.[6] Across fields and methods, researchers' experiences, identities, emotions, and decisions shape the research process. Therefore, from a positivist perspective, to omit reflexivity is in fact to introduce or fail to counter bias in the collection and analysis of data (Bond 2018; Knott 2019, 149).

While time structures all the sociopolitical processes social scientists study (Pierson 2004), it also structures the research process. Researchers collect data during particular moments that shape the availability of information and interlocutors, the spatial and sociopolitical environment of fieldwork, and the mental states of both researchers and participants. Yet neither the researcher nor the field remains static. Over the course of fieldwork, the researcher themself[7] gains more knowledge, develops interpersonal relationships and entanglements, and may change emotionally. On returning from fieldwork to a professional 'home' (even if the researcher is working in their home country), the researcher who now must analyze data collected in the field has changed from the person they were prior to fieldwork when conceiving and designing a project. Any geographic and social setting in which research was conducted will change, in both subtle and overt ways, after the researcher has left the field. These temporal changes make it difficult to anticipate potential downstream risks of research conduct and participation, rendering 'transparent' sharing of data and research procedures problematic (e.g. Knott 2019), while the shifting nature of the field inhibits replicating research conducted in the past.

Ontologically, I take a post-positivist position that there is a 'real' truth and facts; epistemologically, I hold the critical realist view that our knowledge of the world is socially constructed and refracted by interpretation, but that in combination, partial, situated knowledge from different perspectives can help us approach the truth (Bhaskar 2008; Haraway 1988; Roth and Mehta 2002). In this I differ from interpretivists who focus heavily on meanings and understandings held by research participants independent of researchers' conceptualizations (e.g. Fujii 2018), but I seek to bring interpretivist *methodological* insights about reflexivity and context-specificity to bear on positivist-leaning social science.

In dialogue with published works, I draw on my experience conducting field research on issues of conflict, violence, and postconflict sociopolitical dynamics in Liberia, Nicaragua, South Africa, and Uganda to illustrate some of the dilemmas researchers face studying and working in violent settings, and the problems posed by attempts to create uniform standards for data gathering, analysis, and reporting.[8] Feminist and postcolonial/decolonial scholars have been particularly attuned to problems of positionality and power in field research (e.g. Palriwala 2005; Wolf 1996). I build on the foundations they and others (e.g. J. A. Clark and Cavatorta 2018; Shesterinina 2019; Thomson, Ansoms, and Murison 2012) have laid, though from my particular perspective as a white, cis-gender heterosexual man from the Global North. I recognize that this is a privileged perspective in an academic and professional world in the Global North structured by and for white men, and that I have the privilege of secure, rather than contingent, employment. Researchers with more marginalized identities may face

dismissal of their work as too emotional, too focused on identity issues, or of engaging in 'me studies' if they are open about their experiences or work on topics related to their identities (Ayoub and Rose 2016), despite the validity and value of the perspectives they bring to these issues.

I first discuss the DA-RT debate and how interpretivist insights about positionality and contingency clash with visions of research replicability. I then discuss how time shapes and shifts the research and analysis process, foreclosing possibilities for true replication and changing researchers' ethical obligations. Finally, I describe the researcher's role as a bridge between the 'field' and an academic 'home,' and how an approach of 'reflexive openness' (MacLean et al. 2018), rather than transparency, better reflects the realities and potential perils of research on and in violent settings.

Replicability versus Reality and Uncertainty

The messy, highly personalized issues in the process of data gathering, analysis, and reporting all point to the difficulty, if not impossibility, of positivist ideals of 'replicability' (Alvarez, Key, and Núñez 2018; Clemens 2017; King 1995) when applied to social science research on conflict, violence, and human rights conducted with human participants. There has been little consensus among positivist scholars across the social sciences about the definition of replication (see Herrnson 1995; King 1995), but Clemens' (2017) clear, synthesized conceptualization defines replication only as either a) verifying a published study's results by using the exact same analytical steps with the same original data or the exact same sample of participants, or b) using the exact same analytical steps while resampling from the same original population. When elements of the analytical process change or the sample has changed, what is conducted is at most a robustness test. Clemens' first type would be considered by some to be a 'verification,' with only the second type a 'replication,' since it involves following the same analytical steps, but using independently collected data on a new sample from within the original population (King 1995, 451 fn.2; Herrnson 1995, 452; Sniderman 1995, 464).

As Clemens (2017, 327) notes, however, a study conducted using the same analytical steps on new data 'gathered on the same sample at a substantially different time' is a robustness test and not a replication because the sample and data gathering environment have changed in the interim.[9] Researcher characteristics are variant and the fieldwork environment is constantly evolving. For researchers using interviews and ethnography in violent settings, access to places and people[10] and the responses researchers receive will always be different based on personal characteristics, so two researchers studying the same question at the same time with the same participant selection process are still likely to recover

different data. Interlocutors may change their answers due to shifting political winds or public narratives. Key informants may move or die, making it more difficult to verify information or access certain populations in the future. Over time, the spaces in which research was conducted may no longer exist or have changed drastically, destroyed or remade through conflict, disaster, or development. The original researcher, possessing situated knowledge, and subsequent analysts will interpret interview transcripts and field notes differently.

Archival research could theoretically be more replicable since the sources do not change, but access can – the current Ortega regime closed the Nicaraguan military archives to outside researchers, for instance. Regardless, individual researchers inevitably will have different interpretations of the meaning of particular documents or passages. The compilation of quantitative data from archives and repositories and access to existing datasets in the field depend on researcher and context-specific factors (Chambers-Ju 2014; Jensenius 2014). Even quantitative, machine-read text analysis of large corpuses of archival documents on violence varies subject to researchers' coding decisions, algorithms, and analytical lenses (see Douglass and Harkness 2018). Surveys and experimental research, too, are not replicable in the same setting over time due to changing circumstances of conflict and coercion: 'social conditions in conflict zones interact with the survey ritual in ways that can systematically bias the data collected' (Denny and Driscoll 2019, 10).[11] Regardless of the methodology used, contextual factors and researchers themselves mediate the research process.

Positionality and Replicability

Excising the influence of a researcher's own standpoint from data gathering and analysis is extremely difficult, if not impossible, in all settings. Studying conflict, violence, and human rights, pretensions to being an impartial observer, to avoid taking sides or to prevent the personal views and emotions from filtering into the decisions that shape our research and writing, are even further from reality (Shesterinina 2019; Woon 2013). The patterns through which we mentally, implicitly sort and analyze actors and events in the field are shaped not only by our understanding of the research setting, but also by researchers' own past experiences and perceptions of security, violence, and safety. For example, my own relatively secure early life made it difficult to understand the psychology of victims of violence who also perpetrate violence and to appreciate their victimhood, until I myself suffered violent threats and an assault (see below), shifting my subjectivity.[12]

Researcher Characteristics and Participants' Perceptions

Gender, racial, political, ethnic, religious, and other identities can be assets or barriers to access, depending on the setting, research topic, or interlocutors. Different aspects of a researcher's intersectional identities become salient at different times and their effects often vary across research participants, even in the same field site (Bouka 2015; Clark and Cavatorta 2018; Naz 2012; Peritore 1990; Schwedler 2006; Yacob-Haliso 2018). As Parkinson (2016) and Yacob-Haliso (2018) demonstrate, age and life stage (i.e. married and a mother for Yacob-Haliso) can affect what settings researchers are able to access and how they are perceived and responded to in their field sites, factors that change over time and inhibit the precise replication of research projects. Researchers' past experiences, even when unrelated to the research topic, may affect their interview skills and style, as Fujii (2018, xv) points out when discussing how her theater experience made interviewing feel natural, or their access, as in Sirnate's (2014) use of her journalistic experience and credentials to set up sensitive interviews. Researchers, through self-presentation, can also intentionally, unintentionally, or subconsciously shape how others view them, and correct or ignore misperceptions (Tewksbury and Gagné 1997; Wood 2006, 382; Sirnate 2014).

How researchers present themselves and are perceived in the research setting also matters for access and the quality of information received. One particularly fine line that researchers in violent settings walk is in managing the perception that they might be spies (Driscoll and Schuster 2018; Clark and Cavatorta 2018). At some interviews in Liberia, I had to spend time trying to convince participants that I was not, in fact, an agent of the US Central Intelligence Agency, though my disavowals and student identification card did not always seem to convince. In some cases, having a military appearance, with short hair and an athletic build, may have helped get interviewees who had been fighters in the civil war to open up on the assumption that I could relate to their experiences. In other instances, it may have dissuaded full and open answers due to lingering suspicions about who exactly employed me. This can provide a useful line to walk for researchers attempting to gain access to relatively closed or clandestine groups, who may respect people they believe have security backgrounds. Yet perceptions of a researcher's security ties necessarily affect what they will be told – and it can be a dangerous liability if actual intelligence agencies believe such ties exist.[13]

This may be particularly dangerous for researchers based abroad, but conducting fieldwork in their native country, like University of Toronto doctoral student Alexander Sodiqov, who was arrested and accused of espionage while conducting research on ethnic conflict management in his home country of Tajikistan in 2014, and only freed after a month. Foreign

researchers are certainly not immune to this risk, however. In 2018, Durham University doctoral student Matthew Hedges was arrested in the United Arab Emirates while researching Emirati security strategy, reported to authorities by a suspicious research participant and tried and sentenced to life in prison for espionage (then pardoned). Also in 2018, Egyptian intelligence and state media accused American University of Cairo professor Amy Austin Holmes of being an agitating agent for the Nubian ethnic minority, and she has not returned to Egypt since.[14] In the worst case, in 2016, University of Cambridge doctoral student Giulio Regeni was tortured and murdered, most likely by Egyptian security forces, for his research on civic and labor organizations challenging the military government.

Finally, relationships also shape perceptions of researchers and researchers' own access and sympathies. The ways in which researchers gain access to research settings and participants – especially the organizations, gatekeepers, or early informants in a snowball sample who facilitate the research process and the research assistants or translators with whom researchers work (Campbell et al. 2006; Crowhurst 2013; Edwards 2013; Fujii 2018) – affect the sample of participants, the data they provide, and how researchers interpret those data. With whom one interacts, spends time, or dates[15] sends signals that researchers may not always be able to anticipate or understand. Friendships or relationships can offer social networks that facilitate research, providing access to populations with whom the researcher would like to speak, but they could also curtail access if one has taken up with people or groups that potential participants dislike or find suspicious.

Participant Characteristics and Researchers' Perceptions

How researchers conduct themselves and analyze information also depends on participant characteristics. To collect data from those primarily identified as 'perpetrators' of violence, there may be a need to act sympathetically towards them, to demonstrate, at least outwardly, understanding of their point of view, valuing their perspectives and descriptions of their experiences even if, internally, one feels horror or repugnance. Interlocutors may, in fact, seek to manipulate researchers' emotions (Robben 1996), and researchers must attempt to separate out truth, lies, and spin in participants' statements (Baird 2009; Fujii 2010), while also controlling for their own priors about individuals or collective groups. Participants' presentations and omissions may be provide valuable data in and of themselves (Fujii 2010; Wedeen 2010, 256), but they can also be psychologically taxing and difficult for researchers to manage (see Shesterinina 2019). These interpersonal and emotional elements of data collection, whether undertaken as an ethnographer, interviewer, or survey enumerator, affect what data are gathered and how they are analyzed.

In Liberia, I interviewed former military commanders from rebel organizations and state security forces who personally committed or oversaw atrocities. In the moment, I smiled, nodded sympathetically, agreed with their statements to try to keep them talking, and listened to stories about their families. Always in the back of my mind, however, were disagreements and disdain for these individuals' actions and seeming lack of remorse, a sense of injustice that such violent people faced few legal consequences and in many cases enjoyed positions of wealth and power. It was only after leaving the field and reflecting while reading through interview notes that I was able to suppress some of my initial emotions and to try to analyze these participants' statements and actions on their own terms, what Shitrit (2018, 261–62) calls 'acting as if' you 'could listen and open yourself up to the lifeworld of' a moral or political 'adversary.'[16]

The Contingency of Data

As interpretivist scholars have long highlighted (see discussions in Pachirat 2015; Schatz 2009; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006), for all of the reasons above, we can consider data collected in the field – whether through ethnography, interviews, archival research, surveys, or a multimethod approach – to be 'co-constructed' between researchers and their interlocutors, context, and texts (Lesutis 2018; Tripp 2018; Fujii 2018, 2; Pachirat 2015; Maisel 1995). In positivist quantitative studies using data from surveys or structured interviews, there are often controls for interviewer enumerator effects. These create a variable with different values for each interviewer or enumerator, assuming that this captures underlying potential variation in how interviewers interact with participants. Yet for each interviewer or enumerator, their individual interactions with each participant are heterogeneous, and it is impossible in this statistical manner to tell which particular aspect(s) of an interviewer's identity or self-presentation and behavior may be affecting the data being gathered. Furthermore, the data and results of any fieldwork methodology are particular not only to the people who produced them, but also the temporal and sociopolitical contexts in which they were produced.

Temporality and the Changing Researcher and Field

Time changes both researchers and the 'field' in which they conduct research in ways that further complicate visions of research replicability. These temporal issues are heightened by the instability, danger, and psychological and social intensity of violent settings. Researchers' access and perspectives change over time in the field. Access sometimes improves as people get to know researchers better, allowing them to blend into the background (e.g. Chakravarty 2012). Access could be

curtailed, however, due to broken relationships or to key gatekeepers moving locations or positions, being politically pressured, or even dying (Lynch 2016, 37).[17] Without these relationships and gatekeepers, it can be difficult for researchers to continue their projects. If they are not present in the future, it then becomes impossible to try to emulate (let alone replicate) research. Researchers themselves also become different people, reshaped by their interactions and experiences over the course of conducting fieldwork.

Researcher Experiences in and after the Field

The emotional weight of conducting research on violence and in violent settings and the potential for researchers themselves to experience violence can deeply affect how research is conducted and change how researchers relate to participants or understand their research contexts and topics over time (see Loyle and Simoni 2017; Markowitz 2019). While I told interviewees in Liberia they did not need to relate personal experiences of violence and my questions sought to avoid directly addressing this topic due to concerns about retraumatization, many participants brought up such issues voluntarily. Forcibly conscripted fighters related violence they committed and their own suffering. I was especially affected by a former rebel commander, who spoke of perpetrating violence, but had survived the war relatively unscathed only to lose a limb to an armed burglar. These complex feelings of empathy, solidarity, guilt, and anger are common in research on violence and injustice, yet they tend to be omitted from positivist research reporting to maintain a façade of neutrality (Jones and Ficklin 2012), and so I tried to suppress them, both in the moment and in planning for writing based on my fieldwork.

Eventually, these contradictions – between the emotional reality of research and the positivist ideals I had internalized – pushed me into depression. Following discussions with friends familiar with the context and after rereading Theidon's (2014) valuable paper on self-care for violence researchers,[18] I shifted my interviewing toward a new sample, one less directly involved in the more violent aspects of Liberia's post-1989 history. I decided to avoid pursuing interviews with certain people whose histories might provoke the same strong reactions again. There was no description of this as a sampling strategy in any methodology textbook I had read (my doctoral program did not have a qualitative or field methods course at the time)[19] and no way to have planned such a research strategy – keep going until you are exhausted or disgusted.[20] In the moment, I modified my plans try to stay mentally healthy enough to finish the other portions of the research, biasing my interview sample in comparison to a counterfactual situation in which I was emotionally unaffected. The emotional weight of

my previous interviews, however, still likely carried into my demeanor and questioning in later interviews, in ways of which I was unaware at the time.

Researchers working in violent settings can also be subject to violence themselves, which inevitably affects their analytical lenses and how they interact with participants and the broader research setting. Researchers can be unexpectedly caught up in combat or other violent events while conducting research, and the experience of being a bystander to violence can be a terrible, but enlightening experience (Bourgois 1982; Parkinson 2018).[21] Experiencing violent acts or threats on one's own person can also shift one's understanding of the field setting and the social lives of its residents. In my own research, personal experiences of violence in South Africa led to a more empathic understanding of the mindsets of victims and victim-perpetrators of violence, while being a bystander to state violence in Uganda (see below) changed my view of the sociopolitical environment and the character of different actors.

In Cape Town, South Africa, I was examining crime and interpersonal violence, analyzing surveys and interviewing participants who self-identified in the survey as having carried weapons, most of whom also reported having been victims of violence or threats. In initial interviews, I tried to be sympathetic to the participants, but in my mind was the established academic finding that carrying a weapon is associated with increased likelihood of victimization or self-harm.

Then, walking down the street one day, a man, ostensibly selling sunglasses, approached me and demanded money. When I refused, he threatened to pull a knife on me. I ran across the street and escaped. Whether or not he actually had a knife, in the moment, in a surge of adrenaline and anger, I wished *I* had a knife, that I could have threatened him, feeling that this would somehow make me safer. Only then, having felt threatened myself, could I understand the perspective of my interviewees. Later episodes of threats on the street and a violent mugging brought personal pain, but also greater understanding of my research topic through 'accidental ethnography' (Fujii 2015). Yet within the positivist sociological frame in which I was working, there was not room for this personal comprehension in my writing, even if it shaped my analysis. To insert myself, my training told me, would cross a line from social scientist to personal essayist, even if it would have been the most honest portrayal of how I evaluated evidence and arrived at my conclusions – which were in fact more empathetic toward weapon carriers and more focused on personal experiences and psychology than they might otherwise have been. Incorporating interpretivist insights and practices around reflexivity would have allowed a more open portrayal of the research process and in fact better 'controlled' for my particular, shifting biases.

Experiences of violence and abuse that occurred before conducting fieldwork may also affect how researchers conduct their investigations, and experiences of violence after fieldwork may similarly change how researchers understand their research topics. Violent experiences are emotionally intense and traumatic, and suffering (or witnessing) violence will psychologically affect researchers in different ways. So while we should acknowledge that violent experiences are elements of researchers' positionality, with varying effects over time and across individuals, we should not demand or expect researchers to be open, for instance, about experiences of sexual violence in the field and how it affected them and their research, as Moreno (1995) and Winkler (1995) bravely have.

Political Change and Perceptions of Researchers

Geopolitical shifts, too, can affect how researchers are perceived at different moments in time and the feasibility of research in certain settings and on different topics. As a US citizen based at a US university, US government decisions and stances may change how I am viewed in the field. For instance, in Uganda, I found myself facing increased suspicion and people sympathetic to the government less likely to respond to interview requests after the US State Department condemned electoral irregularities while I was conducting research there. Ramaioli's (2018, 128) efforts to interview Salafi Muslims in Jordan similarly ran into a roadblock after political tensions were inflamed in the country by the Islamic State's execution of a Jordanian pilot, making potential participants more cautious and suspicious, while research access and ethics can also change if an organization is outlawed or sanctioned (MacLean et al. 2018, 7). Furthermore, transitions in who is in power, shifting combat frontlines or gang turf, or changes in what areas are considered 'safe' can change the ethics of conducting and disseminating research; curtail the ability of a researcher to conduct follow-up research; and can make the field setting so different that it is not possible for other researchers to undertake similar projects (Knott 2019; Lynch 2016).

Retrospective Bias and the Shadow of the Present

Retrospective bias affects the data gathered in surveys and interviews about past events, as participants provide views filtered through time by the imperfections of memory and the more immediate influence of current sentiments and perceptions. Retrospective bias can also affect researchers' own interpretations of the past, however, and how they engage with participants with whose politics they might once have agreed, but now diverge. My research on victorious rebel groups has closely examined the cases of the National Resistance Army/Movement (NRA/M) in Uganda, in power from

their 1986 victory to the present day, and the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) in Nicaragua, who left power in 1990, a decade after their victory, but returned to power in 2007 in a new form. Changes in the character of the organizations and their behavior towards oppositions groups over time and during the course of my research changed my personal, normative views of them in ways that could not be excised from my research process or analyses.

When I arrived in Uganda in early 2016 to conduct research, the country was approaching national elections. The continued rule of the NRA/M and President Yoweri Museveni seemed assured, but the government took seriously the challenge posed by the opposition Front for Democratic Change (FDC) and its presidential candidate, Kiiza Besigye. Shortly before election day, an FDC rally was planned at the Makerere University campus in Kampala, where I was working. Police repeatedly halted Besigye's progress toward the campus, and clashes broke out further down the road, where Besigye was arrested and one FDC supporter was killed by police. Police then began driving past the entrance of campus, firing tear gas up toward FDC supporters, students, and onlookers like me, as rubber bullet fire echoed up the road. The election took place, amid allegations of fraud and ballot stuffing and continued government detention and harassment of Besigye and other FDC officials (see Abrahamsen and Bareebe 2016). Helicopters swirled overhead, a military police camp sprung up across the road from my neighborhood, riot vehicles sat at key intersections, and months later, as tensions rose ahead of the presidential inauguration, fighter jets flew over the capital for supposed 'test flights.'

In the few interviews I could conduct and in analyzing the archival data I gathered, it was difficult to separate the NRA/M's past and present, to reflect on the positives of the organization's past and its contemporary authoritarianism. This personal viewpoint manifested in the questions I asked and, presumably, in my tone and mannerisms during interviews. When writing about the NRA/M, I am now more attuned to the ways in which early policies and practices may have contributed to the organization's present-day form and behavior, a shift that may not have occurred if I had conducted research at a different time.

The same dilemma applies to the present-day FSLN in Nicaragua. While current party leader and President Daniel Ortega once helped lead a revolution to overthrow a repressive, dynastic dictatorship, since his return to power in 2007, he has constructed a new authoritarian regime centered on himself and his family (see Thaler 2017). Ortega has strangled dissent and political opposition, while he and his associates have claimed more power and redirected state resources for their own benefit. In early 2018, facing protests, Ortega's government began a forceful crackdown, killing hundreds, mainly university students, and youths wounding and arresting many more. I would find it difficult to

interview present-day FSLN supporters about their organization's past, in the 1970s and 1980s, without my perceptions being colored by their association with a changed organization, to whose politics I now object.[22]

Despite any intentions to combat my biases, contacts I made, interviews I conducted, and my analyses would be shaped by this contemporary stance. Ethically, I worry that if were to try to conduct research in Nicaragua today on issues past or present, I would be endangering participants. As I seek to write from afar about the current political environment of protest and repression, I am aware that my knowledge of the situation in the 'field' is partial and in some ways dated (see also Knott 2019). Researchers based outside violent settings, however, have privileges and space to disseminate knowledge and engage in activism around issues in ways that would not be available or possible for locals. This connecting of the field and home is a further non-replicable way in which researchers themselves are inextricably present in the production and analysis of data.

Bridging the Field and Home

Throughout the research process, the researcher provides an embodied link between two different places, their home institution or organization and the field setting, each with its own culture, logics, and demands. The researcher themself becomes a bridge between these two social spaces, having to adapt to divergences between the professional ideas and standards of home and the lived realities of the field. Every stage of the research process is affected by the researcher's interaction with people, institutions, spaces, and norms in these two environments. How the researcher negotiates this bridging is integral even to positivist, quantitative research.

Positivist visions of research on conflict and violence that are formulated in universities and professional offices are often based on the premise of work with quantitative datasets or previously collected material, omitting the messiness and contingency of researchers actually collecting data through physical, social, and emotional interactions in the field. The positivist assumptions underlying initiatives for research replicability and transparency in political science are based on experimentalist ideas about set procedures and, in the vogue of pre-registration, predetermined analytical strategies, that rarely accord with the realities of conducting research in violent settings. As Schatz (2017, 137) argues generally, 'for research projects involving face-to-face contact in live social situations, a rigid research design becomes a straightjacket that restricts, not a safeguard that protects.' Even researchers working in a positivist frame have recognized that social scientists must adapt research designs and plans to changing sociopolitical circumstances

and understandings gained in the field that challenge previous visions of the research project (Kapiszewski, Maclean, and Read 2015; LaPorte 2014).

In violent settings in particular, adaptability is key to both ethics and the ability to gather data in changing and uncertain circumstances that can rarely be fully anticipated before arriving in the field (Fujii 2012). In fact, 'a researcher who believes that [they have] thought through *all* potential risks *at home* is very dangerous, as there are many possible perils that are discovered only in the field' (Weipert-Fenner 2018, 237, emphasis original).[23] Where ideal conditions of stability, trust, and security are absent and 'social relationships and cultural realities are critically modified by the pervasion of fear, threat of force, or (ir)regular application of violence' (Kovats-Bernat 2002, 208), researchers must be open to changing plans and challenging methodological conventions, knowing that they will need to translate their choices from the necessities of the field to a justification palatable to audiences at home.

Returning from the field, researchers may feel dislocated, torn between two separate selves and social worlds (Till 2001). Yet we carry within us the emotional and physical impacts of our interactions with actors and places in the field. The experience of direct, face-to-face engagement with research participants 'makes it hard to be blind to ethical considerations' (Schatz 2017, 137) or the 'emotional costs to sharing data' with strangers (Arjona, Mampilly, and Pearlman 2018, 2–3), which may be difficult for colleagues at home to understand if they conduct disembodied, positivist research that does not entail fieldwork. Elements of a researcher's positionality and understanding can also change over time and in between spaces in the field and at home (Said 2018, 85). Researchers who plan to conduct follow-up research or start new projects, making a research site a long-term space of engagement, have further concerns about what they can or should share or publish in a home environment (Knott 2019; Fujii 2018; Arjona, Mampilly, and Pearlman 2018, 12; Till 2001).[24] This is an increasingly pressing question in the digital age, when actors in the field today may easily find published materials online.

As circumstances at home and in the field evolve, the researcher continues be a bridge between the two places, negotiating new analytical and ethical questions, just as they must do while in the field. Attempts by those at home to impose blanket professional standards for data access and 'research transparency' fail to acknowledge researchers' integral role in the production and analysis of data, as well as the contingencies of the field.

Reflexive Openness versus Transparency

The current DA-RT efforts within 'mainstream' Western (especially US) political science seek to impose uniform standards of analytic research transparency drawn from a positivist, 'frequentist/experimentalist'

paradigm that treats evidence as divorced from the context in which it was collected and analyzed (Kreuzer and Parsons 2018; Luke, Vázquez-Arroyo, and Hawkesworth 2018; Lupia and Elman 2014). Beyond practical problems with this approach in imposing additional difficult work on qualitative researchers and those working in violent contexts with strong ethical constraints (e.g. Monroe 2018; Shesterinina, Pollack, and Arriola 2018, 2), blanket transparency standards conflict with the issues of positionality, temporality, and research geography noted above.[25]

Transparency efforts demand emotional labor from researchers about their experiences that may be quite burdensome. I have now learned to be more open about my difficulties, fears, and depression during fieldwork, but patriarchal gender norms conspire to keep many researchers quiet about such issues (Morgen 1983; Scheper-Hughes 1983). A tendency toward self-censorship in reporting the research process is a dilemma for ethnographers and qualitatively-oriented researchers in more positivist fields (e.g. Nilan 2002). Opening up about the emotional tolls, entanglements, and contingencies of fieldwork may be seen as overly personal or less 'scientific' in positivist-dominated fields. Yet if transparency is really what is desired, then positivist social scientists must become much more comfortable with reading about and accepting the messier and more personal aspects of research as still rigorous and appropriate (Cheng 2018, chap. 9 is exemplary).[26] Quantitatively-oriented researchers, too, must more explicitly address their role in the research process, describing their presuppositions and why they made operationalization, coding, or analysis decisions, as well as acknowledging the impacts of individual enumerator-participant interactions on survey data.

A solution to these issues with 'transparency' is to adopt the approach of 'reflexive openness' advanced by MacLean et al. (2018). Reflexive openness calls on researchers to engage in reflexivity with regard to research participants and their ethical protection, including reflections on positionality and the interactive, intersubjective nature of data collection, and to 'provide a reasoned justification of their ethical research practices,' policies and practices applicable across research approaches and subjects (MacLean et al. 2018, 1). While 'radical honesty' about the research process may be possible for some studies (Yom 2018), it is ethically problematic for most research in violent settings, authoritarian contexts, and with vulnerable populations (Arjona, Mampilly, and Pearlman 2018; Bellin et al. 2018; Lake, Majic, and Maxwell 2018). Accepting the need for researchers to hold back some data and information about the research process, we can instead focus on how to most accurately and ethically portray the research process to not only allow for peer evaluation, but also to remain true to participants by reflecting on the researcher's own role in mediating the data and context of fieldwork.

Grappling explicitly with the personal role of researchers in the research process, rather than being irrelevant or signaling bias, is crucial for all researchers: in fact, *excluding reflexivity* would introduce biases in a positivist framework (Bond 2018). Reflexive openness also helps ensure that inductive ways of knowing vital to observational research (and to formulating hypotheses for experimental testing) are valued and discussed. In interviewing former officials and fighters in victorious rebel organizations, for example, a key factor in my understanding of levels of political and ideological commitment was the passion and conviction of FSLN interviewees discussing their group's ideology and cause, versus the greater animation and emphasis among National Patriotic Front of Liberia interviewees on personal achievements and claims for private benefits. Such interpretive evidence sits uncomfortably within prevailing positivist frameworks, and the conclusion only became clear after returning from fieldwork and reflecting on my interviews. A reflexive openness approach accepts this induction as a natural part of social science research, rather than a troubling divergence from initial analysis plans.

Transparency, rather than the more flexible reflexive openness, would also potentially place researchers working in violent contexts at risk. Writing clearly and explicitly about how our perceptions of and emotional reactions to certain participants or groups might have affected our analysis and findings could understandably lead to cutoffs of access or threats against researchers for exposing the implicit biases we attempt to hide.[27] This is, of course, not to say that scholars should deny or obscure issues of violence, fear, and inequalities they have observed, so long as they can write openly without placing respondents at risk. Keeping quiet about even the small, everyday injustices we see allows them to remain routine, to become gradually more accepted and invisible, which can in the long run lead to far greater structural and physical violence (Bourgois 2002; Scheper-Hughes 2007).

While concerned scholars agree with the idea of making explicit the analytic process and potential biases in research, making research materials public and providing extensive information in the interest of 'replicability' is dangerously misguided and could endanger participants (Arjona, Mampilly, and Pearlman 2018; Bellin et al. 2018; Symposium 2015; Tripp 2018). In an ideal world, by making research materials public, such as interview transcripts, researchers could reduce the need for future scholars to go into the field to conduct similar projects, helping prevent the 'over-researching' of vulnerable communities (Clark 2008; Sukarieh and Tannock 2013). Here, too, however, researchers must consider temporality – the shadow of the future and our inability to know how conditions might change, making seemingly insensitive information suddenly dangerous or promises of confidentiality void due to government pressure.

Protesters in the early days of the Arab Spring were happy to give interviews and be quoted by name, only to have their countries relapse into authoritarianism or conflict, making previous statements liabilities (Lynch 2016; Parkinson and Wood 2015; Wackenhut 2018). The rise of extraterritorial prosecutions for alleged human rights violations makes it difficult to know if statements about past participation in violence may suddenly become evidence against an interviewee who was not under judicial scrutiny at home (Reno 2013). The infamous case of Boston College violating confidentiality promises made to participants in oral histories of violence in Northern Ireland in the face of court pressure (see Palys and Lowman 2012) highlights the uncertainty of how research institutions will react to outside pressure, potentially failing to protect researchers and participants. Local scholars in conflict-affected and authoritarian settings are also at greater risk than researchers from the Global North, for 'Many governments and insurgent groups read and react to academic publications,' creating long-term threats (Bleck, Dendere, and Sangaré. 2018, 558). These ethical concerns and the unknowability of future risks all demand caution and the prioritization human subjects protection over professional demands.

It is important for editors, reviewers, and colleagues to be able to question and challenge researchers about their data gathering processes and analytical decisions. Ultimately, however, trust should be placed in researchers to know and understand the context of the field and what is possible ethically to divulge about research participants and settings. Well after data have been collected, the researcher remains in the best position to know what is at stake in the field and to ensure that professional incentives do not overpower ethical imperatives.[28]

Conclusion

Research in violent settings remains vital for understanding the causes and consequences of violence, conflict, and human rights violations, as well as how they may be prevented or resolved. Such pressing social problems demand examination from 'as many angles of vision as possible … Methodological purity is a big stumbling block to understanding, particularly for something as hard to get at as violence' (Collins 2008, 32). New dilemmas may arise as scholars are increasingly encouraged to conduct experiments and collect original quantitative data in conflict zones and other dangerous settings (Denny and Driscoll 2019; Haer and Becher 2012). Those conducting surveys or especially field experiments in violent settings (and beyond) must be extremely careful in their consideration of ethics and potential risks to populations under study (Teele 2014); the ease of recruiting population samples digitally (Käihkö 2018) or that 'others are doing it or going to' is no excuse for willful ignorance of ethical concerns.

In positivist-leaning fields that are increasingly demanding transparency and replicability, understanding conflict and violence requires a relaxation of expectations and greater realism: realism about researchers' role in the research process; realism about the chaotic nature of research and the specific ethical dilemmas that arise in research on violence and in violent settings (Wood 2006; Ahram and Paul Goode 2016; Fujii 2012; Cronin-Furman and Lake 2018; S. P. Campbell 2017; van Baalen 2018); and realism about the tradeoffs and emotional burdens faced by researchers themselves in collecting and analyzing data while attempting to remain safe and mentally healthy both in the field and after returning (Loyle and Simoni 2017; Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay 2016; Mazurana, Jacobsen, and Gale 2013; Sriram et al. 2009; Theidon 2014; Thomson, Ansoms, and Murison 2012). Professional pressures that hinder research on sensitive topics or impose excessive, unequal burdens on researchers employing particular approaches (Monroe 2018) in fact impede the data gathering and knowledge accumulation that is vital both for the collective social scientific enterprise in combining situated knowledge to approach the shared 'truth,' and for formulating practical, humanitarian solutions to conflict and violence.

Greater reflexivity and attention to positionality is not antithetical to theory and explanation (Wedeen 2010, 263–64), and integrating reflexivity into written work improves the verisimilitude, transparency, and ethical conduct of research (Fujii 2016a; Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay 2016; Shesterinina 2019). Yet these practices can only become commonplace if professional incentives shift to recognize the higher demands and barriers that idealized positivist conceptions of transparency and replicability often pose to researchers working in dangerous, evolving settings. Uniform standards are neither practical nor equitable, and so, just as violence is situational (Collins 2008) and research practices are situational, editors, reviewers, funders, and colleagues must take into account and promote openness regarding the contingencies, personal situations, emotional states, and sociopolitical settings in which research is actually conducted and reported.

Notes

1. Campbell (2017) provides a review of work on research ethics in violent environments.
2. This vision of the natural sciences is overly simplified, however, as there have long been debates in fields like ecology about the value of experiments, observation, or both (Roush 1995). In the biomedical sciences, it is accepted and valued that 'Research on a topic or problem progresses from pure description, through correlational analyses and natural experiments, to phased randomized controlled trials (RCTs)' (Lieberman 2016, 1054). See also Roth and Mehta (2002) on how positivist and interpretivist approaches to knowledge can be complementary and especially useful together when analyzing contested events, and Williams (2000) on how interpretivism does not necessarily sacrifice generalization.
3. On anthropology in violent settings, see e.g. Nordstrom and Robben (1995).

4. Even in experimental research, 'There is no perfect or true experiment … the variety of possible experimental designs and treatments is in some ways greater than the range of possibilities with observational data' (Morton and Williams 2008, 341), and so researchers' contingent decisions remain integral to the research process.

5. See Monroe's (2005) volume on the earlier 'Perestroika' effort for methodological and epistemological pluralism in political science. The DA-RT debate was presaged by debates in the 1990s about replication and data access (Symposium 1995).

6. See Haraway (1988) for a feminist critique of Western, positivist 'scientific objectivity.' Acknowledging the social construction of knowledge, however, does not necessarily preclude direct, situated knowledge of the 'real' world nor a shared baseline of 'reality.'

7. I use they/them pronouns in general discussion for gender neutrality.

8. These concerns may also have relevance to scholars in more 'secure' settings (e.g. Cramer 2015).

9. King (1995, 445) acknowledged the problem of shifts in the field environment between an original study and a replication attempt meaning that 'it may not be possible to replicate the data collection phase, inasmuch as the world may have changed by the time a future researcher undertakes the duplication effort.'

10. Even if researchers have similar baseline understandings of 'danger' (e.g. Wladyka and Yaworsky 2017), for instance, they may have widely varying risk tolerances, affecting where it is possible to conduct research that is ethical from the standpoint of researcher well-being.

11. See also Zimbalist (2018).

12. As S.P. Campbell (2017) writes, 'Exposure to actual situations in environments where violence is so palpable forces researchers to conceptualize security differently than they might otherwise.'

13. I would also advise researchers, for both safety and ethical reasons, against Kovats-Bernat's (2002, 213) strategy of creating ambiguity about whether or not he was armed.

14. Holmes' case highlights the importance of both temporal shifts and issues of researchers' nationalities and home institutions (see Nicholasen 2019). First, Holmes in 2013 wrote publicly about the Rabaa massacre by security forces, a very sensitive topic, but only became a target of the state later when the military regime was more entrenched and she was working on what seemed like a less sensitive subject. Second, being a foreign academic working at an institution in Egypt, Holmes cannot return to her academic home, but she also has more protections than some of her American University of Cairo colleagues, like Emad Shahin who was sentenced to death in absentia for political activities.

15. On sex and 'erotic subjectivity' in fieldwork, see Kulick and Wilson (1995). Women and sexual minorities may be especially vulnerable in the field to sexual harassment, gendered intimidation, and accusations of moral impropriety (e.g. Rivetti and Saeidi 2018; Sirnate 2014).

16. Fujii (2018, 13) highlights that researchers may not always be able to achieve 'rapport' with participants, but can still establish a 'working relationship.'

17. See Fujii (2018, 42–43) on single gatekeepers' importance for many projects. See Kaplan (2018) on the emotional effects of a key informant's death.

18. See also Creek (2012) on researcher self-care. Sometimes leaving the field site may be the best option for recovering emotional health and perspective (S. P. Campbell 2017, 97–98).

19. Knott (2019, 142–43) likewise notes holes in her political science research methods training that could have been helped by incorporating an 'ethnographic sensibility.'

20. Though see Tshabangu (2009) on a 'bricolage' strategy of flexible inquiry and Woon (2013) on 'emotional fieldwork.' The most recent and comprehensive political science

text on fieldwork includes brief sections on emotional tolls of fieldwork, interpersonal relationships in the field, and positionality and power (Kapiszewski, Maclean, and Read 2015, 128–39, 153–57), but does not delve deeply into how these affect data gathering and analysis. A new social science fieldwork manuscript focuses more explicitly on the practicalities of risk, personal security, and participant safety (Grimm et al. 2019), while Clark and Cavatorta's (2018) volume for scholars of politics in the Middle East and North Africa also covers these issues well.

21. There may also be cases, especially where a researcher is embedded in a gang or other armed group, in which they are complicit in violent acts (e.g. Goffman 2014; Venkatesh 2008), or in which violent acts are committed at least in part as a performance or demonstration for the researcher (Rodgers 2017, 655). These experiences should spark not only academic reflection, but serious questioning by the researcher of the ethics of continuing their study.

22. Shesterinina (2019) describes empathizing with participants in past violence, but having greater difficulty empathizing with actors continuing to engage in violent activities while she was conducting research.

23. Circumstances are also likely to change significantly between designing research and receiving funding and the actual conduct of fieldwork (LaPorte 2014).

24. Participation in research and consuming published research can also shift self-understanding and behavior in the field, changing the social context for future research (cf. Smith 2002, 199–200).

25. While proponents of DA-RT argue that their vision is flexible and pluralistic, critics suggest this is an overly generous reading of the written documents underlying the DA-RT initiative and their directives for journal editors, which make assumptions about the nature of research and the feasibility and ethics of 'data access' and 'research transparency' (see debates in Symposium 2015, 2016).

26. See also Shesterinina (2019), who fleshes out supplementary materials from her previous article (Shesterinina 2016). Emotion is integral to the research process and a vital part of how we study and understand social dynamics in violent settings (Hume 2007; Lund 2012; Woon 2013).

27. These access cutoffs may also affect those hoping to conduct research in the same setting in the future. Researchers who have relied on gatekeepers for access thus now become 'keymasters' (Campbell et al. 2006).

28. See Krystalli (2019) for an example of successfully negotiating with a funder over unreasonable blanket policies of data access and research transparency. See Carbonetti (2016) for one model of a journal focused on human rights acknowledging the need for flexibility in data access and transparency practices.

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