4

Intervention, autonomy and power in polarised societies

Corinna Jentzsch

Introduction

The secretary of a small village in Murrupula district in northern Mozambique received my research assistant and I with a concerned expression on his face when we visited the village for a second time. Following our first visit, four people from the area had been arrested and incarcerated for six days. During our first stay, we had conducted extensive interviews with former members of a community-initiated militia, the Naparama, active during the country's civil war (1976–92). We were interested in how the militia had emerged and what role it had played during the war between the party in power, Frelimo, and the rebel group, Renamo (today the main opposition party). The group was disbanded at the end of the war, but since then, some units have tried to lobby for recognition of their war effort to receive demobilisation benefits.

The village secretary linked these imprisonments to our visit since the four residents were arrested while helping with the registration of former Naparama members (and other militia men as well) in the context of their efforts to lobby the government for recognition. The registration had been organised by the Naparama leader of Nampula province from Nampula city, who had introduced us to the Naparama in Murrupula district. After the provincial Naparama leader had collected names and a fee from about 250 militiamen and left, the police charged the local Naparama leadership of the area, who had helped with the registration, with betrayal, and arrested them. According to the police, the collection of money along with the registration process was unlawful. The arrested men were released after paying a high fine to the municipality, paid by the provincial Naparama leader. Afterwards, people came to the local Naparama leaders to ask where their money was.

This story from my fieldwork in rural Mozambique in 2011–12 demonstrates the ways in which fieldwork in the aftermath of war can have unintended consequences and create ethical and methodological dilemmas for the research process. The researcher's activities may provide a backdrop for social mobilisation and opportunities for personal enrichment for interlocutors, who decide to play with people's hopes of future benefits. Nampula's Naparama leader had not visited the local Naparama community in Murrupula since the general elections in 1994. Only when I asked him to introduce me to that community and we went there together did he re-establish contact with the former militia unit. In a way, I had encouraged the re-establishment of that contact, which led to abuse by the provincial Naparama leader for his own personal benefit. That benefit had monetary and political meaning. During our conversations, he had tried to establish himself as the primary Naparama leader during the war, a fact that is contested by information from many other sources. It is likely that through this registration process, he was trying to mobilise Naparama to bolster his claim of being the one and only Naparama leader. As with other Naparama members (and also former members of the armed forces), he was disappointed about the lack of recognition as a war veteran and the lack of demobilisation payments. In fact, a considerable portion of members of the armed forces who were demobilised before the end of the war, and of Frelimo's auxiliary forces such as the Naparama and the 'popular militias', were not recognised as demobilised soldiers as part of the peace agreement signed in Rome in 1992, and thus not eligible for demobilisation benefits.

These unintended consequences are linked to how legacies of war – social, economic and political polarisation and historical marginalisation – influence how communities make sense of researchers' activities in their midst. As Sluka reminds us, research participants 'are naturally going to try to figure out what you are doing here', and previous experiences with strangers in the community provide categories such as 'spy, journalist, policeman, tax collector, and missionary' that may be mistakenly applied to the researcher (Sluka, 1995, p 283). Experiences from the war in Mozambique continue to impact daily lives, and contemporary concerns about the distribution of social, economic and political benefits all contribute to the perception of the researcher as a powerful and ambiguous figure that can influence people's lives in positive as well as negative ways. Although some community residents may feel disempowered by the researcher's presence, others may attempt to manipulate the researcher's work for the purpose of their own economic and political empowerment.

This chapter reflects on my attempt to navigate the polarised political landscape in Mozambique's postwar society. I conducted fieldwork in Zambézia and Nampula provinces in Mozambique to analyse the emergence of armed groups formed by communities to defend themselves against insurgent violence during the country's post-independence war (1976–92). The 'Naparama', as these militia groups were called, formed in central and northern Mozambique towards the end of the 1980s and, within a short time period, fought back against the rebel group Renamo. Renamo was supported by the governments of Rhodesia (today's Zimbabwe) and Apartheid South Africa that sought to destabilise the socialist government of Frelimo, the successor party of the liberation movement of Mozambique (Vines, 1991). Contrary to commonly held beliefs, the war was not just a proxy war fought in the shadow of the Cold War, but provided an opportunity to settle local conflicts and thus pitched 'brother against brother' (Geffray, 1990).

Although I encountered many challenges along the way, I succeeded in collecting more than 10,000 pages of documents in government archives and more than 250 interviews and oral histories with community members, former militia members, former rebel combatants, former soldiers, (former) government officials, politicians and academics in five districts and the capital. I worked together with a Mozambican research assistant who spoke all the necessary local languages and had experience in data collection for international projects. He helped me with arranging interviews, translating from local languages into Portuguese and explaining cultural particularities. As a Mozambican from the central province of Zambézia, but a long-term resident in the province of Nampula, my assistant was well suited to be sufficiently knowledgeable about the two provinces we worked in (and their languages), but considered enough of an outsider not to be identified with a certain political position.

Conflict researchers have recognised the ethical and practical challenges that research on violence entails (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995; Wood, 2006; Sriram et al, 2009; Fujii, 2012; Mazurana et al, 2013). However, as Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay (2016) have noted, there is still little transparency and debate on how researchers form and manage relationships in the field, and what kind of ethical compromises and methodological adaptations they have to accept in order to collect the necessary data for their projects. Researchers in political science have learned from their colleagues in anthropology (and geography) for whom the position and impact of the researcher on the local community has become a central concern for how to 'do' anthropology

(Clifford and Marcus, 1986; England, 1994; Sirnate, 2014). However, what is often obscured are the ways in which the researcher becomes a political actor capable of reinforcing existing power structures and, by disempowering or empowering local actors, influencing social realities in communities under study. This is significant, as not only the autonomy of the researched may be constrained, but also that of the researcher whose presence and work may be manipulated by local actors. This is true not only for research in today's volatile conflict zones (Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay, 2016), but also for research in (postwar) polarised societies[1] in which political conflicts linger on and reinforce economic, social and political inequalities (Gerharz, 2009, p 2).

The limited understanding of the workings of power, and by extension the limits of researcher neutrality, is often due to the fact that the usual concern in Political Science when conducting field research is not with what happens to the field site (during and after fieldwork), but surprisingly with the data that researchers extract from it and how to mitigate systematic bias. This means that challenges of access to research participants or the 'subtext' or 'meta-data' (Fujii, 2010) from conversations, such as lies, silences and evasions, are considered 'obstacles' rather than 'a source of knowledge for ethnographers' (Wedeen, 2010, p 256). In fact, researchers may alter the field site and the data in ways that are difficult to account for and 'reverse' during data analysis. As Goodhand argues, such intervention in conflict settings is not only a methodological challenge, but also an ethical issue, as it 'may affect the incentive systems and structures driving violent conflict or impact upon the coping strategies and safety of communities' (Goodhand, 2000, p 12).

In the context of Mozambique, the impact of the social, economic and political legacies of the war on my interactions with rural communities were puzzling to me, as the country is often hailed as a successful example of postwar peacebuilding and reconciliation (UN, 1995). One could expect that (unofficial) reconciliation processes, national reconstruction and the passing of time would have helped create confidence in people's futures (Honwana, 2002; Igreja et al, 2008). However, the country remains polarised even 20 years after the end of the war (Weinstein, 2002; Darch, 2015). Fear of renewed violence still influences political and social life in rural Mozambican communities – for good reason, as the current resurgence of violence in the centre of the country demonstrates (Darch, 2015). Moreover, the spoils of recent finds of natural resources have not (yet) reached the ordinary citizen, leading to increases in already high levels of inequality (IMF, 2016).

In a society seeking to overcome its violent past and advance economic development, the ways in which communities tried to make sense of my (and my research assistant's) presence had two major consequences for the (perceived) autonomy of research participants and of my own work. The first was related to a narrative of suspicion and mistrust about me and my work that stemmed from the feeling of severe disempowerment with respect to people's control over their own wellbeing. Some community residents felt threatened by my presence, as they were reminded of white foreigners mingling in their affairs over the course of the history of their community. The second narrative was related to whether and how participants could manipulate my presence and my work in a way that would benefit them economically or politically. Some research participants saw my presence as an opportunity to escape from the uncertainties of their own life regarding jobs, livelihoods and political projects. In the remainder of this chapter, I analyse these two responses and what that ambiguous response meant for the perceived autonomy of research participants in my own work. Specific examples from my fieldwork are provided to highlight the implications of residents' ambiguous response for neutrality and power during fieldwork in polarised societies.

Disempowerment and research participant autonomy

One evening in Mecubúri district in Nampula province, a local government representative, who my research assistant and I were having drinks with, told us that people had been talking and wondering what we were up to. In the days before, we had been walking through some of the neighbourhoods of the district town and conducted interviews with residents and local leaders. The government officer reported that some people were afraid we were bringing illnesses, as a number of residents had recently suffered from diarrhoea. Others thought that we might bring another war. As the officer elaborated, these fears had been triggered by several events that had occurred in the area, in the province and abroad. A few days before our arrival in Mecubúri, in October 2011, Libyan head of state Muammar Gaddafi had been killed by rebels, and the youth leader of the African National Congress in South Africa, Julius Malema, had engaged in divisive speeches (for which he was later expelled from the party) (Smith, 2011). Mozambicans follow the news of both countries closely, and in their eyes, their instability was cause for concern.

In addition, in the officer's view, some events closer to home had further made people wary of our presence. A theatre piece attempting

to explain to people that 5,000 houses would be built by the Chinese and sold to the community was understood as meaning that 5,000 Chinese would come and be distributed throughout the province. Residents feared an 'invasion' of 5,000 Chinese people. People were also concerned about news that, a month before, in September 2011, one British and four Americans with heavy weapons in their luggage were held for a brief time at Nampula airport (BBC News, 2011). The men claimed that they had come to rescue a boat from Somali pirates. In the course of our conversation that evening in Mecubúri, we learned that we were not the only strangers who were treated with suspicion. Non-governmental organisation (NGO) workers of a US-funded project seeking to improve access to safe water regularly distribute 'certeza', a chlorine-based water-purifying liquid to prevent cholera outbreaks. However, whenever cholera breaks out, these workers are suspected of having brought it (Serra, 2003; AIM, 2013; Fauvet, 2013).[2]

Our presence, the presence of strangers, in the district seemed to fit into this sequence of ill-boding events whose origins and consequences remained uncertain. As Gerharz (2009) confirms, suspicion about the researcher's motives is often triggered by people's memories of past violence. In a highly polarised setting such as the civil war in Sri Lanka, residents of Colombo quickly accused Gerharz of being an LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) sympathiser when she discussed the humanitarian situation in LTTE strongholds (Gerharz, 2009, pp 5–6). Since people in the South were reminded by Gerharz' comments of their suffering from seemingly unpredictable episodes of violence, it was difficult for her to highlight the suffering of the other side and at the same time claim neutrality. Similarly, in Mozambique, people did not want a return to war, and wondered about the true meaning of my work.

Such suspicion created a situation that prevented trust and gaining access, crucial preconditions for any successful fieldwork. Drawing on research experience in Northern Ireland, Knox shows that in politically contested environments, the problem of gaining access often consists of suspicion around the real research objective, as research in such contexts is 'unlikely to be viewed by local actors as neutral or altruistic' (Knox, 2001, p 211). In the highly contested political environment of Northern Ireland, 'There was immediate suspicion about the ulterior motives of this research, which had the potential to block access at worst or severely curtail data gathering' (Knox, 2001, p 211). This is true for the context of my research. The officer we met that evening in Mecubúri was nowhere to be found when we tried to meet with him for an interview the following day.

All these concerns were troubling, as, without realising it, I had become part of a social and political context in which people feared that, as a consequence of interacting with me, they would further lose control over their health and wellbeing. The more I (or people like me) entered their lives, the less they felt in charge. At the same time, as people overestimated my power, they underestimated their own. People's responses to my presence in their communities had a similar meaning as their resistance against the distribution of chlorine, which Serra (2003) interprets as an expression of severe disempowerment. As Serra's analysis reveals, resistance against outsiders in the form of suspicion and mistrust is an expression of people's distrust in state institutions, as these have been perceived as distant and failing to deliver promised services.

The sources of such feeling of disempowerment and loss of autonomy in the central and northern provinces of Mozambique are varied. First, the history of the central and northern provinces is one of political marginalisation by the government in Maputo in the south of the country (Chichava, 2007; Do Rosário, 2009). Frelimo, the liberation movement and party in power since independence in 1975, has been perceived as a southern movement; the independence movement's penetration of both provinces during the liberation struggle was slow and ineffectual or, in the case of Nampula province, completely absent (Legrand, 1993, p 88); and the peasant population opposed Frelimo's policies after independence. In Nampula, the construction of communal villages and the abolishment of traditional authorities sparked popular discontent (Geffray, 1990). In Zambézia, it was the disrespect for traditional values more generally that had been the basis for life in the province and that, in turn, provoked opposition (Ranger, 1985, p 189; O'Laughlin, 1992, p 115). As a result, the region was and is a Renamo stronghold.

Second, the particular character of the post-independence war, a typical guerrilla war, contributed to suspicion towards strangers in rural communities. Community residents' responses to my presence during a time of uncertainty reflect Sluka's (1995, p 283) observation of the relevance of pre-existing categories misapplied to strangers who enter the community, such as being a spy, which was a common concern during the war in Mozambique, as in many other wars (Sluka, 1995; Vlassenroot, 2006). Many people referred to the war as a 'war between brothers.' In contrast to the anti-colonial struggle, members of either side could not be identified easily, as they all belonged to the same community. The enemy could always be lurking in the midst of the community. Moreover, the rebel group Renamo was

actively supported by Rhodesia (today's Zimbabwe) and Apartheid South Africa. White South African advisers were regularly flown into Renamo bases. Community residents linked that experience to my presence and wondered whether I had anything to do with the war, since I was so eager to speak to them about that period of time. At the end of an interview with an older male community resident I was asked whether the war would return once I left the village. When I worked in an area in Murrupula district, Nampula, where one of the main Renamo bases was located during the war, the chief of staff of the local administration told us that there had never been a delegation with a white person staying overnight. He urged that the community police chief inform residents so that they would not think something was wrong, as this had been, 'an area of the enemy.'

Moreover, although Mozambique has received much development aid and recently also discovered more natural resources wealth, people feel they have yet to benefit from economic development. Serra's (2003) analysis points to the arrogance and distance of NGO workers that creates discontent among community residents. Examples from different regions of Mozambique, such as coal mining in Tete province or the Brazilian large-scale agribusiness project ProSAVANA, where residents are displaced to make space for the business of foreign companies, add to the impression that strangers meddle with people's affairs to the detriment of their livelihoods (Abelvik-Lawson, 2014; Zacarias, 2014; Lillywhite et al, 2015; Chichava and Durán, 2016). Finally, much of the hesitance in talking to us was connected to current party politics, and shows that the Frelimo party never lost its dominance in Mozambican politics, despite the fact that the country had introduced multiparty politics in its new constitution in 1990 (Sumich and Honwana, 2007). Some former government officials declined to be interviewed since they did not feel qualified, which suggests that they did not feel authorised and were thus afraid of violating the official party line. In other cases, these officials made sure that I had respected the administrative hierarchy and attained permission from their (former) supervisors.

This past and contemporary experience of marginalisation contributed to the perception of my research assistant and I as 'intruders'. I dealt with this situation in several ways to establish 'research legitimacy' (Knox, 2001). I always respected the social and administrative hierarchy when coming into a district I had never been to, and introduced myself and my work to local leaders to receive '"approval" from key stakeholders' (Knox, 2001, p 212). In the districts I visited after Mecubúri, I asked for an elder who was respected in

the community as a guide who could introduce me to people, or asked for referrals from research participants (commonly referred to as 'snowball sampling'; Sluka, 1995, p 284; Knox, 2001, p 212; Cohen and Arieli, 2011; Romano, 2006). Mistrust between Frelimo and Renamo elites implied that I was to pursue relationships with several types of 'gatekeepers' (Campbell et al, 2006): with Frelimo party and state structures and, separately, with Renamo party structures. I also respected people's wish to not being interviewed alone; when interviewing men, their wives often sat next to them to listen in on the conversation. I tried to visit communities several times to establish a rapport (Norman, 2009; Browne and McBride, 2015).

Overall, I avoided talking about politically sensitive topics (Sluka, 1995, p 283), and avoided mentioning 'politics'. In the process of trying to make sense of my presence in their communities, residents wanted to make sure that I did not have anything to do with 'politics'. 'Politics' has negative connotations in many parts of Mozambique, as politicians are seen as people who lie and enrich themselves (as is common in many parts of Africa; see Ekeh, 1975). A businessman and veteran of the pre- and post-independence wars in Nicoadala invited me over to his house for lunch to finally "forget about politics" and "just chat". He could not understand that I was willing to "suffer" and study political history, and not do business, as Mozambique was "the place to do business." Religious community residents were concerned about my political intentions. In Murrupula, the first question of a sheikh was which party I was affiliated with.[3] In Nicoadala, a pastor only agreed to meet with me once I assured him I would not talk politics under the roof of his church.[4] I emphasised my status as a student who is independent of party politics (Knox, 2001, p 212).

But as many field researchers have recognised before me, neutrality is difficult to achieve, and sometimes not even desirable (Nash, 1976; Sluka, 1990, 1995; Gerharz, 2009; Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay, 2016). The strategies I adopted mitigated many of the concerns, but posed some new methodological and ethical dilemmas. For example, it was important to take into account the ways in which people introduced me to certain communities, and to consider whether the presence of certain people during interviews impacted and changed the conversation. As Campbell et al (2006, pp 115–16) argue, rather than trying to be 'neutral' in general, it is important to emphasise your independence from gatekeepers. It also meant that some community residents might have felt compelled to talk to me because an authority figure told them to, and not because they themselves had volunteered. Also important was the consideration of 'gatekeeper bias' (Cohen and

Arieli, 2011), and in particular, the issue of sampling bias (Groger et al, 1999). These dilemmas required much explanation on my part and transparency about my activities to make sure that people felt at ease talking to me, but also taking the emerging methodological limits into account during analysis. However, fieldwork challenges not always arose out of people's concern about their own disempowerment and the limits to their own autonomy, but also out of their hopes for political, social or economic empowerment, as the next section discusses.

Empowerment and researcher autonomy

While the reports of mistrust and suspicion in northern Mozambique were troubling, the manner in which they were communicated to my research assistant and I appeared to be for political currency. The local government representative who warned us about the concerns within the community in Mecubúri apparently used these stories to pursue his own agenda and fight a political battle against the district administrator. My research assistant found out that, for unclear reasons, the administrator was not well liked among local government employees. The officer we talked to was wary of the fact that the district administrator had given us permission to work without a guide accompanying us to interviews with community members. It seemed likely that he felt his position within the local administration was not taken seriously. As someone who was in constant contact with the local police and other local leaders, he used his monopoly on information to manipulate us for his political interests and divert attention from the fact that he himself mistrusted us. As mentioned earlier, throughout our time in that district, the officer avoided being interviewed, although he had agreed to do so earlier. This politicisation of mistrust and suspicion has a long history in Mozambique. During our conversation in Mecubúri, I learned that members of the 'opposition' sprinkle 'chlorine' (actually, they use flour), which supposedly spreads cholera, on some people's doorsteps, implying that if the residents touch it, they will be contaminated. Thus, while the initial narrative about how cholera spreads expresses disempowerment and distrust of state institutions, this counter-narrative puts blame on the 'opposition', a diffuse group of people who oppose the Frelimo government and may be sympathetic to Renamo. Overall, such suspicions feed into the reinforcement of political cleavages, which are understood in many parts of Mozambique as existential threats rather than part of democratic politics.

Politicisation can occur on several levels. Another example of the impact of current political developments was the reaction of Renamo leaders in the provincial capital of Quelimane to my request for permission to interview former Renamo combatants in the province. Since at the time of my request national Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama had threatened to stage a (peaceful) overthrow of the government on 25 December 2011, provincial leaders of the party did not consider this a suitable time to allow such interviews.[5] When I tried again in February 2012 the provincial party leaders in coordination with Dhlakama himself granted me permission, as the political situation had since calmed. But my work was not only politicised with respect to its potential negative consequences. Others played with my work's potential positive consequences, as noted above. In a way, the Naparama leader who had organised the registration of the Naparama after our departure was manipulating people's hopes of future benefits, which I had (unwillingly) raised in the first place. Former Naparama members were surprised, but also humbled by the fact that someone wanted to talk specifically to them so long after the war had ended. This fact created the opportunity for many interviews in Mecubúri and Murrupula, since many Naparama walked many miles to meet with me. The way they made sense of this was the hope that my questions would lead to their registration as former Naparama members and eventual demobilisation benefits, or at least funds for 'projects'. In a development context, it was difficult to understand the purpose of research for the production of knowledge, and not of development outcomes.

This demand for recognition and 'projects' did not solely have meaning for the individual but for the Naparama as a whole. "You can't talk to the Naparama individually", a former commander of the government-aligned militia told my research assistant and I. We had just introduced ourselves and our project during a meeting with the group's leadership in Nicoadala in Zambézia province in Mozambique. The commander informed us that the high command of the Naparama could give us all the information we needed, and that the remaining combatants would speak to us as a group. He claimed that individual Naparama were not mentally capable of talking properly about the Naparama, which would result in contradicting stories. They sought to restrict my access and only allow me to interview former members that they could 'control', combatants of high rank, discrediting other members as not telling 'the truth'.The Naparama commander clearly sought to control what version of the history of the community-initiated militia would be told. He did not want my research project

to jeopardise Naparama's ongoing struggle to receive recognition from the government and compensation for the group's wartime efforts. This concern was not completely unfounded. As the commander later explained, he had been taken to the Mozambican intelligence agency's office once, and charged for not providing a certain document that the agency had received from other sources. The commander was afraid that the intelligence agency would get access to information combatants would provide me with, and interrogate the Naparama leadership for not having disclosed this information previously.

My research assistant and I underlined that I was a student writing a thesis and that I was independent of parties or the government. However, our emphasis on my status as a student working on a degree led the leaders to conclude that the Naparama militia would not receive any benefit from the study, and thus they suddenly denied their cooperation. In a last effort to solve what at that point seemed to be an insurmountable hurdle, I explained why I found my study important: most histories of the war had focused on Frelimo and Renamo while ignoring the important contribution of the Naparama. Since the militia leaders had been in the process of demanding recognition from the government for a long time, they appreciated that I highlighted the value of their contribution, and thus agreed that all the leaders could be interviewed individually.

These examples of attempted individual and group manipulation of my research project represent another instance of the earlier-mentioned gatekeeper bias, but in a more intentional and manipulative form, which is common in fieldwork with marginalised or high-risk communities that have certain grievances that they want to see addressed. Access is traded for a certain version of representation that benefits research participants and the groups they belong to politically. Gerharz (2009), for example, mentions how the rebel group LTTE in Sri Lanka attempted to make use of the many researchers to polish its own image. In Eastern DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Vlassenroot (2006, p 197), working among armed groups, experienced how his 'writings were used as proofs that [respondents'] claims or grievances were justifiable' (Vlassenroot, 2006, p 197). Researchers can thus be exploited to improve a group's or an individual's reputation. Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay report how a handshake of one of the authors with an Afghan governor was broadcast on TV to counter 'the governor's reputation as an uneducated countryman by exhibiting his connection to a foreign university professor' (Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay, 2016, p 1014).

While I was careful in all conversations to avoid the impression that talking to me would result in political or monetary benefits, this hope was difficult to dispel. Part of the problem was that local leaders who helped to connect us with former combatants were insensitive to the ways in which they might create false expectations. In a rural area in Murrupula district, the secretary of the locality had called all demobilised soldiers for a meeting. When we started our interviews with some of the demobilised soldiers, and explained what we were doing, they were disappointed since they came in the hope of finally receiving their benefits that they had waited for, for a long time. At times, it looked as if local leaders had deliberately misrepresented the purpose of such meetings, because they knew that if they had said this was for research, people would not have shown up. This created an ethical dilemma, as I was dependent on other people's help with getting introduced to community residents who had been involved in the war, but did not have complete control over how others represented the purpose of my work. Such dependence on core contacts and gatekeepers and the potential for manipulation of the researcher's presence, activities and writings inverts the power relationship between researcher and researched and constrains the autonomy of the researcher and their project (Vlassenroot, 2006). Such power asymmetries in favour of research participants are especially pronounced in dangerous settings in which researchers depend on certain elites for their personal protection (Adams, 1999; Kovats-Bernat, 2002; Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay, 2016, p 1013). But they find similar expression in polarised societies in which researchers depend on certain individuals to gain access and trust.

Conclusion

These narratives from my fieldwork demonstrate that the autonomy of the researcher and that of the researched are closely interlinked. The people I asked for an interview thought I had particular powers that could work in both directions, positive and negative. For some, my work seemed particularly threatening, as they associated my mere presence and/or the subject of my work with threats to their livelihoods and wellbeing. For others, my presence provided an opportunity to receive support for their vision of politics so that they could reach their political, social and economic goals.

In this context, the researcher becomes a political actor within the field site and fieldwork becomes 'a form of intervention' (Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay, 2016), which curtails community residents' autonomy

over their lives and wellbeing. As a consequence of the researcher's presence, the field site experiences a qualitative change, which is difficult to 'factor out' of the resulting data during the process of analysis. At the same time, community residents become 'actors' in the research project, which may constrain the autonomy of the researcher (Vlassenroot, 2006) and contribute to their 'relative powerlessness', restricting their role to that of a 'mascot researcher' (Adams, 1999). The Naparama commander mentioned earlier attempted to influence the research design by limiting access to certain individuals, becoming an author of the study rather than its subject. This negotiation of the researcher's position within the field site needs to be taken into account during data analysis, beyond the considerations about potential biases due to gender and other characteristics of the researcher. Instances of empowerment and disempowerment (and their consequences) can only be recognised when discursive strategies such as rumours about the researcher, inventions, denials, evasions and silences are treated as the 'meta-data' of fieldwork (Fujii, 2010).

Rather than conceiving ourselves as external observers, analysts and critics of disempowerment, we need to take into account the ways in which we may, inadvertently, contribute to empowering some and disempowering others. Even if (or especially when) researchers try to be neutral and retain distance from community life, they unwittingly become actors in local or national conflicts (Sluka, 1990, 1995; Gerharz, 2009). Some researchers have embraced the impossibility of remaining neutral and impartial observers, in particular, in violent settings. Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay (2016), for example, discuss the ways in which they have 'intervened' in their respective field sites and engaged in 'tribal politics' during their work in Afghanistan and Somalia, creating informal networks of informants that provided access and protection. Research in violent settings is made difficult by security concerns for the researcher, but the notion that researchers intervene in local politics, even though they may 'only' intend to observe, is true for highly polarised postwar contexts as well.

Overall, the two narratives demonstrate a deeply ambiguous reaction to strangers. Community residents do not like the intrusion of strangers who bring projects, as these are contingent, conditional, subject to review, and there is no long-term investment and development of trust. Conversely, projects mean jobs and seed money, which could improve people's lives. This again confirms Serra's (2003) notion that what people ask for is not a complete absence of the state and its services, but more accountability and reliability of external interveners. By extension, what communities ask for is not that researchers stay

away from them, but that they remain transparent and accountable about their activities, and aware of the political nature of their work. Researchers become part of a community and shape social realities in ways that may not be anticipated or intended, creating opportunities for both empowerment and disempowerment. Such reflection remains important, both for research transparency and research ethics.

Notes

1 By 'polarisation', I follow the definition provided by Esteban and Schneider (2008, p 133): 'the extent to which the population is clustered around a small number of distant poles. This notion of polarisation is particularly relevant to the analysis of conflict, because it stands for the idea that the tensions within a society of individuals or states result from two simultaneous decisions: identification with other subjects within the own group of reference and distancing oneself from one or several other competing groups.' In Mozambique, 16 years of war contributed to political polarisation between sympathisers of the party in power, Frelimo, and the rebel group turned opposition party, Renamo, which, during the war, was referred to as 'armed bandits' and largely seen as terrorists without a political project.

2 A related phenomenon is *chupasangue* ('drawing blood') that has recurred over decades in regions of Zambézia and Nampula province whenever government or international agencies visited rural communities during vaccination campaigns. These agencies are accused of drawing blood like vampires and thereby causing deaths in the community (Chichava, 2007, pp 392–9).

3 Interview with religious leader, Murrupula, Nampula.

4 Interview with religious leader, Nicoadala, Zambézia.

5 Renamo party leaders in Nampula province, whom I contacted a few months later, did not see the political situation at the time as a problem, and granted me permission to interview former Renamo combatants.

References

Abelvik-Lawson, H. (2014) 'Sustainable development for whose benefit? Brazil's economic power and human rights violations in the Amazon and Mozambique', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, vol 18, no 7–8, pp 795–821.

Adams, L.L. (1999) 'The mascot researcher', *Journal of Composite Materials*, vol 33, no 10, pp 928–40.

AIM (Agência de Informação de Moçambique) (2013) 'Mozambique: Cholera disinformation leads to clashes', 17 February.

BBC News (2011) 'Mozambique holds US and British "pirate hunters"', 19 September (www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14952999).

Browne, B.C. and McBride, R. (2015) 'Politically sensitive encounters: Ethnography, access, and the benefits of "hanging out"', *Qualitative Sociology Review*, vol 11, no 1, pp 34–48.

Campbell, L.M., Gray, N.J., Meletis, Z.A. and Abbott, J.G. (2006) 'Gatekeepers and keymasters: Dynamic relationships of access in geographical fieldwork', *Geographical Review*, vol 96, no 1, pp 97–121.

Chichava, S.I. (2007) 'Le "vieux Mozambique": Étude sur l'identité politique de la Zambézie', PhD dissertation, Université Montesquieu/Bordeaux IV.

Chichava, S. and Durán, J. (2016) *Civil society organisations' political control over Brazil and Japan's development cooperation in Mozambique: More than a mere whim?*, LSE Global South Unit Working Paper Series, Working Paper no 2, London: London School of Economics and Political Science.

Clifford, J. and Marcus, G.E. (1986) *Writing culture. The poetics and politics of ethnography*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Cohen, N. and Arieli, T. (2011) 'Field research in conflict environments: Methodological challenges and snowball sampling', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol 48, no 4, pp 423–35.

Darch, C. (2015) 'Separatist tensions and violence in the "model post-conflict state": Mozambique since the 1990s', *Review of African Political Economy*, vol 43, no 148, pp 320–7.

Do Rosário, D. (2009) 'Les Mairies des "autres": Une analyse politique, socio-historique et culturelle des trajectoires locales. Le cas d'Angoche, de l'Île de Moçambique et de Nacala Porto', PhD dissertation, Université Montesquieu/Bordeaux IV.

Ekeh, P.P. (1975) 'Colonialism and the two publics In Africa: A theoretical statement', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol 17, no 1, pp 91–112.

England, K.V.L. (1994) 'Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research', *The Professional Geographer*, vol 46, no 1, pp 80–9.

Esteban, J. and Schneider, G. (2008) 'Polarization and conflict: Theoretical and empirical issues', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol 45, no 2, pp 131–41.

Fauvet, P. (2013) 'Mozambique: 17 People arrested for cholera riots in Nampula', Agência de Informação de Moçambique, 22 February.

Fujii, L.A. (2010) 'Shades of truth and lies. Interpreting testimonies of war and violence', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol 47, no 2, pp 231–41.

Fujii, L.A. (2012) 'Research ethics 101: Dilemmas and responsibilities', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol 45, no 4, pp 231–41.

Geffray, C. (1990) *La cause des armes au Mozambique. Anthropologie d'une guerre civile*, Paris: Karthala.

Gerharz, E. (2009) *Ambivalent positioning. Reflections on ethnographic research in Sri Lanka during the ceasefire of 2002*, Working Papers in Development Sociology and Social Anthropology, Working Paper no 361, Universität Bielefeld.

Goodhand, J. (2000) 'Research in conflict zones: Ethics and accountability', *Forced Migration Review*, vol 8, pp 12-15.

Groger, L., Mayberry, P.S. and Straker, J.K. (1999) 'What we didn't learn because of who would not talk to us', *Qualitative Health Research*, vol 9, no 6, pp 829–35.

Honwana, A.M. (2002) *Espíritos vivos, tradições modernas: Possessão de espíritos e reintegração social pós-guerra no sul de Moçambique*, Maputo: Promédia.

Igreja, V., Dias-Lambranca, B. and Richters, A. (2008) 'Gamba spirits, gender relations, and healing in post-civil war Gorongosa, Mozambique', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol 14, no 2, pp 353–71.

IMF (International Monetary Fund) (2016) *Republic of Mozambique. Selected issues*, IMF Country Report, No 16/10, Washington, DC: IMF.

Knox, C. (2001) 'Establishing research legitimacy in the contested political ground of contemporary Northern Ireland', *Qualitative Research*, vol 1, no 2, pp 205–22.

Kovats-Bernat, J.C. (2002) 'Negotiating dangerous fields: Pragmatic strategies for fieldwork amid violence and terror', *American Anthropologist*, vol 104, no 1, pp 208–22.

Legrand, J.-C. (1993) 'Logique de guerre et dynamique de la violence en Zambézie, 1976–1991', *Politique Africaine*, June, vol 50, pp 88–104.

Lillywhite, S., Kemp, D. and Sturman, K. (2015) *Mining, resettlement and lost livelihoods: Listening to the voices of resettled communities in Mualadzi*, Mozambique, Melbourne, VIC: Oxfam.

Malejacq, R. and Mukhopadhyay, D. (2016) 'The "tribal politics" of field research: A reflection on power and partiality in 21st-century warzones', *Perspectives on Politics*, vol 14, no 4, pp 1011–28.

Mazurana, D.E., Jacobsen, K. and Gale, L.A. (eds) (2013) *Research methods in conflict settings. A view from below*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Morier-Genoud, E., Cahen, M. and Do Rosário, D. (eds) (forthcoming) *The war within: New perspectives on the Civil War in Mozambique*, 1976–1992, Woodbridge: James Currey.

Nash, J. (1976) 'Ethnology in a revolutionary setting', in M. Rynkiewich and J. Spradley (eds) *Ethics and anthropology: Dilemmas in fieldwork*, New York: Wiley & Sons, pp 148–66.

Nordstrom, C. and Robben, A.C.G.M. (1995) *Fieldwork under fire: Contemporary studies of violence and culture*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Norman, J.M. (2009) 'Got trust? The challenge of gaining access in conflict zones', in C. Lekha Sriram, J.C. Kind, J.A. Mertus, O. Martin-Ortega and J. Herman (eds) *Surviving field research. Working in violent and difficult situations*, London: Routledge, pp 71–90.

O'Laughlin, B. (1992) 'A base social da guerra em Moçambique', *Estudos Moçambicanos*, vol 10, pp 107–42.

Ranger, T.O. (1985) *Peasant consciousness and guerrilla war in Zimbabwe: A comparative study*, London: James Currey.

Romano, D. (2006) 'Conducting research in the Middle East's conflict zones', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol 39, no 3, pp 439–41.

Serra, C. (2003) *Cólera e catarse*, Maputo: Imprensa Universitária.

Sirnate, V. (2014) 'Positionality, personal insecurity, and female empathy in security studies research', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, vol 47, no 2, pp 398–401.

Sluka, J.A. (1990) 'Participant observation in violent social contexts', *Human Organization*, vol 49, no 2, pp 114–26.

Sluka, J.A. (1995) 'Reflections on managing danger in fieldwork: Dangerous anthropology in Belfast', in C. Nordstrom and A.C.G.M. Robben (eds) *Fieldwork under fire: Contemporary studies of violence and culture*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp 276–94.

Smith, D. (2011) 'ANC youth leader Julius Malema thrown out of party', 10 November, *The Guardian* (www.theguardian.com/world/2011/nov/10/julius-malema-anc-expelled).

Sriram, C.L., King, J.C., Mertus, J.A., Martin-Ortega, O. and Herman, J. (2009) *Surviving field research. Working in violent and difficult situations*, London: Routledge.

Sumich, J. and Honwana, J. (2007) *Strong party, weak state? Frelimo and state survival through the Mozambican civil war: An analytical narrative on state-making*, Crisis States Working Papers Series, Working Paper No 2, London: LSE Development Studies Institute.

UN (United Nations) (1995) *The United Nations and Mozambique, 1992–1995* (United Nations Blue Books Series), New York: UN, Department of Public Information.

Vines, A. (1991) *RENAMO: Terrorism in Mozambique*, London: Centre for Southern African Studies, University of York, in association with James Currey.

Vlassenroot, K. (2006) 'War and social research. The limits of empirical methodologies in war-torn environments', *Civilisations*, vol 54, no 1-2, pp 191–8.

Wedeen, L. (2010) 'Reflections on ethnographic work in political science', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 13, pp 255–72.

Weinstein, J.M. (2002) 'Mozambique: A fading UN success story', *Journal of Democracy*, vol 13, no 1, pp 141–56.

Wood, E.J. (2006) 'The ethical challenges of field research in conflict zones', *Qualitative Sociology*, vol 29, no 3, pp 373–86.

Zacarias, A. (2014) 'Mozambique's small farmers fear Brazilian-style agriculture', 1 January, *The Guardian* (www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/jan/01/mozambique-small-farmers-fear-brazilian-style-agriculture).

EXPERIENCES IN RESEARCHING CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

Fieldwork Interrupted

Edited by
Althea-Maria Rivas and
Brendan Ciarán Browne

First published in Great Britain in 2018 by

Policy Press
University of Bristol
1-9 Old Park Hill
Bristol
BS2 8BB
UK
t: +44 (0)117 954 5940
pp-info@bristol.ac.uk
www.policypress.co.uk

North America office:
Policy Press
c/o The University of Chicago Press
1427 East 60th Street
Chicago, IL 60637, USA
t: +1 773 702 7700
f: +1 773-702-9756
sales@press.uchicago.edu
www.press.uchicago.edu

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 978-1-4473-3768-3 hardcover
ISBN 978-1-4473-3771-3 ePub
ISBN 978-1-4473-3772-0 Mobi
ISBN 978-1-4473-3770-6 ePdf

Cover design by Hayes Design
Front cover image supplied by 123RF.com 123. The front image of stacked stones is known as a 'cairn' and is used to denote areas of significance, including to mark out pathways or to highlight places of danger.
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY
Policy Press uses environmentally responsible print partners

MIX
Paper from responsible sources
FSC® C013604

Contents

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Pamela Kea and Liat Radcliffe Ross, who offered critical feedback and commentary on earlier versions of the book chapters, Roger Saul and Shelley Lauren Robinson for their continuous support and advice on the ideas, aesthetics and format of the book. Invaluable mentorship was provided throughout various stages of the writing and publishing process by Professor David Mutimer at the York University, Toronto, and Susan Johnson and colleagues at the Centre for Development Studies, University of Bath. We would also like to acknowledge the postdoctoral fellowship programme of the Centre for Development Studies at the University of Bath for the funding that made possible the presentation of the ideas underpinning this book in its initial stages.

We are grateful to the editorial staff at Policy Press for their belief in the message of the book, guidance and above all, their patience. Finally, we would like to acknowledge and thank those who inspired this book, the scholars, researchers and practitioners, who honestly shared their uncomfortable moments with us, and the colleagues, partners, researchers and research participants who live in the many countries mentioned in this book who have and continue to support and direct our work and ultimately, educate us.

On a more personal note, Brendan would like to thank those dedicated and committed colleagues at Al Quds (Bard) University who provided both professional and personal camaraderie during challenging times spent working and living in the West Bank. His parents, Marie and Paul, for inspiring the confidence to conduct difficult research in uncomfortable spaces. Finally, a special thank you is reserved for Emma for being the never-ending source of support, love, guidance and inspiration when living and working together in Palestine.

Althea-Maria would like to thank Alriguez Sebastian and Kathleen for everything.