

Panel E33: Decolonising the Acadème in ‘red areas’, with a Focus on the Great Lakes Region [initiated by ISS]¹ on 4 February 2021

Convenors

- Marieke van Winden (Conference Organiser) (African Studies Center, Leiden).
- Dorothea Hilhorst: Professor of Humanitarian Studies at ISS (Erasmus University, Rotterdam).
- Marie Rose Bashwira: (Centre de recherche et d'expertise en Genre et développement (CREGED))
- Claude Iguma (ISDR-Bukavu)

Contributors

- Ton Dietz: Professor of African Studies, Leiden
- Melina Kalfelis: University of Bayreuth.
- Amado Kabore: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et Technologique
- Josef Kučera (University of Ostrava)
- Jan Knipping: Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz
- Nico Nassenstein: JGU Mainz
- Janneke Tiegna: Doctoral Researcher at the University of Leipzig, Würzburg, Bavaria, Germany
- Eva Haaser: Student Assistant at Humboldt-Universität, Berlin
- Nformi Joan: African Studies Centre, Leiden (reporter)
- Tina Kontinen: Audience

Abstract

This panel deals with doing research in ‘dangerous areas’ in Africa, areas regarded as ‘red zones’ on the maps of Foreign Affairs departments of European countries: ‘no-go zones’. The Great Lakes Region has (had) many of these ‘red areas’. Local universities in or near these

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areas are often functioning in very difficult circumstances, and 'fieldwork' is often regarded as 'not possible'. Moreover, foreign researchers are often discouraged (or forbidden) to do research there. Those who do are confronted with many ethical dilemmas. Those who want to contribute to decolonizing the academe in these 'conflict-affected areas' often struggle with the fact that research is frequently more unequal and less participatory than elsewhere, as people use arguments of access and security to dismiss such ethical concerns. What are the experiences with countering this predicament?

Accepted Papers

Research in "red areas" - voice for the voiceless or the patron-client relationship? by Josef Kučera (University of Ostrava)

The contribution analyses the role of research brokers in social sciences' research in Africa. With an increasing number of places which are not accessible for Western researchers because of the security concerns, the role of brokers in research is becoming essential. Moreover, their voice in the research is usually the one which is heard the most strongly. However, there is a growing ethical dilemma about their input to the research. Among the questions which arise with this type of research may be brokers' and interlocutors' security, confidentiality, and reliability; their position as co-authors even though they did not write a single word; or their possible dependence on researchers' sources which may establish another patron-client relationship and bias for the research as a whole. Thus, there is a huge question of objectivity of the data collected by them and, in general, of their contribution as co-authors. The contribution wants to put this issue into a normative and ethical light. It is based on personal experience from extensive field research taking place in (Red area) Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon (NoSo) and also on findings of ongoing research of team from Uppsala University led by Mats Utas, which is called "Exploring the Research Backstage - Methodological, Theoretical and Ethical Issues Surrounding the Role of Local Research Brokers in Insecure Zones." The author is aware that his empirical findings will not analyse the situation in the Great Lake region and that they will mainly come from different areas. However, he is convinced that these ethical dilemmas are also present in the research of other African regions.

A discourse-oriented linguistic study on conceptualizations of hospitality in Northern Uganda: anticipating challenges and obstacles in a (post-)conflict setting by Jan Knipping (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz), Nico Nassenstein (JGU Mainz).

Since the withdrawal of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) from Northern Uganda in 2006, the Acholi region is no longer labelled as a 'no-go-zone' or red area for visitors and researchers. However, decades of war and conflict in this region, the records of which can even be traced back at least to early colonial times, have left their psychological and physical marks on the Acholi people who strive to regain socioeconomic "normality" in a post-conflict setting.

Additionally, ongoing conflicts in bordering South Sudan and Eastern Congo recently led to an influx of refugees to Northern Uganda, which poses new challenges to its residents, e.g. resulting in land grabbing by the widely unpopular government and its reallocation to refugees. On the other hand, several sources - ranging from 19th century European travelogues to 21st century ethnographies including self-descriptions of Acholi thinkers and academics - laud an extraordinary hospitality of these people. A linguistic analysis of discourses of hospitality and hostility among the Acholi seems a promising approach to grasp the perception and conception of 'Others' from an emic perspective so that a better understanding of Acholi perspectives on this issue can be gained.

However, conducting such research in a region where (past) conflicts were caused on the basis of ascriptions of 'Otherness' that led to stereotypical images of a militarized, war-prone and ferocious Acholi people that still inform contemporary discourses in Uganda, raises several theoretical and ethical questions that invite a discussion in this presentation: How can such a study be conducted without reproducing stereotypes and without making resurface existing resentments towards Others in this war-torn region? Who is invited to talk and who desires to talk about these issues? Which data is expected to be generated in a discourse linguistic study in the discipline of African Linguistics? How can a (transdisciplinary) collaboration with a local university enhance the understanding of specific concepts (hospitality vs. hostility etc.)? In how far can such an approach challenge and decolonize dominant epistemes of cosmopolitanism by adding a 'Southern' perspective?

La recherche dans les « zones rouges » au Burkina Faso by Melina Kalfelis (University of Bayreuth), Amado Kabore (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique et Technologique).

Burkina Faso has become a new epicentre of political turbulence in the Sahel. Islamist groups fuel violence and intercommunal conflict in order to destabilize the country. In 2019, death numbers in Burkina Faso reached a new peak. National security institutions and international interventions are unable to contain the spiral of violence or provide human security. In the midst

of these developments, the nation-wide self-defense groups called the Koglweegos, who govern crime by their own means, have firmly installed in the country. While the international community accuses them to violate human rights, empirical findings stress that they enjoy trust in the population and have contributed to a significant drop in crime rates.

Vigilante governance in Africa always raised political and moral controversies. Actors like the Koglweegos navigate in legal and moral grey zones, reproduce violence to establish security, and thereby create tensions but also prejudices on various intertwined levels. Our research aims to achieve a decolonized perspective on the issue. This requires a deep anthropological immersion into the Koglweegos' governance and lifeworlds; an endeavor that is promising and at the same time highly challenging. Obstacles are multiple and appear on various levels. On the (inter)national level, where the Koglweegos are framed as an ethnic local militia and oftentimes scapegoated, research with the groups means to constantly swim against the tide of Eurocentric reports and media coverage. On the academic level, the goal to participate in the Koglweegos' every day and during their extra-legal hearings raises severe ethical and methodological concerns. Not for nothing have anthropologists rarely conducted close observations with vigilantes. Last but not least, it is exactly these close observations on the ground, together with the Koglweegos and in the face of physical punishments, prisons, and shackled persons, that confront us with personal and professional limits. In addition, the security situation in Burkina Faso is fragile, which shrinks spaces of manoeuvres during fieldwork and demands a lot of precautions.

This paper tackles the ethical, methodological and epistemological challenges we face before, during and after research with the Koglweegos. It reflects new directions for fieldwork in 'red areas' and puts an emphasis on the - surprisingly - hardest predicament we find: to counter simplified representations and norms that determine the way the world delineates political non-state actors in Africa.

Decolonizing the academe in 'red areas' by Dorothea Hilhorst (Erasmus University Rotterdam), Marie Rose Bashwira (Centre de recherche et d'expertise en Genre et développement (CREGED)), Claude Iguma (ISDR-Bukavu).

Development studies has been engaging for decades in discussions on participatory research, and more recently on decolonizing development studies. However, these discussions have largely bypassed research in so-called 'dangerous areas' or 'red zones'. In these areas it is often assumed that 1) participatory methods cannot be done in conflict-ridden areas and 2) that local

knowledge actors are lacking or lack in capacities to be full partners. This presentation details of different experiences and outlines how participatory research can be successful. At the same time, it yields some lessons that may be relevant to research elsewhere.

Key points from panel discussions.

Inspiration behind this panel – decolonisation. “Truly collaborative research partnerships investigate and change methodologies towards participatory work.”

1) Amado Kabore

- Volontaire pour la défense de la patrie: Formed by governments in villages to assist in ensuring security. In conflict areas like Chad, Burkina Faso, etc., vigilante groups mostly ensure security and they use coded language to describe their actions.
- ‘Red zones’ is a new concept in Burkina Faso and villagers do not like this description. The concept is all about:
 - Access to information and actors.
 - How to access the areas.
 - Researchers’ strife to overcome or find means to access the ‘red zones’ by seeking authorisation and advice from authorities.
 - There are ‘red zones’ in ‘red zones’ and these are not controlled by the State.
 - Researchers hide their identity and purpose for safety reasons.
 - Researchers use a guide and are bound to respect the ethics.
 - ‘Red zones’ is a complex political problem.

2) Melina Kalfelis

Vigilantism on the Margins of ‘Red Areas’ in Burkina Faso

- “I didn’t choose the ‘red areas’ but the ‘red areas’ chose me”, Melina Kalfelis, sharing her experience working in Burkina Faso.
- There is enormous bias relating to ‘who has the power to produce and circulate knowledge on the ‘red areas’.’

Research perspective

Disinformation and how anthropologists can continue their research with. Reconceptualise vigilantism as a process.

Ethical considerations

- From personal experience to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – news coverage is biased and people feel left alone by the State.
- Decolonising our ethical consciousness through new concepts:
 - Ethical divergence – opening up to other dynamics in the field.
 - Ethical discrepancy – disagreeing with what is happening.

Ethics and state-centred norms: How should researchers position themselves?

- Human rights overlook(s) the structurally embedded human rights violations deeply rooted in the institutions of the postcolonial state.
- Can we hide the fact that we are researchers? What about the basic concepts?

Q and A

Q (Nico Nassenstein): How to conduct research, how to be safe ... What are we supposed to describe and how should we discuss it? How can you transform the field images into language? Do you have to speak or write about violence in postcolonial field in less-biased and non-apologetic terms?

A: Dilemmas of the researcher – impacts of the violence experienced as a researcher – writing about it. Though confronted with psychological impacts, staying neutral and objective is the ultimate. There are personal and scientific limits. It is important to be precise on when to be there or not.

Q: People mix and shift functions and roles. How do you deal with researching and reporting in such situations?

A: “Chacun répond de ses actes.” Information in Burkina Faso is polarised as responses from interviews are politically motivated. Interviewing is not an ideal method and this makes it difficult for participant observation in ‘red zones’ – ‘chercheurs endogènes; chercheurs exogènes.’ ‘Red zones’ are often seen negatively.

3) Josef Kucera: Research in ‘Red Areas’

- Who defines those ‘red areas’? – Governments from the West for touristic reasons not for research.
- Countries that are not officially recognised advise against all, but essential travel.
- Who is the centre in research? Who is the centre in media coverage? Are there/they potential traps?

- Mutual exclusive dependency
 - Researcher on broker's info
 - Broker on researcher's money
- Representativeness
 - Extreme case-studies
 - Deviant case-studies

“Ethics has to be an everyday thing. Ethics are not absolute things. We should just do things the right way” (Rose Baswira).

NB: Training to be organised in June: ‘Safety and Security for Researchers’ (Dorothea Hilhorst, President of the International Humanitarian Studies).