Master thesis
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Categorizing The Problems Of Difficult Field Research

Content

Abstract

Fieldwork in difficult environments - conflict, post-conflict and post-disaster areas - and the problems that come with working in such conditions have been the subject of many reflexive articles and chapters. This study attempts to take a more holistic approach to the subject, trying to determine a catalogue of the most common problems of difficult fieldwork. It tries to get some indication of the frequency and impact of these issues via interviews and an online survey. The result is an extensive list of common fieldwork issues, with some information to put the various issues into a slightly more practical perspective.

Introduction

Fieldwork used to be simple. A researcher would find an interesting group to study, enter their ranks, sit in the background, and then report his findings to his colleagues in the scientific community. The researcher's report was final, because it was assumed to be objective, as was the researcher.

Inevitably, some cracks started to appear in this rock-hard belief in the objectivity of fieldworkers. Most notably, fieldworkers themselves started challenging the notion of objectivity into question. Fieldwork was assumed to be objective, but was it really? Were they as (human, subjective) fieldworkers really capable of objectivity? Weren't they really just trying, or perhaps even pretending, to be like the natural sciences, with its hard truths?

The field of fieldwork shifted, or at least became multi-faceted. Different schools of thought appeared that had different notions of what constituted 'good' fieldwork. On one end, positivists believe that it is still possible to find hard truths, although it's more complicated than previously assumed and requires more work. On the other side of the spectrum, constructivists believe that everything is colored through the lens of the researcher's own experience, and that such a thing as capital letter Truth is unattainable.

Especially on the constructivist end of the spectrum, the researchers themselves became part of the data. If 'the world', the traditional subject of all sciences, save perhaps theology, is always viewed through a lens, then the lens itself becomes a thing of interest. What is this lens, how does it work? How does it shape our view on 'the world'? This laid the foundation for numerous works, among which "Emotions and Fieldwork" by Kleinmann & Copp (1993), which explores fieldworkers themselves as a minority group, trying to vocalize their assumptions, doubts and fears, and customs and traditions.

The subfield of fieldworkers examining themselves has been steadily growing since. Researchers in this tradition also keep calling upon others to share their experiences in the field (Diphoorn 2012; Mertus 2009a; King 2009; Barakat & Ellis 1996; Sluka 1995; Kleinman & Copp 1993, p.3). In its most common form, researchers share their experiences via articles, 'reflexive' chapters in books, appendices to theses, and coffee table conversations. However, most information on fieldwork experience is anecdotal, and it's also kept separate from the rest of the results.

This is, on one hand strange, because the idea behind sharing these personal experiences from the field is that they colored our data. Why then, are these experiences not commonly included with the results? On the other hand, it is very unclear what information should be included in the results. What do fieldwork experiences really say about the results? Unfortunately, it's impossible to do the same fieldwork twice, once with emotions and subjective experiences, and once without. Consequently, very little is known about the effects of the emotional state and cultural background of the gathering researcher on their own data.

There are some general assumptions, though. For example, heightened levels of stress inhibit perception and rational decision making (Marin et al. 2011; Spruill 2010; Lupien et al. 2007), so it seems reasonable to think that stressful environments could have a negative or deteriorating effect on research. Assuming that stress indeed has an impact on research: what can/should be done about it?

What if it's not necessary to know the exact effects of stress during fieldwork, but merely to know how to avoid it? Or, if this cannot be avoided, to at least know what to expect? A catalogue of practical problems that arise during fieldwork might serve fieldworkers well.

Few fields seem as stressful, at least at first glance, as conflict zones. To some degree, post-conflict and post-disaster environments carry with them the same risks as conflict situations. Many of these 'difficult' environments carry a high risk of crime, both violent and nonviolent, as well as higher chances of diseases and government monitoring – or even intrusion. There is often a lack of infrastructure, either because it is non-existent or damaged beyond use. People may become suspicious of researchers, who go around asking questions that might be sensitive in nature, or that become so in that situation. Many people are traumatized, the worst cases have seen horrors unfolding right before their eyes. If a researcher conducts interviews with victims or perpetrators, secondary trauma is a real possibility.

Research Questions

The subject of this thesis was the nature of field research under difficult circumstances, such as conflict, post-conflict and post-disaster areas. In particular, this thesis was interested in mapping the practical problems that fieldworkers encounter during such studies. The end result was an overview of which problems are encountered, divided into categories, and with an early indication of their relevance in terms of impact and frequency. The practical aim of this research was that in the future, field researchers will have a better overview of the problems that difficult fieldwork will pose, so this in turn might lead to better design and fieldwork education. The theoretical objective was to formulate a categorization of problems in fieldwork and to evaluate the literature on the subject. This was summarized in the main research question.

RQ: How can the major problems of field research in difficult environments be categorized?

This RQ was broken down into several sub-questions. The first step was to create an extensive list of problems, based on the literature on the subject of difficult fieldwork. This was supplemented with information from the more extensive literature on less harsh ('normal') sociological and anthropological fieldwork. Conflict fieldwork is a special niche within the broader tradition of fieldwork, but many truths of the general fieldwork hold true within difficult fieldwork.

SQ1: What are the problems of difficult fieldwork and how can they be categorized?

The resulting list provided an extensive overview of the problems of field research, but it still only reflected the opinions expressed in a selection of literature. It was decided to supplement this data with the accounts of experienced field researchers. This would be done in two ways: in-depth structured interviews with field researchers, asking them about their opinions and accounts on and about the various categories; and an online survey, less in-depth, but with more possibilities to quantify the questions and answers. During the interviews, researchers were asked if they wanted to add anything to the list, comment on the existing categories, and expand upon them, even if they felt they were problematic at all. The survey asked participants to quantify how frequent and how problematic the categories were, in an attempt to establish some notion of relevance concerning the different issues of difficult fieldwork – the subjects of SQ4 and SQ5. In

effect, the catalogue was evaluated and complemented through the interviews and survey, in order to answer SQ2 and SQ3:

SQ2: What can experienced field researchers comment, add, or subtract on the categories of problems?

SQ3: Are there any new categories experienced field researchers would add to the list of categories derived from literature?

To create a proper categorization, rather than merely listing the potential problems of difficult fieldwork, this study tries to grasp at the relevance of the problems as well. This is a complex question, because relevance is naturally hard to define and measure, and this study does not presume to answer it fully. Nevertheless, it did try to establish a basic premise by asking researchers about their experiences with the issues established in SQ1. Though it does not provide a complete answer, this study asked researchers which problems they most frequently encountered, and which were most problematic in their fieldwork, in order to establish some notion of which problems are most relevant to field researchers. Especially the survey aimed to find some quantitative answers to these questions:

SQ4: What is the frequency of occurrence of the distinct issues of difficult fieldwork?

SQ5: What is the impact of the distinct issues of difficult fieldwork upon the research process and the researcher?

In the end, all these sub-questions resulted in an extensive list of possible problems that could occur during difficult field research, with detailed descriptions, as well as an indication of their relevance in the field, in terms of frequency and impact. The list was composed of information from fieldwork literature, from interviews with experienced field researchers, and from a small online survey among field researchers. All of this combined provided an adequate answer to the main research question: a catalogue of major problems that occur in difficult fieldwork.

Scientific Relevance

As previously stated, there are many field researchers who have taken an interest in the practical difficulties and the personal well-being of the researcher in the field. Often, this interest has manifested itself by sharing personal accounts of field research and the troubles it posed. These accounts usually end by calling upon other researchers to share their stories as well. Kleinmann & Copp even go as far as to call for "a field study of fieldworkers" (1993, p.3).

Sadly, this "field study" has yet to truly kick off yet, at least for researchers who work in difficult environments. There have however been a few studies in this direction. The best example so far is Janine Clark (2006), who conducted an open-question survey amongst field researchers working in the Middle East. The goal of Clark's research was to evaluate whether there were common problems amongst the sample. She was also curious if there should be specific design considerations to fieldwork when working in the Middle East. Other publications that included the experiences of more than three researchers are almost always edited volumes, such as "Surviving Field Research: working in violent and difficult situations" (Sriram et al. 2009) and "Danger in the Field: risk and ethics in social research" (Lee-Treeweek & Linkogle 2000), but these take the form

of individual researchers - or occasionally pairs - all writing a single chapter. Consequently, while interesting and insightful to read, they are more a collection of the experiences of different fieldworkers, rather than a meta-study of fieldwork. Both these books end with a conclusion by the editors, summarizing the stories and gleaming general lessons from them, but it is still very unclear how likely researchers are to run into the problems described in these books. At the same time, the frequency and intensity of the problems encountered is not addressed.

All in all, there is very little systematic analysis in regards to the study of field workers. This is not strange. There is, perhaps, very little commonality between different field studies and different field workers, even when the scope is narrowed to difficult circumstances. The experience of conducting a survey in the outback of Bangladesh will vastly differ from interviewing political elites in Mexico City. Investigating the issue of native people versus huge mining corporations preying on their land requires a different skill set than comparing three cases of violent revolution around the globe.

But despite all the possible differences, all these examples are still taking place in 'difficult' environments. It begs the question, is there truly nothing then, in all these conflict, post-conflict and post-disaster areas, that somehow connects field researchers? Is there no common basis, common frustration, or common problem that most will face? Clark (2009) reports that she did find commonalities among the researchers who worked in the Middle-East. Foremost, the bulk of their problems were related to the authoritarian regimes of the region. They would be watched, interrogated, or in the broadest sense, 'kept an eye on'. Another conclusion was that the fieldworkers' choice of where to conduct fieldwork was significantly affected by local political climates, most importantly in terms of political unrest and (potential) violence. Researchers reported to be far less willing to work in active conflict areas, or in areas where the conflict was very recent.

This raises the possibility that it is feasible to identify common problems in fieldwork, or at least to categorize the frequency and intensity of common challenges. Clark (2009) in the end did not give any suggestions on how to categorize the problems, or how to incorporate the specific features of fieldwork in the Middle-East into education or research design, but this does not mean this is impossible or unnecessary.

All in all, the "field study of fieldwork" could be greatly aided by a catalogue of problems, which not only lists these problems, but their likelihood and impact as well. In this way, the more important problems - high likelihood, high impact - can be separated from the less important ones - low likelihood, low impact. Even if this only starts for difficult fieldwork, these are still the areas most likely to be unsafe for the researcher and the participants, and the increase in knowledge could aid both. It would have a positive impact on education, field practice and research design, and perhaps lessons might be learned from it that affect sociological fieldwork in general.

Social Relevance

Conflict is a big global issue. It has always been and it probably will remain so for the foreseeable future. What society knows about conflict, certainly in Western countries like The Netherlands, mainly stems from what war journalists tell it. War journalists on their turn interpret what they encounter in the field through frameworks that are provided by academics. Those frameworks however, are not free from interpretation themselves. But as with all things in science, the more

we know, the more we can aim to understand the human element in research, the more we can account for it.

This thesis will by no means provide a complete summary of universal fieldwork experiences, even in 'just' the difficult environments. It won't give an end-all edict on the academic fieldwork discourse, the effects of stress, violence and danger. It won't result in a universal list of essential and teachable skills. Each field comes with its own peculiarities and unique challenges. They can't all be solved the same way, and solutions that work for one researcher might not work for someone else, due to gender, connections, context, etc.

However, and firstly, this study can provide a step towards identifying a 'basic skill set' for young academics seeking to do field research, much like the guides provided to starting humanitarian aid workers. This study hopes to find commonalities in the difficulties of different researchers and offer advice that will aid young researchers with their fieldwork preparation and design. Even if the results will find that each problem should be approached on a case-by-case basis, and there are no general solutions, at least it will give young academics a (theoretical) idea of what awaits them in the field.

Secondly, to senior academics, it could provide a set of topics to include in university education programs. Of all scholars who answered a survey in regard to field studies in the Middle East, only 25% stated that their education had adequately prepared them for the field and the difficulties it poses. Two-thirds of the survey respondents indicated that their training was either non-existent or merely some points of advice from their supervisors (Clark 2006). Many felt that the "gray zone" of ethical dilemmas that often are part of fieldwork was something they could have been better prepared for during training. So even though fieldwork can't be taught entirely within the classroom, just like swimming can't be learned without going into the water, there might be some basics to it that future fieldworkers will feel comfortable knowing, especially when it comes to practicalities and ethics.

Finally, this thesis would like to join the call for researchers to recognize their personal struggles in their papers and reports. The "field study of fieldwork" has come a long way since the middle of last century, when individual emotions were to be ignored, in an attempt to probe naturalist truths from inherently chaotic, extreme, (in)human circumstances. However, accounting for personal limitations, rather than just theoretical ones, is still very hard and emotional for a researcher. Sometimes these experiences are implicitly mentioned as methodological limitations, or circumstances, but just as often sensitive personal data is omitted because it is feared that its inclusion will be considered 'unscientific'. Hopefully, the view that the researcher is as much part of the investigation as the participant will be more and more accepted over time.

Thesis Structure

With the subject of this study now introduced, this section will explain what the next chapters will be about. Chapter two "Theory" is both the basis of the interviews and survey as well as the end result of this thesis. It features a large catalogue of issues that can be encountered during fieldwork in difficult environments and an extensive, descriptive list of the problems within that catalogue. It already features knowledge and answers from the interviews and survey. Chapter three "Methods" describes the interviews and the online survey and their limitations. Chapter four "Results" shows the outcomes of the interviews and the survey with some preliminary analysis. Finally, chapter five "Discussion" interprets the results and the limitations of this study and tries to

give a clear answer to the main research question. In addition to the catalogue in chapter two, chapter five answers the main research question by giving information about the frequency and impact of some of the issues, putting them into a more practical perspective. Some of the more interesting findings are discussed in an attempt to explain them.

Theory

This chapter will provide an overview of the difficulties that come with doing fieldwork under difficult circumstances. Many of the referenced materials however, do not specifically focus on such environments. This because fieldwork in difficult conditions doesn't necessarily pose new, unique problems. It would seem from most of the literature that the 'textbook' problems that come with all types of fieldwork are simply amplified under the extreme conditions of a (post-)conflict or disaster environment. Finding respondents for a survey is often a minor obstacle in western cities, but it becomes a colossal hurdle when there are no up-to-date phone books, no internet, rampant suspicion among the population and an authoritarian government that forbids speaking of certain subjects outside the official party line.

The 'textbook' problems of fieldwork have been broadly discussed in other, specialized works, which are not very surprisingly known as 'fieldwork textbooks'. Examples of these include Bryman (2008) and Creswell (2013); books that will also occasionally be referenced to in this chapter. However, though discussing problems that occur during fieldwork in general, this chapter will try to sketch these problems more specifically in the context of difficult situations.

There have been earlier authors who listed and categorized the difficulties that occur during difficult fieldwork, based on their own experiences, and as such every author seems to decide on a different categorization of these problems. These categorizations are summarized in Appendix I: Table 1.

Please note that Sriram et al. (2009) further divide their themes into separate chapters on specific aspects of the theme, written by a large variety of authors, and that Cohen & Arieli (2011) focus on methodological problems specifically and as such aren't trying to categorize all the possible problems of doing difficult fieldwork.

Besides these authors, there are also quite a few authors that do not specifically mention a categorization of the problems they faced, instead opting for a more narrative form. But an implicit categorization can be deduced from their works by looking at recurring subjects and themes in their works. De Vries (2012), for example, repeatedly mentions three specific themes in the reflexive chapter of her book. Clark (2006) asks questions about certain subjects in her questionnaire. These recurring themes have been summarized in Appendix I: Table 2. Please note again that they are not the authors' own categories, but rather categories I distilled from their works.

Based on these earlier categorizations, the categorization as given in *Table 3* will be used in the remainder of this thesis. For completeness sake, it also includes several 'textbook' issues as raised by Bryman (2008) and Creswell (2013). It also includes several categories that weren't readily apparent from the literature, but emerged as a result of the interviews. This was done to avoid having to include several of these tables in this thesis. Where this is the case, it will be explicitly noted in both the table and the corresponding sections further on in this chapter.

Inspired by Sriram et al. (2009), the issues have been further divided into four overarching themes: practical issues, emotional issues, ethical issues and methodological issues. It is important to note that these themes are merely there to provide some degree of structure. All these issues affect each other, and they often overflow from one theme into another. They've been placed under the theme where they seemed most appropriate in order to provide a clean overview, but it should be noted that all these issues are interlinked and that the overarching names are not exclusive. Ethical issues, for example, might be very practical in nature, and a

'practical' issue such as access and trust will have a profound influence on methodology. All in all, this list mostly offers an easier way to constructively discuss difficult fieldwork and a framework for the interviews and survey to lean on.

Category	Based on...	Covers...
Practical issues		
Pre-field preparation	* Pre-field preparation (Barakat & Ellis 1996) * Choosing the site of fieldwork (Clark 2006)	Choosing where to conduct fieldwork, gathering information beforehand
Logistics	* Freedom of movement (Barakat & Ellis 1996) * Technical accessibility (Cohen & Arieli 2011) * Nature of problems - logistical (Clark (2006) * Logistics (De Vries 2012)	Transportation within the field, getting from A to B safely, ability to reach research sites.
Access and trust	* Gaining access and identifying gatekeepers (Barakat & Ellis 1996) * Access (Sriram et al. 2009) * Lack of contact information (Cohen & Arieli 2011) * Lack of system information (Cohen & Arieli 2011) * Identifying respondents (Clark 2006)	Finding and getting in touch with respondents. Gatekeepers. Barriers such as language and gender. Ways to gain respondents' trust.
Truth and triangulation	* Limited information (Barakat & Ellis 1996) * Impartiality (Barakat & Ellis 1996) * Identity, objectivity, behavior (Sriram et al. 2009) * Atmosphere of fear and distrust (Cohen & Arieli 2011)	Respondents hiding data or providing misinformation, dealing with different views on the same subject. Ways of 'fact-checking' data and respondents.
Participation	* Bryman (2008: 413)	Levels of participation and influence on the events studied.
Time constraints	* Fieldworkers as professionals (Kleinman & Copp 1993) * Time limits (Barakat & Ellis 1996)	The effects of the length of research. Dealing with time pressure.

Emotional issues		
Security and stress	* Stress (Barakat & Ellis 1996) * Security risks (Goodhand 2000) * Physical danger (Lee-Treeweek & Linkogle 2000) * Security (Sriram et al. 2009) * Atmosphere of fear and distrust (Cohen & Arieli 2011) * Security (De Vries 2012)	Providing safety for oneself. Coping with the stress of a potentially hostile environment. Effects of stress.
Researcher identity	* Fieldworkers as professionals (Kleinman & Copp 1993) * Self-representation (Barakat & Ellis 1996) * Implicit messages (Goodhand 2000) * Emotional danger (Lee-Treeweek & Linkogle 2000) * Identity, objectivity, behavior (Sriram et al. 2009)	How researchers perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. Handling identity and self-image. Serendipity.
Identification and friendship with participants	* Feelings about participants (Kleinman & Copp 1993) * Emotional danger (Lee-Treeweek & Linkogle 2000) * Identity, objectivity, behavior (Sriram et al. 2009) * Friendships with interviewees (Clark 2006)	Feeling sympathy and empathy with respondents. Making friends in the field, while simultaneously trying to maintain professional distance.
Ethical issues		
Confidentiality	* Confidentiality (Goodhand 2000) * Ethics (Sriram et al. 2009) * Confidentiality (Clark 2006)	Safeguarding respondents' identities and responses in the field.
Informed consent and covert research	* Bryman (2007) * Ethical danger (Lee-Treeweek & Linkogle 2000)	Informed consent, difficulties in obtaining it, discussion on its value and meaning. Covert research and the total omitting of informed consent.
Interfering and non-disruption	* Bryman (2007) * Creswell (2013)	Interfering (or not) in the research environment, especially when participants behave unethically. Leaving no marks on the site,

		keeping the site available for future researchers.
Do some good	* Creswell (2013) * Practical ethics (Goodhand 2000)	The ethical incentive to give something back to the site or the respondents.
Methodological issues		
Finding respondents	* Lack of contact information (Cohen & Arieli 2011) * Identifying respondents (Clark 2006) * Research (De Vries 2011)	Difficulties in finding representative populations samples, good respondents.
Translators and assistants	* Methodology (Clark 2006)	The (dis)advantages of employing translators and/or (local) research assistants.

Table 1: Categorization of fieldwork problems in difficult circumstances based on several earlier categorizations (see Appendix I: Table 1 and Table 2)

Practical Issues

Pre-field Preparation

Being prepared is important for any sort of fieldwork, but it is even more so for fieldwork that is potentially dangerous. In difficult environments, it is vital for a fieldworker to know what he is going to encounter before setting foot in the field. At the most basic level, it is important to know whether fieldwork is at all possible, or perhaps more aptly, whether it is reasonably safe. Researchers tend to avoid sites where there is active violence, or recent violent activity (Clark 2006), despite encouragements from others to face these difficult fields (Barakat & Ellis 1996). All in all, there are many problems researchers can run into before entering the field.

First of all, there's the issue of getting into the country where the research site is situated. Obtaining research visas or permits can be difficult in some cases. Some governments, like for instance Rwanda, have very strict rules for researchers that can greatly affect the subject of research. It might even force a researcher to subvert their true intentions or rephrase them into something more convenient and acceptable (Fujii 2010).

Secondly, the time of year can matter. Many regions know periods of heavy rainfall - e.g. monsoons or simply 'the rainy season' - during which transportation might be difficult, especially if the researcher wishes to visit the backcountry (Martin-Ortega & Herman 2009). If the researcher doesn't need to move around a lot, this is less of a problem. Other issues might be health related, as some diseases like malaria are more prominently present during specific times of the year. Many natural disasters are also more common in certain seasons, such as tornadoes and hurricanes. And there are also man-made reasons to carefully consider the timing of fieldwork. For example, fieldwork becomes more difficult around election times, when everybody is more on edge and politically aware. Likewise, festivities and celebrations, religious fasts, and times of mourning might influence fieldwork experiences.

Thirdly, a good knowledge of the country's history and actuality will help in assessing and dealing with the issues encountered while in the field. Reading up on this can open discussions with participants, and show that the researcher has done their homework. Martin-Ortega & Herman (2009) advice to at least plan the first week of fieldwork in terms of logistics, meeting up with gatekeepers, local contacts and cultural brokers, but preferably to plan as far ahead as possible, as this will allow for a more efficient use of the researcher's time.

Logistics

In comparison to the other issues a scholar might run into during field research, logistics issues are relatively practical and hands-on, though this doesn't necessarily mean they're easily solved. More than with the other issues perhaps, save for access, a researcher's logistics are both dependent on preparation, as well as luck and serendipity. After an initial airplane ticket into the country of study, establishing contacts with host organizations and using their transportation, traveling into less connected areas might become an adventure of hitched rides, unexpected overnight stays in roadside motels and by chance setting up a network of connections days earlier than anticipated.

Finding a place to stay during the fieldwork visit can be equally dependent on fortune, as areas might not have guest houses or hotels - or none that the researcher finds safe enough to

store valuable equipment like laptops, cameras, smartphones, passports and personal finances. In such cases, researchers are dependent on host organizations, local people or local institutions like the church. Or perhaps a researcher finds out there are guesthouses, but none that are registered or have websites. With some luck, one phone call to a number provided by an attendant at the gas station results in a fine place to stay - or it might just as easily not. In outback areas, it's hard to prepare for these things, especially if a researcher is not collaborating with a nearby organization.

About one third of a researcher's available time goes into logistics - the other two thirds going into data gathering and security, according to de Vries (2012). Researchers have to manage transportation, lodging, and food, mainly, during their stay in the field. Moreover, some things, like transportation, have to be available as much as possible in case the researcher suddenly needs to get out - as soon as possible. In difficult areas, which are often areas where this kind of contingency planning is most needed, this is likely to be problematic. Infrastructure might be minimal, ruined or nonexistent.

Personal equipment is another logistic issue that is of some relevance, although this is (nowadays) more easily prepared. Not too long ago, fieldworkers had to carry around bulky audio recorders and cameras, a supply of cassettes and film, notebooks, etc. Nowadays all these things can be found in a smartphone that fits inside a pocket and has enough power to last a day or more. This improved convenience certainly has an impact on fieldwork, as it opens the door for a much more 'spontaneous' approach as many researchers carry their smartphone everywhere. It also saves a lot of hassle regarding luggage and personal carrying capacity.

Laptops, phones, and other electronics need power, but as long as the chosen destination has electricity - at least some of the time - the researcher need only take the proper socket adapter with them. And as smartphones are becoming more popular even in the remoter regions of the world, fieldworkers need to worry increasingly less about taking heavy equipment with them. Maps showing mobile network coverage can be found on the internet for most regions, and most inhabited parts of the world have phone coverage, though not necessarily mobile internet coverage. But even that is becoming increasingly common.

Access and Trust

During scientific fieldwork in (post-)conflict settings, it may be very difficult to get access to the data the researcher desires. It is not hard to image that local people may be afraid to talk about certain subjects, or voice certain opinions, out of fear for repercussions. Or that powerful local actors, such as government agents, warlords or military officers are not inclined to divulge information to strangers they just met. The researcher is a foreign alien asking strange and possible incriminating questions. What guarantee does the respondent have that the researcher is not a spy, or a journalist looking for a scope (Sluka 1995)?

To this end, respondents need to be able to trust the researcher, at least to such a degree that they would participate in interviews, focus groups or surveys. A researcher and a respondent do not have to become friends for life in order to discuss for example the local impact of political choices, but some level of trust is required, though this varies greatly on the occasion. Often, respondents might have nothing to fear in terms of repercussions for their opinions. But when they need to fear for their job, their social status or even their life if their opinion would reach the wrong ears, respondents want to feel secure in giving their opinion to strangers.

There are several types of trust, according to Norman (2009). The first is cognitive trust, which is basically giving someone a rational reason why you can be trusted. Second is emotional trust, which is much slower to build and roughly amounts to building a real and lasting friendship. Lastly she mentions behavioral trust. This kind of trust in essence means as practicing what you preach. If a researcher tells someone they are a researcher, and then go on doing things a researcher does – interviewing other people, visiting universities, traveling around the site – the respondent will trust that the researcher is indeed a researcher. As to be expected, behavioral trust takes some time, because the researcher's behavior has to become apparent, but it doesn't take as much time as emotional trust. Also, and as with every aspect of life, these forms of trust are interconnected, and one form can easily flow into another or be combined with the others. Trust remains a fuzzy and dynamic concept.

In addition to these three, there is a fourth type of trust, namely relational trust. Radsch (2009) describes this type of trust in her book chapter on Egypt and Lebanon, where these are societal concepts known as "*wasta*" and "*isnad*". However, she says it can be found in various forms in all high-context cultures. This is a network-based trust, where people decide if they can trust the researcher based on the researcher's social network and specific connection to them. Someone will trust you, if you are already trusted by someone they trust. In practice, this often means that people you've already established a (working) relation with will introduce you to more and perhaps higher ranked people. The 'snowballing' method of data sampling is heavily based on this idea that contacts will provide a researcher with more contacts. The idea of 'gatekeepers', persons who can provide access into a (closed) group of people, is also based on this idea.

Truth and Triangulation

This category was added after the interviews had been conducted (and was therefore not present in the *Interview Guides*). Before the interviews, it was part of "Trust", and it is indeed closely related to that notion. But one researcher explicitly mentioned during an interview that she paid a lot of attention to triangulation in her research design and in the field, and many methodological textbooks dedicate a section to it, often named "triangulation", but also occasionally "veracity". It was therefore decided to create a separate category for this issue, and it was explicitly present and enquired after in the online survey.

Dealing with 'truth', or finding out 'the truth', is not a unique problem to (post-)conflict fieldwork. However, under such circumstances, the stakes are simply a lot higher for the participants (Fujii 2010). Often, there is a socio-culturally accepted 'public' or 'official' line on subjects, perhaps provided by government or other local authorities, e.g. rebel groups or warlords, or perhaps 'naturally' grown. Deviating from these accepted narratives can have effects on people's lives, depending on the situation. E.g., in post-9/11 America, it was difficult to maintain a pacifist or critical stance towards the US government. Those who did were branded as "unpatriotic" and faced social repercussions. In conflict fieldwork, participants might have to fear for their lives in extreme cases. It requires a great amount of trust on the side of the participant then, to deviate from the 'official' narrative and give their own perspective and private confessions, especially if those directly contradict the established 'truth'.

Lack of trust is not the only problem in finding 'the truth' in difficult fieldwork - memory also plays a vital role. The experiences of participants during conflicts or disasters might have been traumatic, which might cause blurred or selective memories. On top of that, more often than not some time has passed since the events occurred and the interview/survey. Field researchers

rarely wish to put their life on the line to be as close as possible to the violent events that they research (Clark 2006). But because of this, people's recollections might not be accurate. Humans tend to rationalize bad experiences, or simply forget. Chronologies get adjusted, even roles might change. In short, memories are rarely, if ever, factual.

However, the difficulty of establishing facts in respondents' narratives is not just a problem to be dealt with, or a hurdle for the researcher to overcome. Even 'false' answers - whether purposely or accidentally so - provide a valuable insight in how respondents coped with - and still manage - their experiences (Fujii 2010). Possibly, the stories they tell aren't just recollections, they could serve a purpose at that time, too. Fujii (2010) tells of a woman whose story of surviving the Rwandan genocide became less and less plausible, and in the end, Fujii - who had no idea to what extend the woman's story was true anymore - believed she was telling the story to retain some social status. In post-genocide Rwanda, this woman had fallen to the bottom of the social ladder, but 'survivors' were held in high regard. For Fujii, this raised many new and interesting questions, more in regard to the then-current situation in Rwanda, the social impact of the genocide and how survivors coped with their experiences.

This doesn't bring a researcher much closer to the truth of what happened to this particular women during the genocide, however. In essence, there are two different perspectives on the matter: trying to find out what happened, what lead to it, what were the consequences, or trying to find out how people understand what happened, what they made of it, how they're dealing with it. The first is a positivist perspective, the latter an interpretivist one. Nevertheless, though they are different, they don't need to be mutually exclusive. Ruth & Mehta (2002) propose that by asking both types of questions in regards to the same dataset, a researcher might be able to distill more information. In short, the approaches could complement each other.

More practically, the process of trying to fact check respondents is commonly called triangulation. At its core, it means as much as: never rely on a single source. This is important for both styles of research, positivist and interpretivist. Researchers can cross-reference what respondents tell them with archival information, other participants' testimonies, etc. With common sense and some determination, a researcher could look into holes, inconsistencies and differing accounts. At the very least, a researcher would know there are holes, etc., in the respondents' story. It also works the other way around, of course: archival information can be triangulated with witness' accounts, etc.

Fujii (2010) also recommends other researchers to pay attention to the meta-data that can be gathered during interviews, observations, surveys, etc. The meta-data will provide researchers with a framework, or an idea of local context, in which to place their data. She distinguishes between five types of meta-data: rumors, inventions, denials, evasions and silences. All of these helped her understand the subjects she was dealing with, sometimes even realizing she was looking at them in the wrong light.

Participation

An important point of reflexivity for any field researcher is the level of participation with their research subjects. 'Participant observation' by definition implies just that - participation - but there are many different forms of doing so, and various ways of looking at it.

In his book on social research methods, Alan Bryman (2008, 410-413) identifies two common classifications of participation. Firstly, following Gold (1958), he lists a distinction between the scholar's role as complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-

participant and complete observer. Though it is argued that the latter, the researcher as a complete observer, possibly falls outside of the scope of participant observation and ethnography - both of which require participation, something the complete observer role lacks - it is included for completeness. Secondly, he notes a distinction following Gans (1968), which is subtly different, identifying roles as total participant, researcher-participant and total researcher. Gans also allows that roles can switch during research, depending on the context of the researcher.

Lastly, following Van Maanen (1978) Bryman indicates there's a difference between active participation and passive participation, regardless of the role of the researcher. These levels of participation are somewhat instinctive, making it hard sometimes to label the researcher's actions. Moreover, scholars often find this is a dynamic process, in that they are sometimes active and sometimes passive, again depending on context.

Tessa Diphoorn (2012) identifies one other category of participation, between active and passive, based on her experiences in South-Africa, doing fieldwork in a quite difficult settings; in her case, fieldwork meant tagging along with an armed response team, and personal involvement in gun shootings between the team and criminals. Her categories are active participant, reluctant participant and passive participant. She defines active participation as the consented - by the researcher to themselves - involvement in the flow of events. Passive participation involves being involved mostly as an audience. The researcher is present and as such a participant, but doesn't interfere with the flow of events. Nevertheless, she notes that this might still influence the turns of events, as she sometimes felt the South-African men were trying to impress her with actions they might not normally do. The intermediate option, reluctant participation, is similar in that the researcher wants no part of the flow of events, but is made a participant anyway, either because there is no opt-out or because of coercion. Diphoorn, for example, describes getting caught up in a shootout and having to take cover behind the car. The response team then felt they had to protect her, and so acted otherwise than they would have normally done. Diphoorn had no intention of participating in the shootout, nor did she do anything other than taking cover, but she still participated merely because the team had to take her into account.

The interesting aspect of this is that Diphoorn places an emphasis on the research *subjects*' perception of the situation, instead of the researcher's choices regarding their level of participation. If the subjects regard the researcher as a participant or even as merely audience, the scholar is made to be a reluctant participant or passive participant, respectively, even if the scholar has made no choice herself in the matter. For example, she felt that the response team, during an interrogation, was extra hard on the prisoner they were interrogating, simply because she was near and they wanted to show off.

Time Constraints

"Most fieldworkers agree that fieldwork, when done right, takes time." (Kleinman & Copp 1993, p.8). But time is in short supply. Current-day academia isn't well-suited for lengthy research, and increasingly less so. Even for those who have full tenure, fieldwork often takes too long for their taste (Kleinman & Copp 1993). On top of that, there are always financial constraints that limit the amount of time and resources that can be spend in the field.

This is problematic for fieldworkers in general, but even more so for those who work in difficult environments. On its most basic level, it's very hard, if not impossible, for researchers to estimate beforehand how much time they will need in one site. This uncertainty is further amplified

by the scope and intensity of the difficulties of the field, plus the need to visit multiple sites to reduce the potential effects of (war) propaganda (Barakat & Ellis 1996).

Barakat & Ellis (1996) propose that researchers can partly resolve this issue by establishing an 'observation checklist'. This is a list of visible indicators that can be observed even when taking simple, quick walks around the site, so that even when a researcher is pressed for time, they can still gather some data about the subjects they are investigating.

Kleinman & Copp (1993) do not propose any solutions to this problem, but they do see a tendency among fieldworkers to choose sites or groups that are familiar or otherwise easily accessible as the subject of study, out of practical necessity - it simply takes less time to gain access to a group one already knows. This is in contrast with the view that the more distant a site or group is, the less likely fieldworkers are to take it for granted. They also note that many fieldworkers turn to interviewing over participant observation because it requires less time.

As a last note on the subject of limited time, Kleinman & Copp (1993) have a rather discouraging message: it does not get better. Unlike many other skills, where repetition allows for ever increasing working speeds and taking less time, fieldwork seems to take increasingly more time as fieldworkers become more experienced. This is because, even though a field worker might become experienced in conducting interviews, the cognitive space that is freed up is immediately filled with paying more attention to details, silences, or rituals, thereby increasing the amount of field notes and the time required to analyze it all. The fieldworkers' motto of 'everything is data' seems to not only suggest an infinite amount of data, but on its darker side, also an infinite amount of time needed to process it all.

Emotional Issues

The emotional state of researchers is systematically under-investigated. Emotional states of mind are usually reserved for anecdotal parts of papers or books, looking back upon a general period of fieldwork. These stories often get their own section or chapter, and are generally to be seen as somewhat 'separate' from the rest of the research. A bit of biographical storytelling on the researcher's part, something not unlike a summarized travel journal, meant to be a more personal insight on the situation the researcher lived in for the duration of their study (Kleinman & Copp 1993, p.16-17). Specific observations are rarely connected to specific emotions the researcher might have been having at that time. However, the great similarity in this all is that the emotional state of the field researcher is regarded as something highly individual. Research has been done on the emotional well-being, stress levels and psychology of IDPs, inhabitants of war-torn regions, and child soldiers, but no field researcher has recently published about performing these studies on their colleagues on a larger scale.

Security and Stress

In terms of personal security and 'taking care of oneself', academia is far behind on humanitarian aid work (Mertus 2009b). Scholars in the field are all too often willing to take significant risks in order to gather more data, endangering themselves and occasionally participants and respondents (Ross 2009; Sluka 1995). Moreover, security is embedded into every aspect of the research, much like the violence or effects thereof being researched are embedded in every aspect of the daily lives of respondents. How secure the scholar is able to be affects what can be studied, choices made about and during the visits to the field, and how to handle sensitive data afterwards - indeed, it helps determine what data is sensitive and what data is safe to handle.

Security plays a great role in the personal well-being of a researcher. Fieldwork is intense, even in stable, peaceful areas, because of the enormous amount of energy that is needed to be constantly alert to one's surroundings, because "everything is data" (Schwalbe 2002, p.65). In areas where there are security risks, this is even more so the case, as researchers are not only watching their environment for interesting details about the context of their field study, but also worrying about very real, in-the-moment questions, like "is it safe to enter that neighborhood?" or "should I go meet respondents after dark?"

As a result, stress levels are high during field research. These stress levels impact the researcher, and by extend, probably their research as well. In answer to the above questions, a scholar who's experiencing heightened stress might choose not to enter a specific neighborhood, though they might later, in calmer times, reason that it would have been fine and they might have gathered good data there. Conversely, a stressed researcher might choose to enter that neighborhood to look for data, only to find out that was a really bad call, which they might have avoided with a clearer head. On a more general level, the daily observations that a researcher makes are seen through a lens of stress, cognitive dissonance, maybe even distrust. This affects the researchers' ability to observe the environment they are studying, not in so much as that they will observe *less*, but rather observe differently. A stressed person pays attention to different details, and responds to situations in other ways than an at-ease person.

Despite literature commonly citing the stressful nature of (prolonged) fieldwork, there seem to be little to no recent reports that try to systematically chart the circumstances under which observations were made. This is strange, since research suggests chronic stress might be a cause for hypertension (Spruill 2010) and more seriously, burnout, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Marin et al. 2011). It also affects cognitive functioning and memory recall of stressful situations (Marin et al. 2011; Lupien 2007). It seems to be generally assumed scholars weigh this in during their post-fieldwork reflecting and interpreting of data. Indeed, some now regard the reflexivity done after the actual research, the "[coming] to terms with the lacks and failures [...] afterwards" (Marcus 2006: 115), as the more interesting, pioneering part of modern-day anthropological research (Trigger, Forsey & Meurk 2012).

Researcher Identity

It is sometimes difficult for social researchers who do fieldwork to identify themselves as 'scientists', or even as part of the academic community. This has, in part, to do with the unpredictable nature of fieldwork and phenomenon of 'serendipity'. Perhaps best explained as a 'fortunate stumbling upon', serendipity has, since it coinage in 1754, become a permanent guest is scientific circles. It describes the discovery of something that the scientist in question wasn't even looking for, and its examples are numerous, from penicillin to microwave ovens.

For fieldworkers however, serendipity has a darker side, namely their great dependence upon it. In contrast to other scientific endeavors, fieldwork doesn't thrive from fixed experimental conditions, carefully controlled by the scientist. Indeed, such things are all but impossible within fieldwork. Field research stands or falls because of its participants (Kleinman & Copp 1993). In other words, to some extent, good field research is about meeting the right people. And that is to some degree a matter of serendipity.

As a result of that, fieldworkers are never really sure just what they're researching, until they've finished the data gathering. Research questions might change during the research, sometimes as early as on the first day. Oftentimes, a field researcher can start out by wanting the

research X, but soon get the feeling they're actually looking at Y. Even then, after complete analysis of the data, perhaps they've studied Z, or Y and Z.

This can be harrowing. Fieldworkers might be left with an uncontrollable feeling of "floating" around (Kleinman & Copp 1993, p.4) and having no clear goal to work towards. The only real 'goal', albeit temporarily, seems to be to be immersed as deeply as possible as to collect as much data as possible, and then afterwards, upon returning home, trying to get rid of as much emotional attachment and memory as possible, in an attempt to be as scientific as possible (idem, p.27). A fieldworker is therefore thrown into a whirlwind of extremes, hoping to come to good, publishable results.

Identification and Friendship with Participants

Fieldworkers are inclined to judge their own research on basis of how well they've been able to empathize with the participants (Kleinman & Copp 1993, p.27). However, this also places them in the 'vulnerable' position where they might be disappointed, or perhaps even disgusted with their participants. Tessa Diphoorn (2012) describes such feelings when she witnesses the security personnel she's accompanying beat up a man. Such situations might lead to feelings of numbness and distance. Those emotional moments have the ironic tendency to feel like objective states of mind, perfectly suited for 'good research', whereas they are actually an omnipresent emotional layer that shapes everything. In fact, it reduces cognitive function (Kleinman & Copp 1993, p.33-34), much like chronic levels of stress. It also encourages scholars to push off vital parts of the research, such as in-depth interviews with the disliked subjects. Interviews which could, possibly, shine a whole new light on them and give a rationale for their seemingly undesirable behavior.

This also works the other way: instead of distancing themselves, some field researchers are inclined to 'psych themselves up' and convince themselves that they are actually very lucky and happy to be around these 'fascinating' people. This, too, compromises a healthy (which is not to say, non-emotional, but exactly the opposite) outlook on the participants. For example, researchers might be disinclined to closely look at the power structures within a group, being afraid to find something nasty and shatter the 'happy' dream (Kleinman & Copp 1993, p.35).

Ethical Issues

There are several circumstances and methodological choices that could lead to ethical issues during fieldwork. Covert vs. overt research, questions of participating or interfering with research subjects, informed consent and promising and maintaining respondent confidentiality can all lead to difficult-to-solve dilemmas. The sections on covert vs. overt research and participation will mainly discuss problems that are encountered during participant observation research, whereas the section of confidentiality will touch on that particular method as well as interviews.

Strangely, books on research methodology don't usually go into a lot of detail on ethics. Creswell (2013) devoted 5 pages to the subject. Bryman (2007) has one chapter - 22 pages, out of a book totaling some 750 - on ethics. On the other hand, Sriram et al. (2009) has 3 out of 15 chapters dedicated to ethics in different stages of research. However, these are largely anecdotal.

There seems to be no general ethical guideline for peace & conflict researchers, though some organizations, such as the British Sociological Association (BSA)[1] and the Social Research

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[1] http://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/27107/StatementofEthicalPractice.pdf

Association (SRA)[2], have listed ethical rules for sociologists that could also apply to peace & conflicts scholars. In the U.S., most if not all academic institutions have research ethics committees (also known as institutional review boards or IRBs) that is there to help their researchers conduct ethical research and to make sure the participants are in no danger - as well as safeguard the institution's ethical reputation. These committees are not entirely regarded without skepticism by some researchers (Bryman 2007, Hemming 2009), who argue that they're too rigid, perhaps too much based on the natural sciences, to handle the complex intricacies of social research.

Confidentiality

When doing research in a heavily politicized and perhaps even dangerous environment, researchers shouldn't merely consider their own safety. They should also take the safety of their respondents into account, especially when the researcher is asking about sensitive topics that might not sit well with those in power, or with the rest of the respondent's community. The idea of safeguarding respondents' views, opinions and answers is called confidentiality. Offering a respondent confidentiality doesn't necessarily mean offering complete anonymity, but it at least provides some manner of protection for the respondent, such that the answers they give can't be linked back to them when the research is publicized.

This is useful for a number of reasons. First, the respondent will feel safer to express dissident views. When a respondent thinks there is a high security risk for themselves in participating in the research, they are much more likely to produce answers which are socially acceptable in their community. If a researcher offers (and maintains) confidentiality, the respondent will be more inclined to share personal views, which might deviate from the norm.

Secondly, a researcher has to keep in mind the generations of researchers that will come after them. If one researcher discloses respondent responses, those respondents will not likely take part in future research, especially if the publicized information got them into trouble. As a ripple effect, others in their community, group or organization might also be disinclined to provide future assistance. As such, a researchers doesn't only owe it to their respondents to maintain confidentiality, but to the rest of the scientific community as well.

Lastly, there might be legal ramifications for not adhering to the principles of confidentiality. However, these differ per country, and it is not within the scope of this research to go into great depths about this. The focus is on the implications of confidentiality for the purposes of fieldwork in difficult environments.

In short, the ethical issue of confidentiality has to deal with the safeguarding of respondents, safeguarding the image of social researchers as reliable and trustworthy and the tensions between respondent (and personal) security and authenticity. All these issues take place from the moment a research starts collecting data, up to the point of publishing the data - and even beyond, as the researcher is still responsible for the stored data of past studies.

Informed Consent and Covert Research

The principle of informed consent basically means that a researcher should always make their respondents aware that their answers will be used for the purpose of research, what role their answers play in this research, and that respondents, upon being properly informed of these

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[2] http://the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ethics03.pdf

things, will willingly participate in the research (Bryman 2008, 121). This practice should ensure that the respondents are treated with respect, and seen as more than simply walking points of data.

However, the practice conjures up several problems when put in practice. Firstly, there can be difficulties in informing a respondent or participant. For a variety of reasons, it's not always easy to explain to respondents what the research is about, or even what a researcher is. Respondents who are unfamiliar with the concept of a university, or academic research, might have difficulty understanding what the researcher is trying to do. In heavily politicized environments, it's easy for them to confuse the researcher for a humanitarian aid worker, a journalist or even a spy. Even if they understand what a researcher is and does, they might not entirely grasp the subject of the research, perhaps lacking expert knowledge needed for complex issues. For participants, the case can be even more difficult. If an ethnographer observes a village square for one day, or a busy street in a city, it's impossible to inform everyone that they're being watched (Bryman 2008, 121-122).

This raises new questions: if the researcher 'dumbs down' their research in terms that a respondent might understand, is their consent still informed? Is it okay to shorten the information, if a researcher need to update participants quickly? Or is the informant being given incomplete information, and is the consent therefore not entirely informed and thus unethical? But if the researcher doesn't simplify their task, that would mean limiting the data sample to that part of the population that understands the question - by definition the more intellectual side of the population. This leaves out a large portion of people and it is by no means a representative sample of the entire population - and perhaps not even the part the researcher is most interested in.

The second problem with informed consent is about the consequences of the respondents knowing they're being researched and their answers used for academic studies and thus changing (deliberately or not) their behavior - a phenomenon called 'reactivity'. What guarantee does the researcher have that their respondents are not giving them different answers than they would have, had they thought to be in a normal conversation (Bryman 2008, 122)? Sometimes respondents are giving answers they think are desirable, because they don't want to disappoint the researcher. During an interview for this study, a researcher mentioned refugee camps often have a pervasive culture of exaggerating problems, because they hope this will result in an increase in humanitarian aid. So, respondents might try to use the research to further their own agendas. In the end, most scholars are interested in the everyday life of people, their habits and daily opinions, and informing them that they are in a study is a breach of the everyday course of events, which puts tension on the research.

Naturally, these problems can occur both separately and combined, depending on the subjects of research. Especially scholars engaged in covert research face both of these problems at once. Their respondents are neither aware that they are being researched, nor does the researcher want them to be aware of this fact (Bryman 2008, 121). Or, as in some cases, the respondents know they're being researched, but not on what specifically. They've been given "general information", as is sometimes the practice in social research (Creswell 2013, 174). As discussed above, this raises some questions on the ethical consequences of covert research. How generalized should the researcher's information be? When is it too vague or even deceptive? And what about not giving information at all?

Some groups are virtually inaccessible to independent researchers. I.e., criminal organizations, corporations that engage in illegal waste dumps, authoritarian governments - all usually have little to no demand for prying eyes. In such cases, if a researcher wants to gather primary data on these subjects, or gather secondary data through interviews, the researcher might consider to withhold information about his or her true identity and purpose. This is called covert research, and this brings in a whole range of ethical dilemmas, that are not easily solved. For one, it completely bypasses the generally accepted notion of informed consent (Bryman 2008) - a common requirement for research demanded by ethical committees, and for good reason.

Secondly, it might place the researcher in a position where they have to engage in unlawful or unethical behavior themselves. It is not unimaginable that a researcher, infiltrated into a gang, is at some point asked to prove their allegiance by committing something they might morally oppose. This is discussed in detail in the section below, *Participation and Interfering*.

Many scholars argue that it is better to be forthcoming about one's status as a researcher (Creswell 2009, 60), to be able negotiate the terms of the participant observation with the research subjects (Bryman 2008, 406, 413). A researcher could, and should, make clear that they are there to do research, not to engage in all group activities, i.e. taking up arms, or supporting acts of violence. In return, a researcher should work to maintain confidentiality or even anonymity, and will do their best to keep an open mind towards the (controversial) point of view of the subjects (Gallaher 2009).

Interfering and Non-Disruption

Participating with research subjects in their daily lives and activities might pose problems, depending on who those subjects and their activities are and the nature of the research. Dillman (1977) distinguishes two areas that are particular to participant observation that pose ethical problems. Firstly, that of obligations, responsibilities and loyalties towards the field and respondents and informants during the fieldwork. Secondly, post-publication treatment of the field, its culture and values, and the respondents. The ethical problems that arise in the field have to do with the researcher's role as a stranger or a friend (Jarvie 1969). Ideally, a researcher would want to be both, gaining access to a group or culture and fully participate - the friend role - but also keeping academic distance to be able to stay scientifically objective - the stranger role. However, this is a dichotomy and the roles are mutually exclusive - one can't be both stranger and friend. A researcher has to make a choice about their role, and Jarvie (1969) argues that researchers must always choose the role of a stranger.

Next, all participant observation, whether covert or overt, has to consider how the researcher themselves is interfering in the field. The presence of a researcher can be quite alien and affects respondents and context - in the past, this has been a common reason to conduct covert research (Dillman 1977, Fine 1993). It also brings about problems of cultural relativism, meaning the question of how far a researcher should go in adapting to and adopting local traditions and culture (Jarvie 1969). In essence, even asking conversational questions, let alone questions in a formal interview, can be considered interfering with the normal state of affairs. To a very real extent, it cannot be avoided.

As a final remark, social researchers, including peace & conflict scholars, should be careful about disrupting their research sites (Creswell, 2009, 58-60). As noted before, researchers want to study everyday life, and kicking up a lot of dust disturbs that. Plus, it's generally accepted

amongst social researchers that the local people and customs should be respected. As such, a researcher should strife not to interfere too much, or place too great a mark on their sites.

Disruption can become a lot more than just 'kicking up the dust', though. Scientific inquiry into people's lives can have significant adverse effects (Bryman 2008, 118). Post-conflict interviews with ex-soldiers or victims might conjure up traumatic memories with significant psychological consequences, including fits of domestic violence or auto-mutilation. Interviewing dissidents in an authoritarian regime might lead to unwanted identification of those individuals, placing them in great, possibly lethal, danger. However, it are exactly these difficult cases that deserve academic attention and researchers shouldn't be afraid to try and get to this data – with proper preparation and conduct (Barakat & Ellis 1996).

Do Some Good

Researchers should be aware that they are 'using' people as a means for personal (academic) gain. Interviews, surveys, observations all lead to scientific publications, books, articles, conference talks, etc. Generally, the researcher gains a lot by distilling - or, more negatively put, exploiting - information from their respondents. Although some respondents might feel fine about this, happy to tell their story or perhaps create attention for their situation, other might feel they deserve something as well.

Many social researchers feel that they should 'give something back' to the communities they visit and describe (Creswell 2009, 60). This can be a monetary reward for participating, or perhaps letting local organizations in on the results of the research, so that they might apply it to their own practices. It doesn't really matter what the reward for participating is, as long as the respondents consider it a fair trade. It's a difficult matter however, because respondent compensation, whether it be monetary, in goods, or with information, might be working against non-disruption and confidentiality. This is one more reason why informed consent is important, so that researcher and respondent are on the same page about the study.

From the interviews, it also became apparent that many researchers felt they contributed to the communities and families they visited and spoke to in ways that had little to do with their actual research. One researcher would provide advice on complex legal issues, telling families where they might go and what forms they should fill out to get their complaints to the appropriate government department. Others simply paid for lunch when respondents came out to see them. Many fieldworkers also felt they indirectly did some good because their publications would influence policy, and policy would in turn influence the lives of their respondents.

Methodological Issues

Finding Respondents

Sampling can be a major issue in peace & conflict field research, if a scholar is not looking conducting elite interviews, or using other methods that required relatively targeted samples (like high-placed government officials, or INGO workers) and is instead looking at the 'common people'. Especially under the chaotic circumstances of a (post-)conflict situation, when large portions of the population might be displaced or disappeared (Haer & Becher 2011), finding a sample that is representative for the desired population is a difficult, sometimes even impossible challenge. (Post-)conflict countries often have no or badly implemented birth registration, and the last census is often also too old to be truly representative. This forces researchers to divert to less

representative methods of sample selection, a range that includes cluster sampling, chain-referral sampling (more popularly known as "snowballing"), convenience sampling and the 'random walk' method (Haer & Becher 2011).

On the other hand, many peace & conflict scholars have very focused target populations, as mentioned before. These actors might not always be very easy to get appointments with, but at least they are relatively easy to find. People - and fixers in particular - will know who and where they are. This is the case when researchers do elite interviews, looking to get in touch with donors, local governors and administrators, warlords and traditional leaders. However, even in these cases, researcher have to carefully select their respondents.

Translators and Assistants

As many field researchers can confirm, good translators and assistants are hard to come by. Good ones are usually also very expensive. In one of the interviews for this study, a researcher said that in 'active' areas, where there is international military presence and/or lots of INGO's, the 'good ones' have already been hired by these more financially capable organizations. Those who are left can ask for an even higher price, because there is more demand.

For all that money and effort for finding someone suitable, it's still very much the question whether it's worth it. There are many possible problems with these assistant roles: translation is reduction; unaccountability of what is left away and what is emphasized; research assistants who don't know sound academic methods; bad English language skills; fixers who aren't quite as good 'in' with the right people as they made believe; the list goes on. As such, there are quite a few researchers who opt to not use assistants, and many more who never use translators. Fixers however, are quite common, since researchers do often need a way in, especially when they are new in an area and haven't been able to build a network of their own.

Theory Summary

This chapter has dealt with answering **SQ1:** "What are the problems of difficult fieldwork and how can they be categorized?" It has done so by analyzing the literature specifically concerning fieldwork in difficult circumstances and more broadly sociological and anthropological fieldwork in general for those issues that are inherent in all field research. As a result from this, fifteen issues have been identified, divided into four broad themes, as most clearly made visible in *Table 1*. These issues are not distinct and overlap and flow into each other, but they are separate enough to be able to say none is redundant, and at the same time that none are superfluous.

This chapter has also provided a detailed description of all these issues, with information provided by both the existing literature and the interviews that will be further described in the next chapter.

Above all, the initial literature review provided a basis from which to build and conduct the interviews. These interviews in turn added to the knowledge from the literature, and together, the literature and the interviews were the basis for the survey. Both the interviews and the survey eventually evaluated the information derived from the literature and added to it, creating the list as it is now.

Method

The catalogue of fieldwork problems presented in the previous chapter is the final version of the catalogue. The data from the literature which formed its base was complemented with data from researchers who had experience in the field. This added an extra level of depth to the categories and their descriptions by approaching the issues from different point of view, providing more anecdotal data and offering new interpretations. The data from the interviews even led to the formation of a new, separate category ("Truth and Triangulation"). This chapter will describe the methods used to expand the initial catalogue that resulted from the literature study.

This 'extra data' from outside the literature was gained through structured interviews and an online survey. As suggested at the end of the previous chapter, these two methods were meant to verify and supplement the data from the literature. The author chose these two methods because they have different strengths (and weaknesses) that complement each other and diminish the other's weak points. Also, the catalogue is now supported by three different sets of data, rather than just one (the literature) or two (the literature and one other, interviews or survey). Thus, this study tries to follow up on its own examination of triangulation.

Structured interviews were chosen because they allow an interviewer to maintain some control over the subjects of an interview, while also allowing the interviewee to go into details regarding these subjects. Interview guides provided a logical sequence in which to discuss the subjects, but there was no need to strictly adhere to the guides. As many of the subjects in these interviews were close together, often the conversations would carry naturally from one issue to the other, enabling the interviewer to 'cross off' subjects when they came up, as well as being able to quickly see which ones hadn't been discussed yet. Naturally, the structured interview provides interviewers with ample opportunity to ask the interviewee questions, to expand on topics and to go deep. But as with all qualitative data, the downside is that it is hard to compare one interviewee's experience to another's. Another downside is that interviews in person require a lot of time, and pose restrictions on the respondent sample. Who can be interviewed is restricted by distance, time, and means. For this research, this meant that interviewees were concentrated in The Netherlands and Colombia.

The survey had the advantage of being able to reach a broad spectrum of researchers, although this came at the disadvantage of a low response rate. In any case, this countered the 'geographic bias' for researchers employed in The Netherlands and Colombia somewhat. Also, the possibility of using scaled questions meant that the survey could be inherently more quantitative, challenging respondents to compare their own experiences with different issues and to put them into perspective. The downside of a survey is that it's hard to go in-depth with the answers provided. Even though open questions were asked, and a text box for comments was always present on each page, it's impossible for a researcher to react directly to input given in the survey.

However, when used in conjunction, the structured interviews and the online survey work together to reduce each other's disadvantages. The interviews provide the depth that the survey naturally lacks, whereas the survey provides quantitative insights in the qualitative stories of the interviews. In short, interviews provide surveys with detail, and surveys provide interviews with comparability. Also, as the interviews have a more focused sample, the survey tries to mitigate that effect by being available to researchers everywhere in the world – as long as they have access to the internet.

Interview Method

Structured interviews served the dual function of asking whether the issues mentioned in the literature were common experiences, albeit on a small scale, among fieldworkers in difficult environments - thus confirming the validity of the literature - but most importantly they supplemented the literature analysis. Using structured interviews kept the conversation with the interviewee within the general lines of the established themes, but also provided them with sufficient space to tell their own stories, add details and show different interpretations of those themes. Later on, this allowed for better questions in the survey.

A guide was made for structured interviews, mostly following the themes and issues as established in the previous chapter, most notably in *Table 1*. As mentioned before, the catalogue in the second chapter already contains some information that was gained through the interviews, and as such some issues (most notably truth and triangulation) aren't present in the interview guide. The broader themes in which the issues were distributed also changed after the interviews and survey, and the guides represent the themes and categories of the initial (solely based on literature) catalogue. Furthermore, it was decided to keep the interview structure more on the level of the broader, overarching themes, rather than name each issue individually. This was to provide the interviewee with more space for their own interpretations and stories concerning the themes. Occasionally, specific examples were used to give some indication of what kind of answers this study was looking for, but only if the interviewee asked for examples or if the conversation was slowing. For the most part, the interviewer tried not to influence the interviewee's interpretation of the discussed issues.

The interviewees were all experienced field researchers, all of them having at least finished their PhD and some having up to 20 years of experience in the field of peace and conflict studies. The interviews were done in person, which had severe ramifications for the selection of interview candidates. Of out eleven participants, seven were employed at institutions in The Netherlands and the other four were employed at institutions in Colombia. All participants were interviewed in Dutch or English - a matter which further impeded the potential participants in Colombia.

An eighth 'pilot' interview in The Netherlands was also done, with a researcher from a non-academic research institution that focused on policy questions. After analysis it was decided that the nature of policy-based research and academic fieldwork was too different and would significantly broaden the scope of this research. The interview was not taken into account in the results, and no further interviews were done outside of academia.

The first seven (Dutch) interviews were digitally audio-recorded, with permission of the participants, but I also plainly made notes in a notebook. The latter four (Colombian) interviews were not recorded, because I didn't have anything less bulky than a laptop (15,4") at the time to record audio. I thought a device this big would be distracting, so instead I only made notes - again, clearly visible for the participants. The interviews were often preceded by social formalities and small talk, and the interviews were without exception informal and friendly. One interviewee had classical music playing softly in the background during the interview. No attempts were made to steer the talks towards a particular level of politeness or formality. The interviewee decided in effect how they wished to talk.

After the interview, the given answers were compared to the literature on the relevant subject. First, they were checked to see if they fit the pre-established categories outlined in

chapter two. If not, they were written down separately. If yes, the answers were compared to the more detailed description, to see if they added anything to the existing knowledge, or simply confirmed what the literature already stated. It was especially interesting to see whether different researchers had different interpretations of the issues. That too could have a profound effect on the questions of the survey, or in any case the formulation of those questions.

Finally, the issues that were written down separately were examined to see if they could form a new category or if they seemed common or reasonable enough to warrant further questioning in the survey.

The biggest limitation of the interview results is the narrow selection of field researchers. All the interviewed researchers were employed in either The Netherlands or Colombia, though they were spread over multiple institutions per country. It can't be assumed that researchers from for instance the United States, China or Iran face the same difficulties in the field, seeing the wildly different cultural backgrounds of those countries, and the prejudices they might bring with them. For example, American researchers are often suspected to be spies (Clark 2006). That could have a major influence on their field experience.

However, though the researchers were employed in only two countries, their personal and professional background varied wildly. Among the interviewees, there were a French, a German, a Canadian and an American researcher, next to the five Dutch and two Colombian ones. However, it is difficult to pin a distinct nationality on part of them. Some researchers have studied and/or have previously been employed in other countries than their country of birth. Some had prior work experience outside of academia, others had always been working in academia. All in all, despite their current geographical proximities, they represent a reasonably diverse group of academic fieldworkers, though there is an unfortunate lack of researchers from Africa, the Middle East and Asia, and an overrepresentation of Dutch researchers.

The interview guides can be found in *Appendix II* (English) and *Appendix III* (Dutch).

Survey Method

An online survey gives the opportunity to reach out to a far wider audience of researchers than interviews, and simultaneously allows for quantification of the questions. It seemed a natural candidate for this next step in the research process.

The website that was used to build the survey was thesistools.com, a Dutch website that allows users to build basic surveys for free, up to five hundred participants, as well as download the results in Excel and .pdf formats. Since this study did not require a complex question structure, but rather just a long list of question much alike those in the interview guides, this website served the needs for this research adequately.

The target participant population was researchers with experience in fieldwork. They were found in a variety of manners, but all were contacted by email, politely asking them to participate. The researchers were found through internet searches, personal contacts and through tracking down the authors of the relevant literature from this study's references. They were in all asked through the email and at the end of the survey to forward the survey link to friendly researchers. Also, several emails were sent to the directors or general info mail addresses of research groups that focused on peace and conflict studies, with the request to forward the email to colleagues that conducted fieldwork.

In the end, 50 researchers, 12 research groups and 2 online communities were contacted. Of these, 22 responded and participated in the survey (14 women and 8 men) with 15 participants actually finishing all of it (10 women, 5 men). The answers of those who did not finish the survey will be taken into account for so far as they participated.

The experiences in field research among the participants ranged from 1 year to 30 years. They'd go into the field for periods ranging from 1 week to 2 years. Some would visit the field once for a particular research project, many twice or thrice, one researcher said five to ten times, and another answered simply "As many as it takes." One country stood out as a frequent place of fieldwork, with 9 out of 22 mentioning having experience in (among others) Rwanda. Other than that, 6 mentioned Congo, 5 mentioned Uganda. No other country was mentioned more than three times. The countries that were mentioned three times were South-Sudan, Kenya, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and South Africa.

This survey had many limitations. Most notably, the number of respondents is very low. The actual getting in touch with researchers was difficult, in that it took a lot of effort to track down possible respondents and find their contact information. It was also unclear to what extend researchers helped the research along by sending it to colleagues, although a few of those who were initially contacted took the effort of emailing to say they had done so. Also, because of the anonymous nature of the survey, several issues weren't documented that from an analysis point of view could have been interesting, like the current place of employment. It is now impossible to sort the results according to where the researchers came from - the survey only asked where participants went for their research projects. It also didn't ask researchers to put their experiences into a geographical or chronological context. As in: the survey never asks whether particular problems are linked to particular areas, or if problems diminish or worsen over time.

A full copy of the survey's pages and their questions can be found in *Appendix IV*.

Method Summary

Through an extensive literature study an initial catalogue was created that mapped the major problems of field research in difficult environments, which answered SQ1. Then, with that catalogue in hand, this study moved forward to answer SQ2, SQ3, SQ4 and SQ5. This required additional data from experienced field researchers, and it was decided to handle this through structured interviews and an online survey. The structured interviews would be conducted with an interview guide that addressed all the themes and issues of the initial catalogue. In this way, the interviewer could ensure that every topic would be addressed, whilst still allowing the participants room to talk and express themselves freely. After the interviews, with new lessons learned from them, an online survey was started to mitigate the geographic bias and small selection of the interviews. Unfortunately, the low number of respondents failed to address that last issue wholly. However, the survey did add some quantitative elements to the qualitative data of the literature and interviews, giving an impression of the respondents' views on problem frequencies and impacts.

Results

Interview Results

The results of the interviews don't warrant any statistical analysis, seeing the small sample size in relation to the world's population of fieldworkers in difficult environments. A qualitative overview of the results will be provided below, following the order and themes of the questions of the interview (see the guides in *Appendix I* and *II*). The first question is largely introductory and will be skipped, starting the analysis at the second question, about pre-field preparation. For readability, the sidebar on the right gives a quick overview of the subjects of the interview questions.

Interview Structure
Q1: Introduction
Q2: Pre-field preparation
Q3: Logistics
Q4: Access
Q5: Ethics
Q6: Danger
Q7: Stress
Q8: Main sources of data
Q9: Interviews
Q10: Translators and Assistants
Q11: Surveys
Q12: Sampling
Q13: Other problems
Q14: Uniqueness
Q15: Training

Q2: Pre-field preparation

Few researchers reported major difficulties with their pre-field preparation, although all seemed to implicitly accept that it was impossible to have complete information on the field before coming there. According to the respondents, the field can only be understood fully by going and spending time there.

The difficulties there were mainly had to do with two issues. Firstly, practical business such as finding out where one could stay and how one could get around - i.e., is it safe to take a taxi? Where can you sleep safely? What are the dos and don'ts on the streets? Can you go out to lunch? etc. Secondly, the current state of affairs in the field - i.e. who are the important persons, where are they, and who is connected to who? The first problem is about preparing logistics, the second has to do with preparing access.

Most researchers agreed that those two items - access and logistics - were the most important preparations to make before entering the field. They were especially important for the first few weeks, when the researcher is new to the field. After that, researchers have something of a small, established network and they can work with that. Most respondents argued that it is difficult to plan ahead for more than a few weeks, although one respondent extensively prepared and planned her entire fieldwork before entering the field. She said she would never go out into the field, especially active conflict areas, unless she was certain that everything had been accounted for. Access and logistics were the key features of her preparation as well, and she would take care of everything from a driver and a vehicle to accommodation in safe areas and appointments with the persons she wished to interview.

However, one researcher mentioned it was very dependent on the location. Some areas are very well researched, and there is lots of literature available to prepare with. Others are more difficult, especially if there has been recent violence. In such cases, the local situation might change overnight, and it's hard to prepare such things as logistics.

One researcher reported having some visa problems trying to get into the field (in this case, South Sudan). All others reported never having problems obtaining visas or getting into the country, even if that country was an active conflict zone.

Q3: Logistics

Half of the respondents reported never have any real problems with handling their logistics. The other half reported they frequently had trouble getting to the places they needed to be, although reasons for this varied greatly, as did the way they coped with their difficulties.

Several researchers mentioned that it is very difficult to get anything done beforehand, and that this was one of the greater problems in getting around. There was no real solution for this, they felt, other than accepting that things had to be arranged on the ground and at that moment. However, another researcher mentioned she was able to prepare for everything before going into the field and indeed would not leave without total preparation. The interviewees could not explain with certainty why their experiences were so different, offering that it could perhaps be the area or the determination of the researcher that might play a part.

Two other researchers stated they depended greatly on local organizations, such as NGO's, to travel. One researcher said she would hitch rides as she needed them, the other researcher was frequently 'embedded' or collaborating with these organizations, and part of the deal was that they would provide him with transportation.

Another researcher, who often used his own vehicle to get around, said that it was sometimes necessary to obtain indirect permission from local authorities to pass through an area. Although this greatly depended on the area, the way this was usually done was by 'casually' mentioning that he was planning on going to an area to contacts there. Those contacts would then mention this to their local authorities, who would say if it was okay or not, and this information was then passed back to the researcher.

Q4: Access

All researchers seemed to agree that access is of the utmost importance during fieldwork, and that much of their effort went into dealing with access - not surprising, considering that access is the key to obtaining data, which is every researcher's end goal.

The interviewees had many outlooks on access and how they gained it. It would seem there are many roads that lead to Rome. Some researchers frequently mentioned their "network" as the source of all their access. Others talked about their status as a researcher, as a foreigner, or even as a woman (though specifically, a foreign woman researcher), that opened many doors for them.

The discussions on access also made clear how connected this topic is to others. Researchers mentioned that access was dependent on such things as distance from violent events, empathy, researcher identity, language and trust.

All interviewed women seemed to be keenly aware of gender differences, though none reported that being a woman was merely a downside. Two women researchers actually regarded it as a huge advantage, as they felt interviewees opened up to them more easily. However, all women were also more keenly aware of their security situation. Male researchers seemed to have given their gender very little thought. When asked, most realized that being male, they probably had easier access to certain people or data, but they also recognized that women would have different access. None considered it to be easier to be male than to be female, though all acknowledged that they probably needed to worry less about their security.

The idea of trust was heavily present in nearly all interviews. One researcher mentioned that literal access wasn't hard to get. Phone numbers of (important) persons are easily obtained. But if they don't know someone, they'll keep delaying a meeting infinitely. Getting an actual interview requires that someone they know and trust mediates the appointment. Another interviewee said that sometimes, it is even possible to get an interview, but if someone doesn't want to talk, they don't talk. He'd get superficial and short answers to all his questions, or no real answers at all, just vagueness. In those cases, he said, he just wraps the interview up quickly and moves on.

Strangely, though trust seemed to feature so prominently in everyone's fieldwork, not all researchers engaged in active trust building. One figured if she was around long enough, people would get accustomed to her presence and word of mouth would get around informing people that she was a harmless researcher. Another told that he'd actively try to build trust in the beginning of a field project, but not worry about it later on. Yet three others said that building and maintaining trust was the biggest part of their job, that they still actively maintain contact with people from previous field projects. Though it is possible that the former researchers don't regard this as 'active trust building', it seems there are many different ways of handling, building and maintaining trust.

Q5: Ethics

Despite the wide variety of ethical issues discussed in the literature, all researchers indicated they have few ethical problems while in the field. Or at least, that they didn't experience them as such. Most ethical problems seem to manifest afterwards. Those problems that do occur during fieldwork aren't always immediately recognized as ethical.

A few themes were repeatedly mentioned during interviews: informed consent, confidentiality, and talking with victims. One researcher mentioned legitimizing illegal actors as a problem he encountered. Two others mentioned managing expectations.

Informed consent proved to be an interesting subject, with the researchers divided into two camps: informed consent is obligatory, and consent is implicit. The first strongly believed that researchers had the obligation to explain to respondents exactly what they were doing, and what they were going to do with the data, and that they would not, in as far as possible, ease up on that. The latter group felt that if it was known to respondents that they were researchers, naturally the respondent would understand that the things they said to the researcher would be used as data and could be published. The reason for this was always that stating explicitly what was being researched would influence the answers people gave and thus obscure or corrupt the data. The researchers were roughly evenly divided on this matter.

Confidentiality was also frequently mentioned, but a lot of it centered on publishing the data, and worries that the people in the field might not like what the researcher had to say about them. Though technically this occurs outside of the field, researchers argued that it could have profound influences on their ability to work in that field if they were to return, next to the obvious moral obligation they felt not to endanger their respondents. However, there was also one issue, mentioned by three separate researchers, that they were asked by government officials to report back to them if they found out 'anything relevant' while in the field. This ranged from information on human rights abuses to general security in an area. One researcher also had problems

explaining the concept of confidentiality to his translator, who promptly answered a question by an interviewee about who they'd interviewed before him.

Talking to victims was seen as problematic for several reasons. Mostly, researchers felt it hard to guess how talking about past traumas would affect their respondents. Therefore, they approach these subjects very carefully. They were all reluctant to 'stir around' too much. However, one researcher argued that victims were hard to talk to, because they 'knew' how to talk. As in, victims often had their own agenda (i.e. receiving compensation or aid) and the things they said and how they said it were designed towards that goal. This obscured the data, he felt.

Managing expectations mainly had to do with researchers having to explain to respondents that they were researchers, and not government officials or aid workers. People often hoped the researchers could help them, or improve their current situation. For many respondents, the difference between a researcher and an aid worker can be difficult to grasp. They just see an educated, well-to-do person from the capital, or from abroad, and the status that comes with that. One researcher said she'd try to help her respondents by providing them with legal information. Often, there were ways for these people to get what they wanted, via forms at the local municipality for example, but they'd simply be unaware of these possibilities. It was her way of giving something back to her participants, she said.

Q6: Danger

No researcher had ever seen or been caught up in violence. Field researchers seem to be quite aware of their environments and able to navigate the field quite well, although three researchers explicitly stated that they believed they were very lucky to never have been caught up in violence.

There were some minor incidents. One researcher once got arrested by the police for taking pictures of a demonstration. Another was aware of a rebel attack some kilometers away from the walled compound where she was staying. One researcher got subtle messages through his network that armed actors were suspicious and keeping an eye on him and his research. The heaviest stories were from a research who'd heard bombs dropping nearby, and another who had a 'green dot' on his chest (a laser sighted gun pointed at him).

One researcher stated she saw signs of active combatants in the area - in her case, fresh FARC graffiti - but never saw any active fighting, though she always made sure to leave the area before nightfall, when most attacks would occur.

All of the older researchers - over 30 - indicated that they took less risk than they used to, because they had a family now. They spent less time in the field in general, and were more aware of their safety.

Furthermore, every researcher seemed to have some rudimentary safety protocol. These protocols had no basis in anything general, and the researchers drew them up out of their own experiences and knowledge of the area. Rules included such things as "never drive at night" and "never have a fixed (predictable) schedule or eat in the same place twice". The area mattered, because the dangers differ. One researcher working in Afghanistan wouldn't go out early in the morning, because that was when most attacks and kidnappings happened. This in contrast to the aforementioned "get out of the red zones before nightfall", when the biggest danger was at night.

Q7: Stress

There were few commonalities in the answers to this question. Except for two researchers, all researchers indicated they felt stress during fieldwork. But the amount of it, when they felt it, and how they coped with it differed per person.

The two researchers who answered they didn't feel particularly stressful also had different explanations for this. One said he felt extra alert during fieldwork, and he noticed he'd lose weight, but he didn't 'feel' stressed as such. The other was always embedded with local organizations and said that he had absolute trust in their ability to maintain a safe environment. Perhaps insignificant, but both researchers were men and both worked mainly in Afghanistan.

Two other (male) researchers did indicate they felt stress during fieldwork, but they said they always felt it "afterwards". Some stressful event would happen - one researcher mentioned a nearby bombing, the other took an interview with a particularly dangerous person as an example - but they wouldn't feel stressful during that time. The stress came afterwards, with the realization of the danger they could have been in.

The other respondents (one male, all other female) said they often felt stressful during fieldwork, but the when and where varied widely. One felt stressful during interviews with dangerous persons, another while traveling through dangerous areas, and still others felt a heightened level of stress all round.

Coping strategies were also widely varied, though one stuck out as it was mentioned by many respondents: talking to others about their experiences. These others could be loved ones, friends, or colleagues. Indeed some researcher said that they would talk to all these groups if they felt it helped, while others strictly confided in one of them. Four of the respondents mentioned talking to others as an option, and one mentioned he had been given the advice to do so, but that he felt there was no one in particular that he felt could fulfill that role now.

Another thing mentioned by three respondents was having a protocol and sticking to it. They felt the protocol would ensure a certain level of safety, and therefore keeping to the protocol gave them a feeling of security as well. In the same line, one researcher mentioned she always made sure to have an exit strategy, whatever the situation, and that knowing how to get out would also provide her with a certain sense of calm.

One researcher took time-outs for herself while in the field, usually in the evening or weekend. After an evening or so of relaxing, she felt she had enough energy again to do her work. She also felt that these planned moments of relaxation gave her some sense of structure, something her fieldwork - which would differ day by day - did not give.

Q8: Main sources of data

All researchers did interviews while in the field. Two had conducted surveys, but neither worked with them very much. Three frequently worked with focus groups. Three explicitly mentioned observations as a source of data, and two explicitly mentioned casual conversations. Two researchers also did or had done ethnographic studies.

Q9: Interviews

All of the respondents did interviews during their field research. It was generally felt that the difficulties that come with interviewing people are 'textbook' difficulties, and there wasn't anything particularly more difficult about interviewing in a (post-)conflict environment than in other forms of

fieldwork. There was one issue that many respondents felt worthy talking about, and that was whether to record interviews or not.

Half of the respondents often or always recorded their interviews, the other half never recorded. Those who didn't record had very strong opinions on why they wouldn't. In summary, they felt that respondents wouldn't feel as free to talk, and would more often fall back to 'official lines' during interviews. Two respondents told that their interviewees explicitly told them that if they'd record the interview, they wouldn't say anything except the socially acceptable norm. One researcher said that it would sometimes be useful to be able to listen to an interview again, but that particular advantage wouldn't outweigh the possibility of getting more data when not recording the conversation.

The others preferred to record so that they could listen to their interviews again later, and felt that this extra chance to interpret what respondents said provided them with more or better data. They only not recorded when respondents would explicitly ask them not to.

Q10: Translators and Assistants

Almost all researchers disliked working with translators, and therefore never worked with them. A frequently heard phrase was "translation is reduction". Four researchers had worked with translators, and said finding good ones is difficult and at times expensive. One researcher, who had done fieldwork in Afghanistan, said that with the foreign military intervention, the good ones had already been hired by the UN or US. Worse, when they didn't have a job, they knew they were good and often charged $100 or $150 an hour.

However, these researcher felt that a good translator also functioned as something of a gatekeeper, giving access to potential respondents, and also would assist with the research. In short, finding a good translator is difficult, but once found, they can be a major asset to a research project.

As for local assistants, most researchers never used them, finding them bothersome and often feeling they lost more time managing them than it gained them anything. However, one researcher felt very strongly that perhaps he, as a white foreign guy, didn't have a lot of business poking around in people's lives, and he worked solely through local research assistants. He would only provide a coordinating role, and would give methodological pointers to the local research assistants, who were often students, hoping that this would empower them to do their own research in the future. He felt this was an ethical decision more than anything else. One other researcher mentioned she was thinking about working more often with local research assistants, in much the same way as described above.

Q11: Surveys

Only two researchers had done work with surveys. They said it's sometimes very interesting to see the data that comes out of them, but often they're a great bother to set up. One of them, based in Colombia, said she used a third party that was experienced with conducting surveys to get the data she was looking for from the right population. It was costly, but they had trained people and experience in the area, and the local population knew them. She felt it was more effective than doing it herself together with a team, which she had tried once before.

Q12: Sampling

Overwhelmingly, all researchers found their respondents through snowballing. Some had some other methods of finding respondents, like repeated walks, but mostly, researchers got redirected to new people through older contacts. Most researchers specifically asked for this sort of information, usually at the end of an interview. One researcher stated she would simply ask them if they knew anyone else who she could approach to talk about the subject they'd just discussed. Often, the respondents would give them new contacts, or occasionally even set up a meeting.

Most researchers went into the field with a very clear picture of who they wanted to talk to, whether that be a specific person (e.g. "Mr. Smith") or a specific function (e.g. "a mid-level government official who deals with immigration policy"). They'd do research beforehand on where to find these people and how to contact them. Afterwards, these conversations would usually propel them forward. One researcher mentioned that the first time you go anywhere, you don't really do research yet. Instead, you try to get a broad idea of who is who and where you need to be for certain kinds of information.

Q13: Other problems

Most researchers had nothing to add to the list of problems. One researcher mentioned that the line between 'normal' and 'abnormal' tends to fade as time in these difficult fields goes on. This can lead to dangerous situations for the researcher.

Two researchers wished to express the positive sides of fieldwork, one stating that she found a great joy and energy in her life by doing this work, the other wishing to express to fieldworkers all around the world that their job is important and that even though it is at times hard, the data they collect is invaluable.

Q14: Uniqueness

Most researchers felt that the problems they faced weren't unique to their country or area, and that similar environments could be found in other places as well. One researcher felt that maybe South-Sudan was special, because the state was really intimidating. Another thought her work with mining companies in conflict areas in Colombia was unique.

Q15: Training

Of all interviewees, only two had had methodological and/or fieldwork training, prior to going into the field. The others had to work with whatever they could get their hands on, and many researchers stated that they tried to read everything they thought could be useful before they went into the field. The two who had received field training were positive that this helped them prepare for the field in a practical sense. Those who had no training were mostly convinced that it would have helped. All were proponents of training students for fieldwork.

If there was time to discuss it in more detail, most researchers (three of four) thought the main purpose of such training would be to prepare students mainly in a practical sense, and one thought it was important to give them a sense of the ethical problems that might occur during fieldwork.

Survey Results

As the survey was divided into pages, this section will give the results per page. Page 1 was the introduction, and page 2 asked the participant's gender and months/years of experience. The demographics of participants have already been discussed above, so the results will start at page 3. Again, for readability, a summarized overview of the survey has been provided in the sidebar to the right.

> **Survey Overview**
> P1: Welcome
> P2: Personal information
> P3: Getting there
> P4: Gathering information
> P5: Logistics
> P6: Access
> P7: Truth and triangulation
> P8: Emotions
> P9: Time management
> P10: Ethics

All scales in the survey were 5-point, with the lower numbers always signifying less [often, difficult, problematic] and the higher numbers always signifying more [often, difficult, problematic]. For the sake of conciseness, only scores of lower than 2,00 or higher than 4,00, or those with small error bars (standard deviation < 0,70), will usually be discussed. Especially in regard to the small sample size, this author feels only those scores that are either very outspoken or generally agreed upon by the respondents might give any insights into the broader population of field researchers.

P3: Getting there

Obtaining the right documents (Q5) isn't an annoyance to all researchers, but it is to some of them. Eight researchers mentioned bureaucracy as a reason, three mentioned lengthy time-consuming processes were needed to obtain the right documents. Two reported that it was often unclear to them were they had to go to obtain the correct documents. On the more positive side, two researchers mentioned that for at least some of the countries where they did research having a local contact who could supply a letter of invitation solved practically all their problems concerning the right documentation.

One researcher made the general remark that these issues differ greatly per country. As she said it: "to get to Rwanda is physically easy, whereas to get to my research settings in eastern DRC is hard." Another described getting to the area of research as "not hard, but tedious", citing having to use bad roads or hiking trips of multiple days to get where he wanted to be.
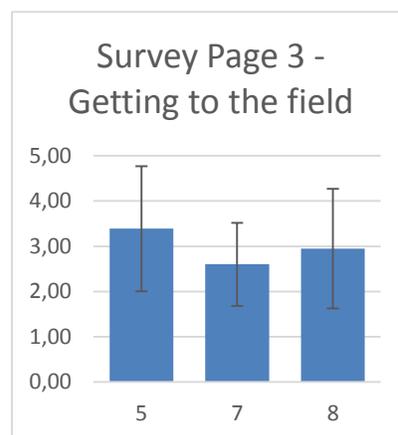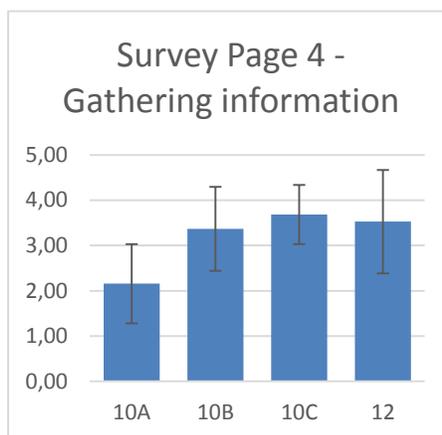
P4: Gathering information

Gathering information about the conditions on the ground doesn't appear to be a major difficulty for researchers in difficult fields, at least not among these respondents. Q11 asked about the sources of information researchers used, and this came up with pre-existing networks (with 95% of researchers employing this source), local organizations (84%), and colleagues (64%) as top sources. About half of the respondents also kept an eye on the local news and read existing literature on the area. One respondent mentioned using the local government, and two more checked their embassy in the country of research.

Survey Page 4 - Gathering information

The small error bar at Q10c indicates that most of the respondents share the feeling that their pre-field preparations were mostly adequate when they finally entered the field.

One interesting comment added by a respondent was: "I think local conditions affect my research design more over time, as I know more what to expect and can adjust beforehand. Previously I did that more ad hoc. That being said, I use to give myself more time in the field than I do now." It seems logical that as a researcher becomes more acquainted with an area, it's easier for them to anticipate the conditions there and adjust their design accordingly.

P5: Logistics

The results on the questions about logistics indicate that, much like gathering information, the respondents don't think logistics are a very big problem to field researchers. Especially finding accommodation (Q17) seems to come easily. This is mirrored by the lack of impact

Survey Page 5 - Transportation

respondents find accommodation to have (Q20c). Furthermore, the issue of food and drink also has a very low impact on the research process (Q20d).

The small error bar at Q19 indicates respondents felt a largely similar level of stress while managing their logistics, being "moderately stressed".
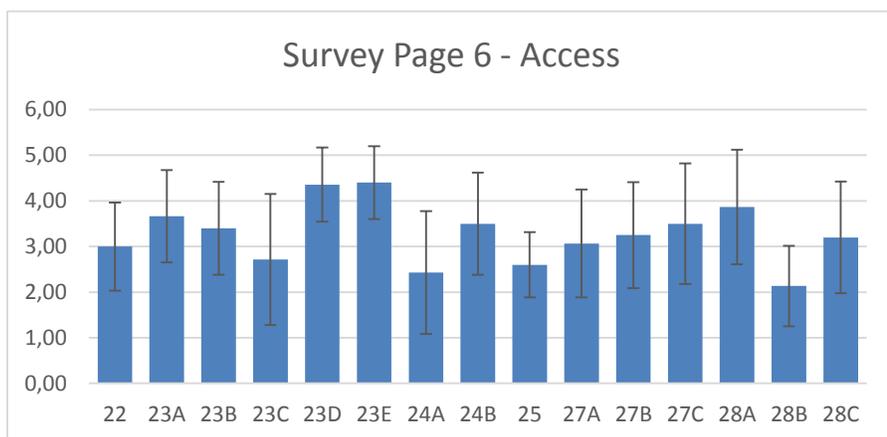
As for means of transportation, 84% of respondents indicated using public transport, and three in four (also) used taxis and/or local contacts to get around. Less than half had a personal driver or are driven around by local organizations. Still less had their own vehicle (26%). One respondent reported using military transports to get around.

One added comment stressed the difficulty in Sub-Sahara Africa to find a clean, safe place that was also affordable.
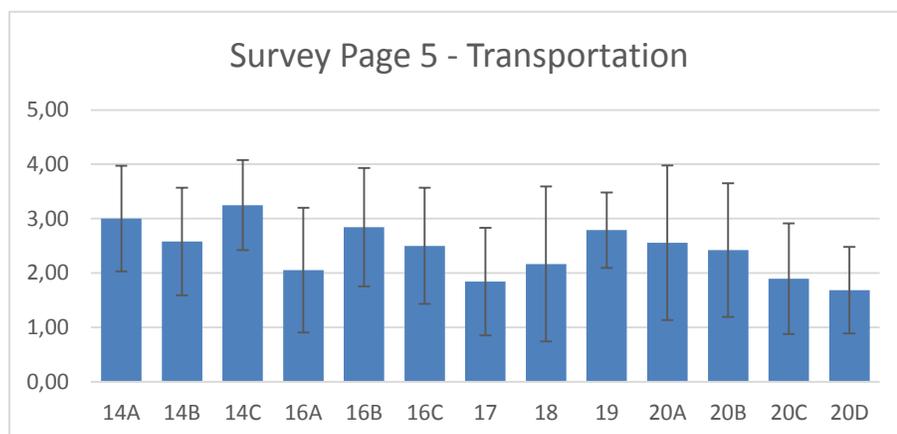
P6: Access

From the chart, it is clear that Q23d and Q23e are very high, with relatively small error bars. These questions had to do with relational trust, asking about the effects of being vouched for (Q23d) by another contact, and of being referred to someone by another contact (Q23e). Almost all respondents agreed these things greatly improved the levels of trust with research participants.
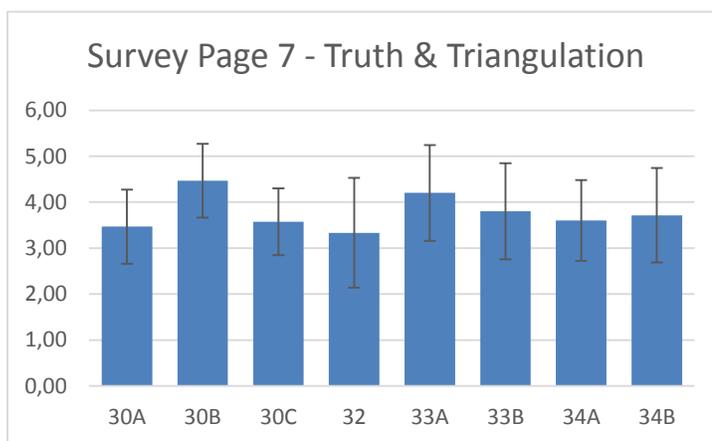

Survey Page 6 - Access

     Strikingly, the respondents didn't feel strongly their gender either reduced (Q24a) or increased (Q24b) their access in the field. In general, respondents (both male and female) found their gender to work slightly to their disadvantage (Q25), although there were also many researchers (again, both male and female) who found their gender to be highly advantageous.

     In the remarks section, two respondents indicated they found it hard to answer this section, because their experiences from different areas were so far apart it was hard to generalize. A third, male, commentator reacted to the gender questions: "Security institutions are male-dominated. Anthropologists tell me that western women doing security research in traditional societies have "honorary male" status. I can't vouch for this."

P7: Triangulation

Nearly all respondents answered to "always" triangulate their findings (Q30b). This is mirrored in Q33a, where respondents indicate that they incorporate triangulation to a very high extend in their research designs.

Survey Page 7 - Truth & Triangulation

     Interviews and observations were the most employed methods of triangulation, at 93% and 87% respectively. Two thirds of the respondents (also) used archival data and scientific literature to triangulate their findings. Half of the respondents indicated participation as a means of triangulation, two out of five mentioned rumors, and a third conducted surveys. Three respondents added using the media, human rights reports, and institutional websites.

     Two respondents commented that the nature of their qualitative work meant that it didn't matter so much whether their research subjects were speaking the truth or not – they were interested in subjective viewpoints to begin with. Another mentioned that triangulation works on a much longer timescale than just the fieldwork.

P8: Emotions

Again, no question came back with a particularly high or low score. Researchers experience their share of stress, discomfort, fear and anxiety, but not on such levels that it controls or heavily impacts their wellbeing or research. The same goes for identifying with respondents.

Q36a has a small error bar, indicating most respondents felt largely the same amount of stress during their field research, being "moderately stressed" here.

Page 8 - Stress & Security
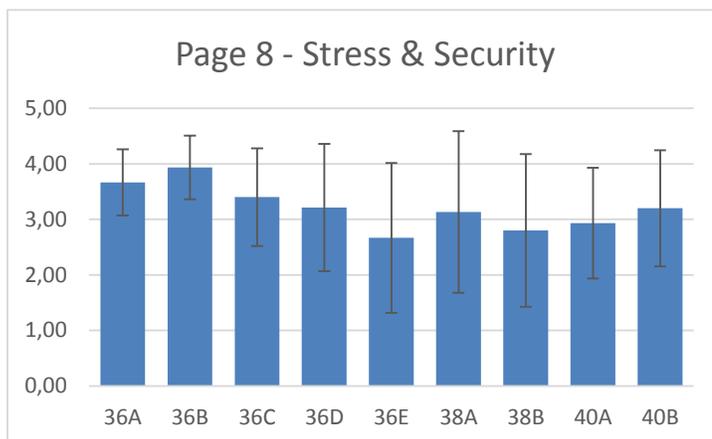
The respondents had several methods of dealing with stress. Most common was going out with local friends, something that every three out of four researchers did. Two thirds of the respondents (also) regularly took some time for themselves, to be alone and relax, and perhaps read a book or so. Then came talking to loved ones (60%) and going away from the site for a few days/weekend (also 60%). One third kept a diary, and 20% reported using alcohol and nicotine, again 20% did sports.

Q39 asked about safety protocols or rules that the respondents used to stay safe. Nearly all respondents (93%) maintained a local network of contacts that would keep them updated on what was going on and the security situation. Regularly checking the news and carefully planning travels and meetings were also common. Less than half of the respondents never traveled at night. Only a handful employed rigorous methods such as never visiting the same place twice and not keeping a predictable routine.

Only one respondent commented in this section, but he again iterated that the situation was often very different based on the locale of the research. As he put it: "[My] field work in Bosnia and Sierra Leone were at the top end of the conflict scale; all others listed were less intense. In all cases, the direct connection with local and/or international military and police greatly reduced the risk."

P9: Time management

On average, researchers reported spending 55% of their time gathering data, 27% on logistics, and 7% and 8% respectively on managing their security situation and R&R/stress management.

This tells us that researchers (at least those who participated) try to make as much of their time in the field as possible. They spent most time gathering data, and much of the rest goes to supporting the data gathering and themselves. Only a small portion of time is spent on rest, relaxation and losing stress. The low amount of time spent on security also tells us that apparently, either security takes very little 'active' time, or the areas the researchers visit just aren't that dangerous. This would support the notion that field researchers aren't very keen on researching in active or recent conflict zones.

There were two additional comments from the respondents. One stated that this part was impossible to complete for a researcher who does research "in so many locations", thereby implying that her time was spent very differently from locale to locale. The other comment was: "It takes far longer to reach a research site typically than to collect data, and so most time is spent travelling." There were three others (for a total of 4 out of 15, they didn't share a particular country or site of research) who seemed to support this notion and indicated logistics took a larger part of their time than data gathering.
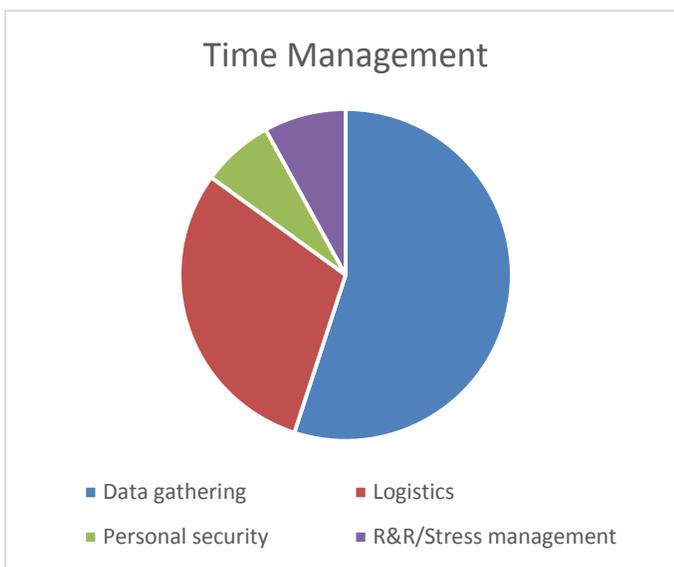
P10: Ethics

Quantitatively, this page yielded very interesting results. As is clear from the graph, there are very low-scoring questions (Q44a-c) and very high-scoring questions (Q46a and Q46b).

Q44a-c have to do with covert research (Q44a), partially covert research (Q44b, i.e. their

subjects knew they were a researcher, but not what they were researching) and ability to confirm informed consent (Q44c). Thus, from these respondents, scarcely anyone ever did any research that was remotely covert. And the majority of respondents had no trouble getting informed consent from their subjects.

All the other ethical issues score averagely – they are neither very common nor rare, and researchers occasionally have to deal with them in the field. Only Q44i, about having to safeguard subject confidentiality against state actors, rises slightly towards 'often'. Q44h, managing subjects' expectations, is slightly lowered towards 'seldom'.

But then, the last questions suddenly spike up. Q46a and Q46b have to do with the impact of ethical issues on the research design and actual research in the field, respectively. Apparently, though the respondents indicate that ethical issues happen not rarely, but not often either, major considerations are given to them whilst designing and conducting research. This is an interesting finding that warrants more thought.

It is also interesting to look at the questions dealing with informed consent (Q44c, Q44g, Q44h, and Q45). Although Q44c (inability to gain informed consent) is very low, meaning the respondents usually had no problem obtaining informed consent, the others aren't so outspoken. Q44h is closely related to Q44c and asks the respondents how often they are unable to adequately explain their job as a researcher or their research. Apparently, this happens more often, and the longer error bar indicates a much larger spread of responses to this question than to Q44c. Likewise, there is a large spread at Q44g (fear that informed consent might seriously influence the results of the study), indicating respondents heavily disagree on this point. Lastly, Q45 asks forthright what the respondents' opinion is on informed consent. It reaches towards that 4,00 threshold (informed consent is important), but never gets there. Indeed, some respondents think it isn't all that important, and a few even feel it gets in the way of their research. Informed consent is a much debated topic in the literature, and these results underline that.

One comment said that she used most of her time considering the ethical issues towards the state and state actors, rather than ethical issues towards research subjects. Another remarked that informed consent "is not a technical exercise but about building a relationship with respondents such that they understand what they get - if anything - from their giving of their time and energy."

Finally, one respondent commented: "Too long survey!"

Results Summary

First and foremost, the interviews provided a much more detailed insight into the issues posited by the literature. There were new examples, new insights and new interpretations of the themes and problems. From this it was clear how deeply the literature was rooted in anecdotal stories, for with each new anecdote in an interviews, new information arose. All in all, the interviews were of tremendous help in building the survey afterwards. Many stories, examples and experiences told by the interviewed researchers were the direct inspiration for survey questions. The survey was able to ask about more practical issues and details that might be encountered in the field. Not in the least, the interviews added a separate issue, "truth and triangulation", to the original catalogue and the survey.

In the survey, in terms of frequency, only trust issues and triangulation stood out to be occurring often, and accommodation issues and covert research to be occurring rarely. In terms of impact, ethical issues were found to have a very big impact on both design and research, and accommodation and sustenance to be of very small impact. All the rest hovered between the values of 2,00 (sometimes) and 4,00 (often), staying within a region that implied neither high or low frequency or impact. However, this doesn't mean this data isn't interesting per se. As made

clear with the example of informed consent, sometimes the absence of a peak score (whether high or low) is more surprising than its presence.

Both the interviewees and the survey respondents frequently pointed out that many things were very dependent on the area where the study was being conducted. Different countries and locales pose very different challenges. Whilst in the interviews there was often time and space for these nuances, several survey respondents indicated they had trouble giving general answers to some questions, most notably in relation to personal security and to time management.

Discussion

The next section will discuss the results of this study, in three sections. Interpretation will try to combine the lessons learned from the literature, the interviews and the survey. In this section the answers will be given to the last four sub-questions. After that, a section on limitations will focus on the boundaries of this research. Based on that, the section will also provide suggestions for future research. Finally, the conclusion summarizes with an answer to the original research question.

Interpretation

In the first chapter, the main research question was introduced, along with several sub-questions in order to be able to give a complete answer to the main question. The first sub-question was answered with a detailed description of common problems in difficult fieldwork in the second chapter of this thesis. The following section sets out to answer the remaining questions with the added information of the interviews and the surveys. For the sake of completeness and readability the sub-questions are repeated here:

SQ2:	What can experienced field researchers comment, add, or subtract on the categories of problems?
SQ3:	Are there any new categories experienced field researchers would add to the list of categories derived from literature?
SQ4:	What is the frequency of occurrence of the distinct issues of difficult fieldwork?
SQ5:	What is the impact of the distinct issues of difficult fieldwork upon the research process and the researcher?

This section starts, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, with SQ3. The reason for this is simply because it is easiest to answer. There was one category added to the catalogue because of information from experienced field researchers. This was the issue of "truth and triangulation". It was decided to add this after a lengthy answer during an interview, in which the interviewee discussed in great detail the planning and effort she put into making sure her data was well triangulated. This wasn't always easy in conflict areas, where not only territories are disputed, but truths as well. As triangulation is part of any solid piece of science, and triangulation in difficult fields seemed to pose extra challenges, it was decided to add this category. There was some literature that dealt with this, most notably Sriram et al. (2009), and together with the information from the interviews the description was added to the theory chapter.

Continuing with the more interesting SQ2, SQ4 and SQ5, there were a few categories that this author felt were really augmented by the interviews and survey, or that stood out as either (in)frequent and/or impactful. These categories were preparation, trust-building, ethics, and emotion management, which will be discussed below. In the end, SQ2, SQ4 and SQ5 proved to be so interwoven that it was decided to look at them per fieldwork category, instead of answering the sub-questions one at a time.

It's apparent from the survey that a reasonable amount of good information can be collected before going into the field. Several of the interviews made clear that it is possible to plan and prepare many things, especially for the first few weeks. Several respondents in the survey stated going into the field for about a week at a time, and for such short time spans, preparation is especially important. One interviewee said that the shorter the period of fieldwork will be, the

more important the pre-field preparation is, and the greater its role. This had consequences for how the interviewed researchers prepared their research. One interviewee said she would spend several days or weeks in a nearby city before heading out into the field, thus making the city a sort of 'outpost' from which it might be easier to prepare things than from abroad. Strategies such as this are rarely ever discussed in the literature.

Discussing access usually took more time during the interviews than any of the other subjects. Trust-building is, according to the interviews, a big part of doing field research and gaining access, if not the biggest part. It takes time and effort to gain the trust of people, and for many types of research, trust is a prerequisite for getting an interview or otherwise access to the data that is being studied. Now, according to both the survey and the interviews, being vouched for or being referred by others are the best methods or gaining trust and/or access. Several interviewed researchers said that their local network of contacts was at the core of everything they did in the field, and that maintaining their network required a great deal of their time, even - or especially - when they were not in the field. They emphasized the importance of local networks for staying updated, getting in touch with the right people, and just learning about the site in general. Many researchers still keep in touch with the various networks they built over the course of their years of research. The importance of networks was often emphasized during interviews. It was the most-used source of gathering pre-field information according to the survey. This makes it clear why gatekeepers can be vital to doing difficult fieldwork. Next to that, it explains why 'snowballing' or chain referral sampling is such a ridiculously popular way of finding sample populations and participants - it's simply hugely effective.

However, network-building is not so prominent in the literature. In that regard, the experiences of this study's respondents really added to the information that could be presented in the catalogue. Both from the interviews and the survey, it is clear that building a network of connections is a huge help in fieldwork, and sometimes nothing less than essential. Next to providing lots of access, it has all sorts of beneficial side effects, like the ability to give a researcher more precise and real-time safety advice during tumultuous moments, and the opportunity to go out with local contacts was the number one way of releasing some stress while in the field for the respondents of the survey. Perhaps this also warrants research into the nature of networks themselves, how they form, how they function, etc. Which is not to say that researchers should find the optimal way to create and maintain a network as to become 'more efficient at fieldwork', but it would be interesting to better understand the nature of this tool that is helping so many researchers in the field.

Ethics are a common and much discussed subject in the literature on doing (difficult) fieldwork. It's also a part of many curricula in social sciences. Even undergraduate students often receive some theoretical education on doing ethical research, although they might not get any practical experience until they start working on their thesis. So, there's a lot of attention for ethics, and according to the survey, ethical issues indeed have a big impact on the researchers' ability to do research, as well as on their designs. However, this does not mean that the respondents ran into ethical dilemmas all the time while in the field. The most common ethical issue according to both the interviews and the survey seemed to be safeguarding participant confidentiality, especially against state actors. It was also commented in both the survey and the interviews that ethical issues are sometimes hard to see. One interviewee remarked he often wouldn't realize

the ethical implications of choices he faced in the field until afterwards, when he'd had time to think and let the experiences sink in.

The survey made two things clear in regards to ethics in doing fieldwork in difficult environments. The vast majority of the respondents was absolutely forthright about their identity as a researcher. In fact, only one respondent answered differently, and he immediately went to the other side of the spectrum: very often hiding his identity as a researcher from participants. Among the respondents of the survey at least, covert research was not an option. Secondly, the respondents did weigh ethical considerations very heavily into their research design, and found they had a large impact on the research process. Seeing the relatively moderate frequency of ethical issues, this can either mean that when they happen, they have a major influence over the research, thus also explaining why researchers go a long way to designing their research to take such things into account or prevent them. Alternatively, maybe ethics are held in such a high regard by the scientific community (for good reasons) that it is simply part of academic culture to consider the ethical implications of research more prudently than all others.

Lastly, the management of the emotional state of the researcher might deserve some further discussion. As part of the literature already pointed out - especially Kleinman & Copp (1993) - the emotional state of fieldworkers has long been undervalued. However, from the interviews and survey in this study, it seems that the respondents rarely worried over their emotional state of mind. They mostly felt it doesn't really impact their ability to do research. Very few researchers ever experience emotional distress up to a 'cracking point', and most are smart enough to leave the field long before that happens. But it is telling that none of the respondents really worried about these things, or felt they were important, unlike Kleinman & Copp (1993) pleaded. The big question now is: does this mean it might be a non-issue? Or were the respondents so emotionally detached this is actually a symptom of the dangerous 'objective' state of mind Kleinman & Copp warn about? Obviously the sample size of this study is too small to make any such claims, but it is telling that though the respondents universally felt stressed during field research, they spend on average less than 10% of their time trying to reduce this stress.

Limitations

There are several limitations with this research as a whole. The total number of interview participants and survey respondents especially creates a very strong limitation on being able to generalize information from this study. For a more detailed discussion of the limitations of the separate methods, see their respective chapters.

The small number of survey respondents makes it hard to say anything definitive about field research in difficult environments in a quantitative sort of way. It is hard to estimate the number of fieldworkers worldwide who work in difficult fields, and therefore hard to estimate how large a sample population would need to be for a study of fieldworkers, but a total of 15 respondents is too small to say anything generalizable. Clark (2006) had some fifty researchers participate in her survey, and she was only looking into field studies in the Middle-East. A similar amount of respondents would have been a good minimum for this study.

Furthermore, many interview participants and survey respondents made it clear – sometimes repeatedly – that it was difficult to answer some questions with all of their previous fieldwork in mind. They found many things couldn't be said about difficult fieldwork 'in general'. Their experiences varied widely depending on the country and area where they worked. Though

it was possible to work around this somewhat in the interviews, this was a major bother in the online survey. In any case, a lot of data got scrambled up because it was 'generalized', or even lost because it was impossible to add more geographical context to the answers than to include a short remark in a text box.

So, as a suggestion to future research, next to the obvious notion of finding more respondents, this author would like to suggest to follow Clark's (2006) example and differentiate the survey towards a specific geographical or thematic (i.e. "countries with authoritarian regimes" or "failed states") region. This of course brings its own challenges with it – for indeed, how does one decide which countries to group together into a similar 'region'? – but if done well it would increase the comparability of fieldwork experiences. If several such studies are done, different regions or themes could then be compared, i.e. how does fieldwork in countries with authoritarian regimes differ from fieldwork in failed states? Or, does doing fieldwork in El Salvador conform to the characteristics of doing fieldwork in failed states?

Other than this, time in the field might be an interesting variable to work with. Many researchers reported having much more trouble in the first weeks and months of working in a new country or site, when they were just learning the lay of the land. It might be interesting to see if some problems only develop after some time, or that others only occur in the beginning. It could also have effects on the emotional well-being of the researcher and the use of their networks, that probably grow stronger every time they visit a site (for an extended period of time). Feelings of stress and anxiety might decrease as researchers get more familiar with an area. And it doesn't seem strange to assume having good knowledge and lengthy experience with an area might influence how and what a researcher will study in those areas.

It has occurred to check if other conditional restraints might be viable, but from the interviews and the surveys, there was little evidence that implied differences in fieldwork experiences based on gender, age, years of experience, or country of origin. But again, with a sample size this small, it is well possible that these differences exist, but that there is simply not enough data in this study to be able to see them.

Conclusion

This thesis has been concerned with answering the following question:

> **RQ:** How can the major problems of field research in difficult environments be categorized?

Through literature studies, interviews and an online survey, categories of fieldwork problems have been established, and an attempt was made to gauge how frequent or problematic they are in the field. This resulted in an extensive list, with fifteen issues divided into four broad themes – practical, ethical, emotional and methodological issues. A brief summary is provided in the sidebar to the right.

- Practical Issues
  - Pre-field Preparation
  - Logistics
  - Access and Trust
  - Truth and Triangulation
  - Participation
  - Time Constraints
- Emotional Issues
  - Security and Stress
  - Researcher Identity
  - Identification and Friendship with Participants
- Ethical Issues
  - Confidentiality
  - Informed Consent and Covert Research
  - Interfering and Non-Disruption
  - Do Some Good
- Methodological Issues
  - Finding Respondents
  - Translators and Assistants

The basic structure of this catalogue came from the literature on the subject of difficult fieldwork. Through interviews, these categories were fleshed out and expanded. One new category was added as a result of the interviews: truth and triangulation. With the survey, it was possible to get a quantitative indication of the relevance of the categories – how often they occurred in the field, how much of a problem they posed – but it is hard to make any hard statements in that regard, seeing the low number of respondents. Nevertheless, the survey also added some extra insights into the matter, as many respondents were kind enough to add extra commentary to their responses, explaining their experiences or interpretations of the various problems.

If this thesis were to make any claims regarding frequency or impact, it would say that good pre-field preparation is key to good fieldwork, especially if there's a very limited amount of time to work in. The interviews gave a clear idea of what can be prepared before going into the field – access and logistics – and the survey provided the answer to 'how?'. Pre-existing networks and colleagues are the most common ways of getting good information.

Secondly, it would stress the importance of networks. Both the interviews and the survey show that many experienced researchers rely on and trust in the informal networks that they've build throughout their years of fieldwork. From access to security and transportation to relaxation, having a good network can get many things done. Unfortunately, the literature on difficult fieldwork still has to catch up with this. Network-building is seems to be often dismissed as an implicit of practical matter that naturally happens as fieldworkers go about their work, despite the fact that research projects can stand or fall depending on a researcher's network. Perhaps the matter comes so naturally to fieldworkers that they don't think much of it, but in several interviews it seemed to be a very important aspect of doing field research in difficult environments. Researchers report it is connected to almost every other issue in the catalogue provided in this thesis, and having a good network can have many positive effects on the other issues.

Thirdly, the respondents of this study, both in the interviews and in the survey, stress the importance of thoroughly considering ethical issues that researchers might run into in the field. However, the interviews and survey results also point out actually encountering ethical issues in the field is not all that common, save for confidentiality issues (particularly protecting participants from state actors) and deciding on how to deal with informed consent. These are very personal decisions for a researcher, but they have a profound effect on the researcher's 'style' of research. From the interviews, it was apparent that most researcher think long and hard about their ethical stance, and as such, many stood rigidly by theirs, perfectly able of explaining why they took that particular decisions and why they felt it was best.

And lastly, the role of emotions in fieldwork is still entirely unclear. Though practically all respondents report heightened feelings of stress, discomfort and sometimes even anxiety in the field, almost none of them spent more than 10% of their time during fieldtrips on rest and relaxation. Many respondents felt their emotional state of mind did not influence their ability to do research very much. Perhaps this is why they don't want to spend time on R&R, that possibly they think it is 'wasted'. Or perhaps the financial and time constraints of modern academia force them to use as much time as possible in the field on gathering data, as the interviews showed that especially those researchers that spend little time in the field create very intense schedules for themselves to gather as much data as possible. Perhaps researchers that spend much more time in the field (a year or more) are much more lenient in providing themselves some time to rest.

It is unclear why the subjects of emotions and networks in particular are little discussed in the difficult fieldwork literature. Perhaps it is because these subjects are somehow so 'obvious' to fieldworkers they simply don't come up with the idea to reflect upon them a bit more. Does the fish know the water in which it swims?

There is still much we don't know about the nature of fieldwork, or the researchers who go out and do it. Some suggestions for future research have already been provided at the end of the previous section. But this thesis hopes to have at least shone a little bit of light into this subject, by bringing together knowledge from literature and experience from researchers. This author hopes to see fieldworkers start to look into it themselves. To build on a 22-year-old quote: it is still time for a field study of fieldworkers.

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Appendices

Categories of difficulties in fieldwork by author

Kleinman & Copp (1993)	Barakat & Ellis (1996)	Goodhand (2000)
* Fieldworkers as professionals * Feelings about participants * Immersion vs. analytical ideal	* Pre-field preparation * Programming and seasons * Gaining access and identifying gatekeepers * Freedom of movement * Time limits * Limited information * Range of techniques * Self-representation * Impartiality * Stress	* Perverse outcomes * Security risks * Confidentiality * Expectations * Implicit messages * Opening old wounds * Practical ethics
Lee-Treeweek & Linkogle (2000)	**Sriram et al. (2009)**	**Cohen & Arieli (2011)**
* Physical * Emotional * Ethical * Professional	* Ethics * Access * Veracity * Security * Identity, objectivity, behavior	* Lack of contact information * Lack of system information * Cultural differences * Legal, political and ideological constraints * Technical accessibility * Atmosphere of fear and distrust

Table 1: Categorizations of problems in difficult fieldwork by various authors

Clark (2006)	De Vries (2012)
* Choosing the site of fieldwork * Nature of problems - logistical/ political/ social/ cultural * Methodology * Identifying respondents * Confidentiality * Ethical issues * Friendships with interviewees * Fieldwork training and instructions	* Logistics * Security * Data Gathering

Table 2: Categorizations derived from Clark (2006) and De Vries (2012)

Interview Guide (English)

Introduction

1. I read your research was about [...]. Could you say why that got your interest? What did you think the field was going to be like?

Difficulties

2. Did you run into difficulties before starting your field work? Acquiring the right documents, contacts, etc.?
    a. *Were these problems anticipated? Which were, which weren't?*
    b. *How did you solve/handle them? (Best practices)*
    c. *Have you tried solutions that did NOT work? (Worst practices)*
3. What about logistics? Were there problems with transportation, keeping in touch with your home institute, medicine, supplies or other practical issues?
    a. *Anticipated? Solutions, best/worst practices?*
4. How much of a problem was access? Were there language or gender barriers, trust issues, or official documents you had to acquire?
    a. *Anticipated? Solutions, best/worst practices?*
5. Have you run into ethical issues while in the field? What kind?
    a. *Anticipated? Solutions, best/worst practices?*
6. How dangerous was your field research environment? Was there violence or tension?
    a. *Anticipated? Solutions, best/worst practices?*
7. Have you had feelings of personal distress during your fieldwork?
    a. *Anticipated? Solutions, best/worst practices?*

Sampling & Data Gathering

8. What were your primary sources? Interviews, surveys, participant observation, etc.?
    a. *Did this present you with any specific problems?*
9. Have you conducted interviews?
    a. *Did you record the interview? With what? What were the advantages of that?*
    b. *How did you anonymize the data and keep it confidential?*
10. Did you employ a translator during your field research? What was your experience? Was it an advantage, or not? Strengths and weaknesses?
11. Did you conduct surveys in the field? Did you conduct them personally, or through a third party? If so, how did you select the third party?
12. How did you find your sample population sample in the field? Were they representative samples of the entire population? Why (not)?
    a. *Did you use techniques such as snowballing, employ social networks, etc.?*
    b. *Best/worst practices for finding adequate samples?*

Other

13. What other problems, that we haven't discussed yet, did you run into during your field research?

14. Do you feel (some of) these problems are unique to the country we discussed? Or more prominent than in other places?
15. Did you have any training in field research before entering the field, at a university or NGO for example?
    a. *Do you think doing field research can (to some extend) be trained or taught? Should it be?*

Interview Guide (NL)

Introductie
1. Ik begrijp dat uw onderzoek gaat over [...] in [...]. Waarom bent u dat gaan onderzoeken? Had u een idee van hoe het veld zou zijn voordat u ging?

Moeilijkheden
2. Wat waren moeilijkheden waar u tegenaan liep al vóórdat het veldwerk begon? Was het lastig om documenten of visa te verkrijgen, informatie in te zamelen, contacten te leggen, o.i.d.?
    a. *Had u deze moeilijkheden verwacht? Welke wel, welke niet?*
    b. *Hoe hebt u deze problemen opgelost of omzeild? (Best practices)*
    c. *Hebt u ooit oplossingen geprobeerd die NIET werkten? (Worst practices)*
3. Hebt u last gehad van logistieke problemen in het veld? Transport, communicatie met het thuisfront, voedsel, voorraden, praktische dagelijkse dingen?
    a. *Verwacht? Oplossingen, best/worst practices?*
4. In hoeverre was toegang krijgen tot de data een probleem? Waren er taalbarrières, gender-problemen, moest er eerst vertrouwen gewonnen worden, etc.?
    a. *Verwacht? Oplossingen, best/worst practices?*
5. Bent u ooit tegen ethische problemen aangelopen? Wat voor soort?
    a. *Verwacht? Oplossingen, best/worst practices?*
6. Hoe gevaarlijk was het veld toen u er was? Waren er spanningen, of openlijk geweld?
    a. *Verwacht? Oplossingen, best/worst practices?*
7. Hoe stressvol was het veldwerk, en wat was het effect op uw persoonlijke gemoedstoestand?
    a. *Verwacht? Oplossingen, best/worst practices?*

Populaties & Data verzamelen
8. Wat waren uw primaire bronnen? Interviews, surveys, participant observation, etc.?
    a. *Hebt u problemen gehad met deze methode(n) van data verzamelen?*
9. Hebt u interviews afgenomen?
    a. *Hebt u de interview opgenomen? Waarmee? Wat was het voordeel daarvan?*
    b. *Wat voor maatregelen heeft u genomen om de data vertrouwelijk te houden?*
10. Hebt u een tolk gebruikt tijdens uw onderzoek? Wat was uw ervaring daarmee? Goed, slecht, gemengd?
11. Hebt u enquêtes afgenomen in het veld? Deed u dat zelf, of via een derde partij? Hoe selecteerde u die partij?
12. Hoe kwam u aan representatieve steekproeven in het veld?
    a. *Snowballing, random walks, o.i.d.?*
    b. *Wat werkte het beste? Wat werkte niet?*

Overig
13. Wat voor andere problemen, waar we het niet over gehad hebben, bent u zoal tegengekomen in het veld?

14. Denkt u dat sommige van de problemen die we besproken hebben uniek, of althans meer aanwezig, zijn in het gebied waar u veldwerk deed dan in andere?
15. Hebt u training in veldwerk gehad aan een universiteit of bij een NGO, voordat u het veld in ging?
    a. *Denkt u dat het doen van veldonderzoek (tot op zekere hoogte) gedoceerd kan worden? Zou dat ook moeten?*

Graphs Source Numbers

page 3	question#	5	7	8
	average	3,39	2,60	2,95
	st. dev.	1,38	0,92	1,32

page 4	question#	10A	10B	10C	12
	average	2,16	3,37	3,68	3,53
	st. dev.	0,87	0,93	0,65	1,14

page 5	question#	14A	14B	14C	16A	16B	16C	17
	average	3,00	2,58	3,25	2,05	2,84	2,50	1,84
	st. dev.	0,97	0,99	0,83	1,15	1,09	1,07	0,99

	question#	18	19	20A	20B	20C	20D
	average	2,17	2,79	2,56	2,42	1,89	1,68
	st. dev.	1,42	0,69	1,42	1,23	1,02	0,80

page 6	question#	22	23A	23B	23C	23D	23E	24A	24B
	average	3,00	3,67	3,40	2,71	4,36	4,40	2,43	3,50
	st. dev.	0,97	1,01	1,02	1,44	0,81	0,80	1,35	1,12

	question#	25	27A	27B	27C	28A	28B	28C
	average	2,60	3,07	3,25	3,50	3,87	2,13	3,20
	st. dev.	0,71	1,18	1,16	1,32	1,26	0,88	1,22

page 7	question#	30A	30B	30C	32	33A	33B	34A	34B
	average	3,47	4,47	3,57	3,33	4,20	3,80	3,60	3,71
	st. dev.	0,81	0,81	0,73	1,19	1,05	1,05	0,88	1,03

page 8	question#	36A	36B	36C	36D	36E	38A	38B	40A	40B
	average	3,67	3,93	3,40	3,21	2,67	3,13	2,80	2,93	3,20
	st. dev.	0,60	0,57	0,88	1,15	1,35	1,45	1,38	1,00	1,05

page 10	question#	44A	44B	44C	44D	44E	44F	44G
	average	1,38	1,79	2,00	3,21	3,00	3,00	2,73
	st. dev.	1,08	1,01	1,07	1,42	1,04	1,28	1,44

	question#	44H	44I	44J	45	46A	46B
	average	2,53	3,67	3,00	3,80	4,20	4,27
	st. dev.	1,36	1,07	1,41	1,05	1,05	1,00