Walking the Line: Brokering Humanitarian Identity in Conflict Research

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Abstract: Increasingly, academic research in conflict-affected contexts relies on support from humanitarian organizations. Humanitarian organizations constitute sites of study in and of themselves; they partner with academics to roll out surveys or randomized program interventions; and they frequently facilitate security, logistics and transportation for independent researchers. We use a research partnership between IRC, the World Bank, and academic researchers in the UK, the US and eastern DR Congo, to explore the effects of humanitarian affiliation on conflict field research. In investigating when, how and under what conditions humanitarian identities are adopted by researchers (and how these affiliations shape research dynamics) we identify three paradoxes. First, “wearing humanitarian clothes” to facilitate research logistics can both facilitate and constrain access. Second, humanitarian affiliations invoked by researchers to ensure security and protection in volatile research sites can undermine the “insider” status of local staff. Finally, working through humanitarian organizations allows local and international researchers to benefit from the protections and privileges afforded to humanitarian employees without providing any of the services on which privileged access rests. In this article, we map out decisions faced by local and international researchers concerning when to adopt and discard humanitarian identities, and the fraught logistical, ethical and methodological consequences of these decisions.

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Civil Wars on 26 September 2019, available online: https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2019.1619154

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Acknowledgements

The authors extend their gratitude to all the staff at the International Rescue Committee (IRC) who made this research possible, especially to the research team and the Women’s Protection and Empowerment Technical Unit. We are particularly grateful to Pamela Mallinga, Danielle Roth, and Nadine Rudahindwa at IRC, and to Julia Vaillant at the World Bank’s Gender Innovation Lab, for their support and input. Additionally, we thank Maria Eriksson Baaz and Mats Utas for their editorial support and comments on earlier drafts. We are also grateful to Morten Boás, Kathryn Falb, Marsha Henry, Ilaria Michelis, Swati Parashar, Sarah Parkinson, and the anonymous reviewers at Civil Wars, who each provided generous comments on this manuscript. This research was made possible through the generous financial support of the State and Peacebuilding Fund and the Nordic Trust Fund at the World Bank, as well as the World Bank’s Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality. All errors are our own.
I. Introduction

Academic research in conflict-affected contexts increasingly relies on support from NGOs and humanitarian organizations. Humanitarian organizations constitute sites of study in and of themselves; they partner with academics to implement surveys and program evaluations; and they facilitate security, logistics, permissions, and transportation for academic researchers. These relationships are made possible through a number of individuals who are often unseen and underacknowledged in research outputs: a series of organizational research brokers – program staff, community outreach workers, security personnel, logisticians, drivers, and others – who facilitate research partnerships. In light of the growing prominence of academic-humanitarian partnerships, which vary in their level of interaction and independence between researchers and organizations, surprisingly little has been written on humanitarian organizations as research brokers. Critical examination of these partnerships is important, however, because working with an organizational affiliation may define the parameters within which a researcher can operate (Haar, Heijmans, and Hilhorst 2013).

This article brings together critical reflections from six researchers engaged in such a partnership in the context of an intimate partner violence prevention program in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). We foreground some of the important benefits of such collaborations in conflict-affected contexts, and also consider the attendant challenges that can arise when walking the researcher-humanitarian line. We posit that the intersection of academic and humanitarian identities can

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5 We follow Baaz and Utas (Introduction to this issue) in defining brokers as “key persons in-between the researcher and the researched who regulate access and flows of knowledge between them.” Baaz and Utas note that brokers “often become the eyes and ears of researchers.” Because our article focuses on the role of humanitarian organizations in facilitating academic research in conflict-affected contexts, we are predominantly interested in the brokering roles played by actors implicated in this work. A key component of Baaz and Utas’ definition is that brokers also often assume the role of “local research assistant”. While we focus on a range of different “brokers” (including drivers, program staff, and organizational security personnel), three of the article’s authors – Banga, Cimanuka, and Hategekimana – also assumed the role of local research assistants in the field. Banga, Cimanuka, and Hategekimana were tasked with data collection, yet were also employees of the International Rescue Committee, the humanitarian organization facilitating our research. Lake, Lewis and Pierotti periodically participated in data collection, and oversaw the research from afar. These different roles are discussed in depth in Part III of the manuscript.

6 Our discussion centers on a research project that took place from April 2016 to January 2017. We write this deeply conscious of the changing political and humanitarian landscape in DRC since the culmination of the project. We offer our respects to the humanitarians, investigators, peacekeepers, activists, journalists, and others whose lives were taken in their efforts to mitigate the worst effects of conflict, and/or in the pursuit of peace, truth, and justice in DRC and beyond.
open a productive space for research in conflict settings. It can also, however, produce tensions and trade-offs that are not easily resolved. This article delineates three sets of interrelated paradoxes – and the research trade-offs each engender – for consideration by researchers entering into similar academic-humanitarian partnerships. These trade-offs have crucial repercussions for data collection, as well as for the analysis and interpretation of research findings.

For humanitarian organizations, academic partnerships are increasingly important in light of intensifying calls for evidence-based programming across scholarship, policy, and practice (Falb et al. In Press). For academic researchers, such organizational affiliations allow access to new data, they permit academics to scale-up their research, and they can aid with research permissions, security umbrellas, and logistical resources that can be hard to come by for otherwise ‘independent’ researchers (Humphreys 2014; Peter and Strazzari 2017). These can be especially valuable amidst a shrinking research space, whereby states are tightening research and visa entry restrictions, and universities are increasingly regulating fieldwork clearance.

Yet, such partnerships confer researchers with a humanitarian identity to negotiate alongside their academic one. On the one hand, individuals engaging in such partnerships represent the ‘researcher’ who is aspirationally ‘removed’ from service provision in order to partake in observation and knowledge production. However, they, also represent the organization, which may have a history and reputation of service provision, protection, or assistance in the research site. Researchers must therefore walk the line between ‘brokering’ the infrastructural support, contextual knowledge, and vast networks humanitarian organizations can provide, while simultaneously distancing themselves from the organization’s humanitarian role to mitigate influences on research participation and data generation. As such, how academic researchers and humanitarian organizations navigate these partnerships in practice impacts heavily on the research process and knowledge produced.7

In the following discussion, we present the logistical, methodological and ethical paradoxes that emerged from an academic research partnership undertaken in eastern DRC between the World

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7 Academic-humanitarian partnerships also have implications vis-à-vis humanitarian programming, which are important to consider in their own right but fall outside the scope of this particular article.
Bank, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and six academic researchers hailing from DRC, the UK, and the US. While these paradoxes are grounded in a specific research partnership, the three trade-offs that follow bear consideration by researchers undertaking a variety of different types of collaboration. Logistically, organizational affiliations facilitate access to some sites and participants, and necessarily constrain others. Methodologically, humanitarian affiliations may facilitate trust between researchers and populations but can also introduce unforeseen barriers between researchers and participants. Ethically, partnerships may present the possibility of infrastructure for referral support if necessary, but they simultaneously present researchers with a quandary of benefiting from the privileges of humanitarian access without offering directly any of the assistance or protection associated with humanitarian practitioners. As a result, researchers and research brokers embedded in such partnerships seek to deploy, diminish, and moderate their organizational / humanitarian identities differently at different stages of the research process. Understanding these trade-offs, and the ensuing decisions researchers make in the field, is crucial for contextualizing the findings of any study undertaken through such a collaboration.

II. Contextualizing Humanitarian-Academic Partnerships

Despite the increasing prevalence of humanitarian-academic partnerships in conflict-affected contexts, existing literature reveals a surprising scholarly gap in rendering transparent their effects on the research process. The multiple and complex facets of researcher positionality, and the ways in which different embodied identities come to bear on the research process is well documented in literatures on qualitative research methods in particular (e.g. England 1994; Henry, Higate, and Sanghera 2009; Rose 1997; Merriam et al. 2001; Smyth 2005; Sriram et al. 2009; Thomson, Ansoms, and Murison 2013). Similarly, a vast (and growing) literature on research ethics explicates the dilemmas, tensions, and trade-offs associated with researchers being mistaken for service providers and benefiting from attendant assumptions of assistance (e.g., Brown 2009; Cronin-Furman and Lake 2017; Wood 2006).

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8 The World Bank Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) was contracted by IRC to conduct a mixed-methods randomized control trial evaluation of its program, Engaging Men through Accountable Practice (EMAP). This article focuses exclusively on the two qualitative phases of this research conducted by the authors from April 2016 to January 2017.
These ‘mistaken’ identities can cloud processes of informed consent (e.g. Campbell 2017; Enria 2018). Yet, given the burgeoning number of formalized partnerships between academic researchers and humanitarian organizations in recent years, the specific sets of challenges they introduce for differently situated researchers is worthy of further analytical exploration.

Emergent literatures that bring together these distinct ‘lifeworlds’ tend to foreground institutional divides to be “bridged,” rather than necessarily reflecting on their implications for the research process.9 Focusing on Ebola response efforts in West Africa, for example, Levine (2016) highlights the significance of academic research for humanitarian response. Similarly, Enhancing Learning & Research for Humanitarian Research (ELRHA, 2012: 14), produced a guide for effective practitioner-researcher collaboration, but emphasized the overarching goal of improving humanitarian practice. While the implications for humanitarians are undoubtedly important, so too are the logistical, methodological and ethical implications for research and knowledge co-production when walking the researcher-humanitarian line.

We join Myrttinen & Mastonshoeva (this issue) in seeking to redress this gap. In this article, we treat humanitarian organizations as crucial research brokers that facilitate aspects of academic research in conflict-affected settings. We also posit that the researcher-humanitarian partnership engenders an identity to be “brokered”. The researcher may resultingly draw on – and de-emphasize – their humanitarian identity at different moments of the research process. In embodying an “embedded observer” on the one hand; and a perceived (potential) source of protection, assistance and program delivery, on the other, humanitarian and researcher identities can both complement and contest one another.10 We reflect on the balancing acts at play when these two identities are inhabited simultaneously; that is, when researchers ‘wear’ – literally or figuratively – humanitarian clothes.

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9 We note van der Haar et al. 2013 as a key exception. We also acknowledge a parallel literature on research ethics in experimental research, which foregrounds the ethical implications of decisions made in the research process, but does not typically focus explicitly on humanitarian-academic partnerships (e.g., (Baaz and Stern 2008; Verweijen 2015).

10 We are cognisant of the fact that humanitarian organizations are not always perceived as sources of protection or assistance, and in many conflict contexts are received with apprehension or suspicion. The academic-humanitarian identity inevitably shifts with the shifting power relations underpinning the organization’s reputation within a particular research site.
Specifically, we reflect on the implications of academic-humanitarian partnerships for the ways researches are able to embed in and navigate their research sites, the kinds of security-related decisions that can and cannot be made, and how affiliations with humanitarian organizations can bear upon processes of informed consent, research participation, and the reputational capital of the organization in the community. We acknowledge that the compatibility of these identities, and their productivity, depend heavily on perceptions of the facilitating organization in any particular research context. To be clear, we do not profess to offer a blueprint for researchers engaging in humanitarian partnerships. Rather, our hope is that this discussion, and the framework presented in Table 1, can guide discussions around the logistical, methodological, and ethical questions that can arise when research is brokered through a humanitarian organization in conflict-affected settings.

III. Project background and research context

We use a cross-institutional collaborative research project centred around an intimate partner violence prevention program in eastern DR Congo to explore the effects of organizational affiliations for academic research conducted in conflict-affected research sites. The program, implemented by IRC, is one of IRC’s largest and longest-running initiatives designed to address the root causes of gender-based violence through behavioural and attitudinal change. Since 2002, IRC has been working with local organizations, community-based groups and health partners to provide comprehensive services to gender-based violence survivors. The initiative we studied, “Engaging Men through Accountable Practice” (EMAP), sought to increase gender equality and men’s accountability to women in their community through weekly women’s and men’s discussion groups over six months. The discussion groups sought to improve intra-household relationship quality, reduce intimate partner violence, and question existing gender norms. While the evaluation included a quantitative component, this article focuses on the experiences and reflections of the qualitative research team. EMAP was implemented across North and South Kivu by IRC’s Women’s Empowerment and Protection team, who facilitated
our research in collaboration with IRC’s Research, Evaluation, and Learning (REL) Technical Unit. Both phases of research were approved by IRC’s institutional review board (IRB).\textsuperscript{11}

While the research was led by the World Bank’s Gender Innovation Lab (GIL), all research was carried out through IRC. IRC provided invaluable logistical support and facilitated travel across the Kivus for each member of the research team. For parts of the research, IRC provided drivers and vehicles visibly marked with IRC’s logos. For security purposes, in the more volatile parts of North Kivu, researchers travelled in IRC convoys of minimum two cars and wore IRC t-shirts, lanyards, and badges. The research was facilitated by organizational employees including IRC drivers and security personnel, organizational interlocutors in the field sites, and other IRC contacts. Moreover, three of the project’s researchers were recruited as IRC employees. In collaboration with the three foreign (women) researchers, the IRC-employed researchers, all Congolese nationals (men), were responsible for the majority of data collection. For these reasons, IRC (rather than the World Bank) was the most visible and salient institutional identity exhibited by the researchers throughout the data collection.

The qualitative research was conducted in two phases. The first phase consisted of more than 100 interviews with male EMAP participants, other villagers, and community and religious leaders conducted in fourteen sites prior to program implementation. This phase was designed to probe gender attitudes and to understand the depth of support for the program, as well as the characteristics of the communities in which we were working. Interviews were conducted exclusively by two teams of Congolese researchers, including Banga, Cimanuka and Hategekimana, in North and South Kivu. Lewis, a white foreign woman, travelled with the teams to oversee data collection in each of the research sites. In addition to IRC drivers, the team travelled with a Congolese member of IRC’s Women’s Empowerment and Protection unit program staff and a Congolese member of its research staff to facilitate access in the field and aid with the recruitment of research participants. In each of the research sites, IRC had an established presence and engaged in active service provision; service availability represents an important ethical condition of IRC’s approach to the research it conducts.

\textsuperscript{11} The study was approved by the IRC Institutional Review Board on 7 March 2016 (IRB number: 00009752) and a continuing review application was approved on 30 March 2017.
The second phase of the research took place between August 2016 and January 2017 and consisted of observing EMAP’s implementation in six purposively selected communities. During this second phase, the researchers’ IRC identities were less palpably visible. The researchers travelled to the sites by motorbikes rather than IRC vehicles and did not wear IRC t-shirts. In order to gain deeper insights into (changing) patterns of gendered behavior, Banga, Cimanuka, and Hategekimana embedded as much as possible within the research communities. This second longitudinal and embedded phase was part of the original conception of the research plan, designed to build relationships with participants and follow them through the roll-out of the program. This ethnographic approach was critical, given that social change is near impossible to capture relying on interview data alone. This was carried out in close coordination with Lake, Lewis, and Pierotti, who reviewed weekly fieldnotes remotely. Leveraging their Congolese and gender identities, the embedded researchers observed the men’s discussions groups, got to know a select number of EMAP participants, conducted ethnographic observations in the communities, and arranged interviews with other purposively selected respondents. Banga, Cimanuka and Hategekimana became regular and trusted presences in the villages, frequenting spaces where residents gathered, such as ligalas (bars/drinking houses) and churches. The non-Congolese authors only occasionally visited the research sites as their presence as visibly foreign impacted on the research, as discussed below.

In the sections that follow we explore the logistical, methodological and ethical paradoxes that emerged during the collaboration. We use the conceit of the paradox to capture the duality with which the productive opportunities, benefits, and protections born out through the partnership gave rise to a number of associated constraints. The trade-offs and ensuing decisions navigated by the research team provide a framework (captured in Table 1) to guide future researchers when embarking on similar collaborations.

IV. Deploying humanitarian identity: Facilitating entry, enforcing exit

The first – logistical – paradox inherent within organizational-academic partnerships illuminates the ways in which humanitarian identities and organizational affiliations can both facilitate and constrain research access simultaneously. In the context of this study, each of the six authors travelled
under IRC security protocols. This humanitarian affiliation – and porting a visible humanitarian identity – came with important and necessary logistical benefits. Working with an organization as visible as IRC enabled access to remote and conflict-affected areas of eastern DRC, including areas that remain under the control of armed groups. Without such support, access to data from these sites would have been challenging at best, and untenable for our team within the time allocated for the data collection.

The relative logistical ease of working through an organization such as IRC stems not only from its established presence and reputation, but from the myriad, often unseen and rarely acknowledged institutional actors who play diverse ‘brokering roles’ throughout data collection. IRC programmatic and research staff, for instance, offered the logistical infrastructure to set-up and carry out the data collection. In this case, IRC staff oversaw the recruitment of local researchers, arranged travel and lodging for the research teams, and facilitated introductions to local authorities in the research sites. Institutional security managers closely monitored and negotiated access for research teams prior to and during field missions, and determined when, where, and for how long research teams could stay in each location. Security personnel also determined and coordinated how teams responded, including evacuations, when insecurity arose. A final, crucial and often under-acknowledged, “broker” in such settings is the organizational driver; drivers enable access, in literal and physical terms, to research sites sometimes across near impracticable terrains, negotiate passage at checkpoints, and work to resolve any altercations that may arise en route.

This is not to suggest that entry to conflict-affected research sites is otherwise inaccessible to independent or academic researchers. On the contrary, and as we later discuss, such partnerships can constrain access in important ways. Moreover, many academics undertake research in conflict-affected settings independently, brokering other gatekeeping relationships to enable access. Nevertheless, humanitarian organizations with a longstanding presence in particular research sites often have relationships in place that can facilitate data collection and / or safe travel to and from remote locations.

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12 For each of the six researchers, all travel, visa invitations, access, ordres de missions, transport, office space, and other important logistical details were facilitated by IRC.
13 See, for example, Baaz and Stern (2008) and Verweijen (2015).
This is extraordinarily helpful when researchers seek to pursue large data collection efforts under pressing time constraints.

In our research, IRC’s logistical contributions were most pronounced in Phase One of the research, when two research teams traversed fourteen sites in eight weeks. Conducting the data collection with IRC’s support meant that we were able to ‘set up office’ in our research sites with relative ease, benefiting from community spaces built by IRC as safe locales for interviews. In addition, working with IRC program staff and their local contacts eased the process of identifying research participants so that interviews could, for the most part, start as soon as the research team arrived on site. Our affiliation with IRC also meant that team members were able to access office space, electricity, and relatively stable internet when ‘at base’ in Goma and Bukavu. For anyone who has conducted research in ‘challenging’ contexts, the value of each of these factors should not be understated. Importantly, office space permitted the research teams to write up, upload, back-up, and send the data generated over the course of the week to the other members of the research team.

In addition, humanitarian identities can offer valuable security protections.\textsuperscript{14} This derives from two related factors. First is the logistical support provided to facilitate and systematize “check-ins,” information sharing, and protocols for evacuation in the event of violence. The second is the importance of sporting an easily recognisable identity, particularly when working in sensitive and volatile conflict-affected contexts. Throughout our research, but particularly in Phase Two when the researchers were less visibly associated with IRC, each of the Congolese members of the research team was approached by representatives from the notorious and omnipresent \textit{Agence Nationale de Reseignements (ANR)} –

\textsuperscript{14} The authors note that the security protections afforded by ‘humanitarian status’ vary regionally and contextually and cannot be taken for granted. The shrinking humanitarian space within which personnel operate engenders increasingly significant costs, particularly for national staff who are typically exposed to far greater risks (Humanitarian Outcomes 2017: 3). Moreover, humanitarians are not always perceived as sources of protection. Indeed, in the aftermath of failed missions and interventions, for example, humanitarian actors can be targeted directly, or viewed with resentment and hostility. Humanitarian actors and other interveners have also been known to abuse their protective status, including through the sexual exploitation and abuse of host populations. As such, the impact of humanitarian identity on a research process depends heavily on the contextual dynamics of the specific research site. Throughout our research in eastern DRC, a familiarity with and acceptance of IRC staff was evident, and expectations of humanitarian assistance were widespread; however, we do not presume this to be the case in other research settings.
the national secret service – as well as national police and the army. This was especially prevalent for one of the authors embedded in communities in North Kivu located near the Rwandan border. These villages had been strongholds for the M23 armed group during its occupation a few years previously. This author’s field notes frequently reference persistent community suspicions of “negative forces” in the area. Being able to easily demonstrate that he was working with IRC, and observing IRC activities in the community, enabled him to maintain his presence in the community without raising the suspicion that he was an ANR spy. Similarly when armed clashes broke out close to another author’s research site, IRC was immediately informed of rising tensions through its networks across the Kivus. IRC was quickly able to communicate with the researcher and revise his security protocol accordingly, introducing new curfews and “no go” zones for the research.

The team experienced a similar and all the more stark example of the access – and ensuing protections – afforded to the researchers by virtue of their humanitarian status and affiliation during Phase One. Due to ongoing insecurity in and around the more remote sites included in the study, the team in North Kivu was instructed to travel in convoys of no less than two cars. Team members were also instructed to wear IRC t-shirts and keep their IRC badges visible at all times. As the team arrived at one site, the convoy was met by clear and visible representatives of an armed group, who controlled the surrounding area. Since these remote areas were rarely visited by humanitarian organizations, the visit had been carefully negotiated by IRC’s security manager. Without the visibility of the humanitarian organization, and this pre-negotiated access IRC was able to arrange, it is likely research permission would have been denied.

In another site during Phase One, upon the research team’s arrival, IRC’s research coordinator received a phone call from the organisation’s security manager informing the team of a change in the security situation and instructing them to return to ‘base’ in a nearby town to await further instructions. As one of the author’s fieldnotes recounts:

“We calmly and politely excused ourselves to the facilitators, the respondents, and the head nurse [for abruptly cancelling the interviews scheduled] explaining that we had been called
back to the office – we did not mention the insecurity. The head nurse graciously understood but said ‘it’s like you know the war is coming.’

Conscious not to incite a sense of panic, the team had not mentioned the developing insecurity. However, the abrupt departure of a humanitarian organization sent a clear signal to residents of the community. Clashes had broken out between the Mai-Mai APCLS and the FARDC brigade stationed in the area. Returning to the hotel, the situation seemed to have calmed, although many of the town’s residents were either lining the roads awaiting to see how the situation would unfold or were fleeing with their belongings and cattle. At this point, the qualitative research team and other personnel traveling with IRC were stationed in the hotel and were informed that all other humanitarian organizations in the zone had evacuated. After an hour or so of waiting, the teams received the green light from the security manager to return to Goma, the provincial capital, for the weekend. While preparing to leave, gun shots were heard on the other side of the hotel compound wall. The team’s return swiftly became an evacuation. Teams were instructed by IRC to leave quickly in convoys, but in paced succession, so as to minimize panic among the local residents.

Security incidents and attendant protocols such as the ones described interact with identities, beyond the researcher/humanitarian status. As demonstrated by James vis-à-vis Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), race and (inter)nationality feature heavily in the organization’s everyday security management (2019, unpublished: 3). Indeed, James examines the colloquially termed ‘donkey rule,’ wherein a white expatriate is placed “in the front of an MSF convey to protect the rest of the team,” highlighting the operational function of associations of whiteness with ‘neutrality’ (ibid: 2). Other ways in which identities interact with insecurity include who is permitted or expected to travel where, and who can leave and where to when security concerns arise. With respect to the incident described above, all researchers were evacuated to the same place: Goma. In that sense, the security protocol applied equally to the whole team, regardless of race and nationality. Different expectations did, however, emerge later. Once the security situation had calmed, the researchers would return. Counter to the

‘donkey rule,’ however, the foreign researcher’s presence was deemed too risky for the team due to her heightened visibility. At this point, then, institutional restrictions on entry and exit fell differently on the research team, squarely on the basis of race and nationality.\textsuperscript{16}

The examples above illustrate the challenges of assessing the balance of (perceived) risk with the pursuit of ‘good,’ ‘interesting,’ or (potentially) ‘important’ data. It is evident that the locations above would have been more challenging to access without IRC’s support. Moreover, the evacuation processes in place facilitated a speedy and safe departure for everyone, without which the decision to travel to these sites would have been markedly different. Nevertheless, the need to rely heavily on organizational infrastructure to conduct research safely and effectively was not without consequences, particularly in the form of the constraints it introduced for the research team in Phase One and later for the embedded researchers in Phase Two.

During Phase Two, each of the authors experienced a number of instances in which they grappled with the challenges of respecting IRC’s security protocols. Where the researchers perceived the constraints most palpably was with respect to IRC’s ‘heures sécues’ – or security hours – which determined when the researchers were permitted to travel to the research site and when they were required to leave. For more remote sites, this often meant that the researchers could only spend two to three hours on site, which had evident implications for time available for data collection, including for interviews and group observations. As one author reflects:

“…I often had to leave the site before the men’s discussions group had finished even though these were moments that I, personally, thought it would be better for me [to stay] and have more data. But the IRC [policy] determines the security hours of [IRC] staff in this zone, I was forced to return to the hotel, despite the fact that the [EMAP] participants were engaged in full debate.”

\textsuperscript{16} It is obvious, although worth noting, that when the security situation in humanitarian settings deteriorates significantly, foreign employees of international organizations are often evacuated from the country altogether, while national employees may be left behind.
Similarly, another researcher’s field notes raised the issue that the security restrictions and their attendant limits on time in the field “was very good for us as researchers but weren’t without negative consequences on the information gathered for the research.”17 He further explained that “a large part of household tasks – which were a central focus of the study – are executed in the evening whist everyone is at home, but given the security requirements of an international NGO, we were forced to only be present for observations in the household during the day.” By respecting the stringent security protocols established by the organisation, we missed crucial opportunities to embed with the communities with whom we were interacting, and to observe and generate data that would have been of value for the project. While these barriers to immersion are familiar to foreign researchers whose institutions often require them to abide by different security protocols than national researchers in conflict-affected research sites, restrictions extend to local researchers and brokers, including drivers and program staff, when they are operating under the responsibility of humanitarian organizations. In the context of ethnographic research, this meant rupturing the process of relationship building and observing everyday interactions in the communities.

The logistics paradox vis-à-vis humanitarian partnerships is thus born out of a trade-off. While playing a crucial role in facilitating access to communities and data, providing infrastructural support, and ensuring security for researchers that allows them to safely conduct research in volatile contexts, organizational affiliations inhibit the researcher’s autonomy, subjecting them to the security protocols required of other humanitarian personnel. Thus, while enabling access to some data, such affiliations, and the security protocols associated with them, can constrain access to others. Data collection implications notwithstanding, there is significant value in institutionally enforcing exit. Prioritising the researchers’ security in this way effectively takes the decision to leave the site out of the researchers’ hands. Deciding to exit can be challenging for anyone with the possibility of such a choice. It can, however, be especially challenging for national researchers navigating the power imbalances of working with (or, for) international researchers and an international humanitarian organization, and who may fear missing out on employment in a precarious labour market as a result of withdrawing from

17 Field Notes, South Kivu, 22 May 2018.
insecure locations. Bearing this first set of tensions in mind, the next section focuses on the ensuing methodological repercussions for the researcher in humanitarian clothes.

V. Diminishing humanitarian identity: Building trust and signalling difference

For methodological reasons, researchers working in conflict-affected contexts frequently face incentives to “play up” and “play down” their humanitarian affiliations at different moments of the research process. Locally-networked humanitarian organizations can facilitate safe entry, as well as trust and acceptance, among gatekeepers, powerbrokers and research participants. At the same time, humanitarian affiliations can signal privilege and distinction, which has methodological implications for qualitative research. This tension can be compounded for more embedded or ethnographically informed research.

For example, in violence-affected research sites, where an organization is well established and well connected, researchers may rely on their affiliation with a service-providing organization to establish trust and build rapport. Doing so, however, engenders two repercussions, which we discuss in turn in this section. First, invoking humanitarian or organizational affiliations in order to build trust can compromise the researcher’s ability to simultaneously establish “insider” status or common ground with her research subjects, which might enable deeper insights into participants’ daily lives. Second, at the same time that researchers might call upon their humanitarian status to enable entry and acceptance in a community, they must simultaneously establish independence from that organization to guard against participants’ inclinations to represent themselves according to organizationally-endorsed mandates. In the sections that follow, we outline these tensions as they emerged in our own work, and the methodological opportunities and pitfalls they create.

The methodological benefits of humanitarian affiliations were apparent throughout our collaboration. Project fieldnotes consistently referenced the ways in which their humanitarian identities contributed to trust building with participants. Each of the Congolese authors noted that their affiliation
with IRC, due its longstanding relationship with the communities, facilitated their “rapid acceptance in the field.”  

In a report to the research team reflecting on his interviews, one researcher pointed out:

“Collaborating with this organisation, thus having the IRC visibility - which is an organisation that has worked in the targeted communities for a long time - enabled us in a first instance to get the consent of our interviewees. This is explicable, in part, by the fact that these communities are beneficiaries of IRC projects. In effect, they had an interest from the outset to receive us and answer our research questions.”

Another researcher’s field notes echoed this logic, noting “when you are with humanitarian visibility in front of the participant, they trust you because you’re with an NGO known in the community. Therefore, they won’t be scared to give you information because they know that you’re coming to give them support so they will talk about everything and nothing. They know that later you can bring aid.” In many conflict-affected communities, mistrust of unknown individuals – and, in DRC, suspicions that outsiders may be affiliated with ANR, for example – is a common response to ongoing insecurity. Affiliation with a locally-known NGO permits researchers to inhabit a recognizable and easily understood identity, which can assuage suspicions and put the communities in which researchers work at ease. In eastern DRC, the ease with which researchers could revert to their IRC identities during run-ins with security personnel, showing their badges and paperwork, was therefore invaluable. These identities gave the researchers a cloak of institutional protection without which the research would have been significantly more risky.

Nevertheless, from the excerpts above, it is evident that humanitarian affiliations also pose methodological challenges. At the same time as these affiliations can build trust and acceptance, they can also create barriers and expectations. Many researchers working in aid-dependent contexts have called attention to the challenges of overcoming the perception that they are aid workers or humanitarians (Brown 2009; Clark 2012; Mitchell 2013). When explicitly partnering with humanitarian

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18 Field Notes. South Kivu. 22 May 2018.  
21 See Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert (2008) on gatekeeping and access more broadly.
organizations, establishing the status of an independent researcher can be even more challenging. Given that security constraints made it impossible for the researchers to shed their humanitarian affiliations completely, their organizational ties at times emerged as a visible barrier to be overcome. The *heures sécues* and the need to promptly evacuate their field sites at the first sign of renewed conflict re-affirmed a lingering barrier between the researchers and the communities in which they were otherwise assimilated. Moreover, these institutional protections were unavailable to community members in the research sites, thus serving as a stark and enduring reminder of the privileges that set the embedded researchers visibly apart from their research subjects. In conflict-affected eastern DRC, working to be integrated as an “insider” in the community required continuous effort, since adherence to IRC security measures served as a constant reminder of difference.22

As such, during Phase Two, the (Congolese) researchers simultaneously used their humanitarian affiliations as a crutch to enable entry and acceptance, but invested considerable and continuous efforts to diminish this identity and embed more fully in the lives of their research subjects.

A related tension that emerged derived from the need to avoid influencing the way that research participants presented themselves and their circumstances. As highlighted above, respondents can interpret studies affiliated with humanitarian organizations as needs assessments, and may use interviews as an opportunity to present the hardships experienced in the community. In addition, the degree to which participants are reminded that they are taking part in a research project has implications for their willingness to make statements or behave in ways that conflict with the organization’s values (Angotti and Kaler 2013). For example, participants are more likely to adhere to behavioural and ideological scripts endorsed by institutional actors in one-on-one interviews with a researcher than as participants in ethnographic observation. For studies conducted in partnership with humanitarian organizations, participants’ responses will be affected not only by their “research awareness,” but also a “humanitarian awareness.” That is to say, their consent to participate and responses to questions might

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22 See Thapa-Björkert and Henry (2004) on researcher positionality, and insider-outsider status. See Henry, Higate, and Sanghera (2009) and Narayan (1993) for a discussion of the false dichotomy such a discussion creates. These discussions have important implications for Phase Two of the project, given that the embedded Congolese researchers were always “outside” by virtue of their researcher status, despite many facets of shared identity with research participants.
be underpinned by an expectation that doing so might lead to future assistance and/or opportunities. This may remain the case even when the consent process includes explicit and ongoing reminders that participation in the research does not bear any relation to the receipt of aid in the immediate or longer-term future (Dugas and Graham 2011; Enria 2018; Molyneux 2004).

Not unexpectedly, during Phase One, the combination of the presence of the cars and of a (white) foreign researcher rendered it more challenging for the Congolese researchers to diminish their humanitarian status. One of the Congolese authors noted that because of this dynamic he was concerned that respondents “were going to give us information to advocate for their cause in the community so they could receive aid.”

During Phase Two, another author similarly recounted that because of his affiliation with IRC, when observing the men’s discussion groups, particularly during the earlier sessions, he was frequently asked if he was a ‘spy’ sent on mission by IRC to supervise the groups.

When Lake (a foreign researcher) visited one of the field sites in Phase Two, her presence provoked such a strong reaction from the community that the team decided that visits from the foreign researchers would create too many expectations surrounding the team’s presence in the field sites, and could compromise the value of the data. Subsequently, the team decided that the foreign authors should no longer visit the research sites in person. This decision helped to ameliorate expectations that the researchers were capable of providing material benefits, but the Congolese researchers were nevertheless consistently engaged in balancing their access to the communities with the need to diminish expectations surrounding service or assistance provision.

Researchers operating with a humanitarian identity can influence responses from participants not only because participants consciously seek to extract support from the researchers, but also because the humanitarian agenda may simply be a salient contextual feature of the interaction. First, the knowledge of humanitarian employees inevitably shaped the way the research was structured, the types of questions we asked, and our baseline assumptions about the project. Second, humanitarian affiliations inevitably influence the co-constitution of knowledge. In addition to the above discussion, research participants likely inadvertently shifted their own self-presentation by virtue of their pre-existing

impressions of who they were interacting with. While respondents did not necessarily distort their responses, behavioural and representational shifts can arise inadvertently (Jerolmack and Khan 2014). By way of example, when visiting a doctor, one may be inclined to represent their dietary and exercise regimes in ways that are consistent with the way they would like to behave; in other words, how they think about themselves and what is expected of them, even if this image is aspirational. Similarly, in interviews about hiring practices, employers may respond to questions in ways that correspond with their genuinely-held principles of non-discrimination in hiring. In reality, however, their behaviors may not always align with the ideologies they understand to be guiding their choices (Pager and Quillian 2005).

In this study, the influence of the authors’ humanitarian identity and their association with IRC was perceptible by participants. It may have encouraged men to report on ways in which their behaviour was consistent with the gender equality principles advocated by IRC. It was common, for example, for men to emphasise how much they help in their household, while indicating that ‘other’ men in the community were the source of the problem. During Phase One (the baseline study), some respondents heralded the positive influence of the program – which had not yet been implemented – on their lives and their commitment to gender equality and non-violence.

To mitigate these representational pitfalls in the interview context, and to understand the meanings and behaviours of individuals in the context of their daily lives, researchers often attempt to “shed” their humanitarian identities, and seek ways to establish “insider” credentials among the research participants they study (Angotti and Sennott 2015; Schatz et al. 2015; Watkins and Swidler 2009). Ethnography and embedded research is premised on building rapport and becoming a non-disruptive presence in a particular research site, in order to comprehend situated and subjective meaning (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011; Haar, Heijmans, and Hilhorst 2013; Schatz 2009; van Voorst and Hilhorst 2019).

The Congolese researchers adopted a number of strategies to overcome these distinctions, downplay their privilege, and embed in their field sites. In his field notes, one author calls attention to the ways in which he sought to de-emphasize his affiliation with a humanitarian organization, in order to “play up” his identity as an independent researcher. He highlights the importance of an ethnographic approach to doing so: “the longer we spent together, they abandoned those ideas of me and, in the end,
they were calling me dear friend, and GDH colleague. There was no doubt for me that this obstacle [of IRC affiliation] had been overcome.” Author 4 similarly noted: “The fact of speaking the same language (local language), of sharing food and a drink (in the liga\textsc{la}s), of participating in quotidian tasks with participants (participating in the work in the fields even in the rain and storms), the fact of living for a while with them and sharing the same culture. We became accustomed to and closer to one another.”

In summary, conducting research with humanitarian partners in conflict-affected settings threads a methodological needle. On the one hand, it brings methodological advantages because it can encourage trust, access and acceptance in communities where insecurity reigns. On the other hand, the need to adhere to security protocols and the privilege of exit in cases of rising insecurity, challenge the ability of researchers to establish an embedded status fundamental to observing everyday meaning and behavior. In other words, while organizational affiliation can facilitate trust and acceptance in some contexts, it can undermine “insider-ness” by signalling privilege and difference in others. Even when a researcher or broker grew up in the village in which they are conducting the research, an organizational affiliation introduces a distinction that sets him/her apart from other inhabitants of his/her research site. This methodological paradox can have important implications that necessarily shape the types of knowledge, data, and access generated.

VI. Conflicting Identities / Ethical Binds: Profiting without Providing

Thus far, the article has highlighted some of the logistical and methodological tensions that emerge for national and foreign researchers as they negotiate, and broker, a humanitarian identity assumed through an organizational affiliation. Here, we identify a third and final line to be walked: an ethical dilemma, in which researchers affiliated with humanitarian organizations are able to benefit from the privileges and protections humanitarian identity affords them, without offering any of the assistance or

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25 Field Notes. South Kivu. 14 May 2018. GDH refers to \textit{Groupe de Discussion des Hommes}, the term used for men’s EMAP groups.
services expected of them. In following paragraphs, we explicitly consider the ethical binds and dilemmas that arise as the researcher and their humanitarian status come into conflict.

As articulated by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), “human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found.” (UNOCHA 2012: 1). UNOCHA similarly notes: “the purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings” (ibid). Accordingly, when confronted with human harm, the key role of a humanitarian actor, then, is to act to alleviate that suffering. In effect, the principles by which humanitarian organisations abide underpin their perceived legitimacy to undertake their work. Conversely, the role of the researcher is, in principle, to observe, document, and theorize (Schepers-Hughes 1995; ELRHA 2012; Levine 2016). This can be an uncomfortable position to hold, particularly in the face of harm. Reflecting on her observer status in ethnography, Behar (1997: 6) notes that:

“Because there is no clear and easy route by which to confront the self who observes, most professional observers tend to develop defences, namely ‘methods’ that ‘reduce anxiety and enable us to function efficiently.’ Even saying, ‘I am an anthropologist, this is fieldwork,’ is a classic form of the use of methods to drain anxiety from situations in which we feel complicitous with structures of power, or helpless to release another from suffering, or at a loss as to whether to act or observe.”

These sentiments point to the fundamentally distinct parameters within which humanitarian personnel and researchers working in conflict settings are ‘mandated’ to operate (ELRHA 2012; Levine 2016). As illustrated in the three vignettes below, these roles and the expectations they engender can come into conflict in the research encounter.

During Phase One, our research team comprised three data collectors, two research coordinators (one Congolese IRC employee and one of the article’s foreign authors), and a Congolese IRC program staff member. During Phase One, therefore, the data collection included a white foreigner. Each member of the team was aware that the purpose of the trip was to collect data and not to provide material assistance or services of any kind. Despite arriving in full IRC visibility, the organisation’s research
role was to be kept separate from its programmatic one in order to discourage interviewees from aligning their comments with IRC’s program mandates. While clear in theory, operating in a context wherein humanitarian needs are high and wherein individuals exist in various forms of chronic precarity, maintaining distance from IRC’s programmatic role sometimes came under strain.

The first scenario occurred in the early part of Phase One, when the data collectors visited a remote village in North Kivu. While the data collectors were conducting interviews, the IRC program assistant was speaking to members of the community, who were not included in the research sample. After some time, he approached the two research coordinators and explained that a woman had come to him to request our assistance to bring her twelve year old daughter, who we were told had been raped and hurt her foot, to a hospital to receive treatment for the foot injury. For the research coordinators, this raised a number of uncomfortable questions. What obligations do researchers owe to those in their research sites, particularly when wearing humanitarian t-shirts? From a research perspective, among the questions the research and programmatic teams discussed were the implications for how the researchers might be perceived if they did (or did not) assist the young girl. Given the focus the team had placed on keeping their researcher role distinct from their service provision role, to avoid confusion or misperception in the communities in which they were working, in what ways, if at all, would being seen to assist a young girl encourage the perception that the IRC team was there to provide direct assistance to the community. Such a perception could have repercussions for the interview responses elicited. While negotiating these concerns, the program staff, perhaps justifiably, questioned the researchers’ humanitarian spirit: “I try to understand where you researchers are coming from, but when there’s a need, I prefer to act.” Ultimately, the decision was taken out of the team’s hands, as senior IRC staff contacted by phone authorized taking the girl to the nearest IRC supported health center. This was not the only occasion when members of the community made demands of assistance to members of the research team. Such instances illustrate the palpable tensions that arise when humanitarian and research identities – and the respective expectations of assistance versus observation they embody – collide.

The second scenario emerged in Phase Two when the researchers were embedded in their field sites. To mitigate social desirability bias, the researchers were encouraged not to be seen to take a position on the program and gender equality more broadly, to avoid exposing the normative commitments of the researcher. Towards this end and as discussed above, the research team was engaged in an ongoing effort to diminish their humanitarian affiliation so as not to be associated with IRC program goals. The researchers did not travel with IRC cars or t-shirts, and were less visibly ‘humanitarian.’ Relatedly, the team agreed that to build trust among respondents and to distance the researchers from the program, the principle of confidentiality would be respected vis-à-vis IRC. In other words, the researchers conducting the data collection would not relay conversations or observations to IRC staff. It was evident over the course of the data collection, however, that adopting these strategies did not ipso facto offset the ethical tensions that arose from inhabiting humanitarian and researcher identities simultaneously. Maintaining an observer stance sometimes proved challenging.

Notably, when confronted with instances of intimate partner violence, particularly when involving research or program participants, it was not always apparent what, if any, the researcher’s response should be. One researcher reflected on an incident when an EMAP participant was violent towards his wife. After learning that this was a frequent occurrence, his field notes document his turmoil as to how to respond. From a research perspective, he wanted to “understand in greater depth what the misunderstandings between them were and to ask his wife what she thought about the violence and what to do about it.”29 Yet, as an individual committed to gender equality, he notes that:

This had affected me greatly. When I talked to the wife, she told me that it is always what her husband does when things do not work well between them. The presence of visitors in the household, or even the fact that she was pregnant, did not seem to matter to him…Finally, I went to see the two IRC facilitators to find out what they thought we should do given this reaction from an EMAP participant. The facilitators initially suggested to exclude the participant from the group, but the IRC program staff instead

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29 Field Notes. South Kivu. 23 May 2018.
recommended that we allow him to continue participating with the others. The IRC supervisor noted that EMAP may be able to help him make changes in his life.”

Ultimately, the author sought confidential guidance from the program facilitators, making them aware of the situation. Yet it is evident that, for all researchers, efforts not to unduly influence participants’ responses presented a significant ethical bind, particularly in the face of harms inflicted. As made clear in the first scenario, such decisions are particularly pronounced when working in sites affected by grave violence. And attempted neutrality – or identifying an appropriate course of action – can prove even more challenging when balancing the dual identities of a researcher in humanitarian clothes, particularly when the research is made possible through an organization with a role and mandate to alleviate harm in the communities in which it is active. In this case, given that the focus of the research was a program explicitly designed to reduce gender-based violence, the fact that the incident in question involved a gender-based harm made it all the more fraught. While the researcher’s personal instincts aligned with his humanitarian identity, his researcher identity rendered him an onlooker/observer, constricting his impulse to ‘act.’

For all of the project’s authors, and across the research phases and sites, an even more common ethical challenge pertained to managing almost ubiquitous expectations of material assistance. As an institution, IRC provides different forms of support within the communities in which EMAP was implemented. IRC therefore had a pre-existing presence and support services in place where the program, and by extension, the data collection took place. In fact, for ethical reasons, IRC does not conduct research on violence against women in places where they do not have established referral services available for those who disclose an experience of violence. This is also significant from the perspective of research reciprocity, which occurs at the level of the community. Indeed, in the context

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30 The EMAP protocol states that should instances of violence perpetrated by EMAP members be reported or identified over the course of the sessions, the male participant should be excluded from the program. The EMAP program includes an explicit commitment to non-violence among its participants (IRC 2013). The EMAP facilitators were community members hired and trained by IRC to lead the weekly discussion groups, but were not IRC staff, per se.
of this study, as part of the process of negotiating informed consent, the interviewers emphasised the value of participating in the study for the amelioration of programmatic interventions in the long run.

Such rationale was, understandably, not always satisfactory for populations living in precarity. When expecting, or hoping for, aid – whether in the form of money, food, or even a drink – participants in the study did not always distinguish between immediate material assistance (in the form of individual material reciprocity) and community-level support (in the form of programmatic interventions or infrastructural support). One of the researcher’s field notes reflected that the expectation of material assistance was higher when the foreign researchers travelled with the teams. The researcher’s fieldnotes commented: “people would think ‘how can a mzungu come here and leave us like that?’ You see a white person and the immediate expectation is that this reflects material aid.”

In addition to potentially shaping research responses, this expectation poses additional ethical questions for individual researchers and for those representing IRC. Although IRC does not always provide direct material aid in the form of cash or food in eastern DRC, the association with, and attendant hope of, material aid by virtue of arriving with a humanitarian organization was, to some extent, inevitable. Another researcher’s fieldnotes captured this sentiment.

“No, when we arrived with the same organisation but without money to give them…we were perceived poorly. This was why […] the old man and other people told us that we were no longer welcome in the future. In other words, the fact that we just came with research questions but without any money, if we want to have data [from there] in the future, we can rest-assured that they will not provide them; unless we come with money.”

Through this encounter, it is clear that arriving as researchers, and not as humanitarian or program staff, can clash with people’s expectations. While the research team’s consent forms were explicit in stating that there would be no material gains for participating in the study, this did not necessarily dampen participants’ hopes. The failure to bring any ‘assistance’ was confusing, all the more so because the

32 Field Notes. South Kivu. 23 May 2018.
researchers donned a humanitarian identity, rendering such expectations (and ensuing disappointments) all the more pronounced.

Overall, the reflections discussed above demonstrate the heightened tensions that arise when a researcher – national or foreign – balances multiple, overlapping, and sometimes conflicting identities simultaneously, as is often the case when conducting research in a conflict setting. Crucially, they illustrate the ethical binds researchers may be confronted with as the distinct codes of ethics associated with each ‘role’ compete (Falb et al. In Press). Paradoxically, researchers partnering with humanitarian organizations are benefitting from the status and reputation that those organizations’ service provision ensures, yet failing to offer support or assistance to research participants. At times, this may undermine or damage the reputation of the organization locally. Moreover, as reflected above, what is deemed an appropriate response to such encounters can look quite different when seen from the vantage points of humanitarian on the one hand, and researcher, on the other. Identifying the most appropriate course of action can be rendered all the more complex when embodying these dual identities hand in hand.

Conclusion

Our research was conducted through and facilitated by one particular humanitarian organization, IRC, in one particular context, Eastern DRC. Academics engaged in different types of research in conflict-affected environments may be affiliated with humanitarian organizations to differing degrees. Indeed, IRC itself embarks on a variety of different types of academic partnerships, and employs different models of collaboration for each, including outsourcing data collection entirely to an independent third party. Yet even when working independently, foreign researchers operating in conflict-affected contexts may make use of NGOs, humanitarian organizations, or the United Nations to facilitate logistics and travel. They may rely on NGOs, humanitarian organizations, and their networks for evacuation should the security situation deteriorate. Or they may work with humanitarian research brokers to facilitate aspects of their otherwise unaffiliated or independent research. As the excerpts in the previous sections demonstrate, this may mean “playing up” one’s humanitarian identity in certain contexts (for the purposes of security personnel or local authorities), yet “playing it down” it during the research encounter.
Using a case study of a collaboration between IRC, the World Bank Gender Innovation Lab, and six differently situated researchers, this article demarcated three paradoxes – and the research trade-offs they gave rise to – that emerge from academic-humanitarian collaboration.

Logistically, we demonstrated that partnerships of this nature can facilitate and constrain different types of research access. Through our examination of IRC’s EMAP in North and South Kivu, we evidenced ways in which academic-humanitarian partnerships shape landscapes of security and protection for researchers and their brokers in volatile research sites. Researchers may draw on their humanitarian affiliations to facilitate access and enforce exit, particularly where conflict jeopardizes their security. The protections that organizational umbrellas can afford, however, can introduce new constraints on researcher access in the form of curfews and security protocols. These can impact researchers differently based on, inter alia, their race and (inter)nationality. Methodologically, the article demonstrated that humanitarian-researcher partnerships can engender the need to “play up” and “play down” intersecting identities at different stages of the research. Visibly porting humanitarian identities to facilitate security and access can pose challenges to the researchers’ perceived impartiality and independence. Moreover, humanitarian affiliations can build trust with research participants but inhibit their “insider” status in embedded research with implications for data collection. Ethically, the article exposed a tension faced by researchers when researching in ‘humanitarian clothes.’ Indeed, how the researcher is seen when conducting research in conflict-affected communities may differ from how the researcher sees herself. Conflicting expectations can put researchers and their humanitarian colleagues in difficult positions vis-à-vis inhabitants of their research sites. Researchers are likely to be met with the uncomfortable reality of profiting from the privileged access humanitarian identities afford, whilst failing to offer the services associated with them, and on which their reputational capital relies.

Understanding local perceptions of humanitarian organizations and their role is thus crucial for researchers navigating these intersecting and sometimes conflicting identities. The aim of this discussion is not to discourage humanitarian-academic partnerships in conflict-affected contexts. Rather, it is to call attention to some of the granular and easily overlooked tensions that arise for academic researchers and organizational research brokers. Table 1 lists some illustrative questions that
researchers should ask themselves as they consider collaborating with humanitarian organizations. Researchers undertaking humanitarian collaborations in conflict environments in the future would be well-placed to evaluate the myriad trade-offs such partnerships demand, and to consider how walking a researcher/humanitarian line can shape a project’s implementation, the research encounters themselves, and, indeed, the knowledge generated.

Table 1. Considerations for Researchers Embarking on Academic-Humanitarian Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Constraints</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Logistical</strong></td>
<td>How important is an organizational affiliation for obtaining local permissions and safe access to research sites?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the scale and speed of the research logistically feasible without assistance from an established organization?</td>
<td>How are security risks to researchers in different positions—especially international vs local—assessed by the partner organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What security risks exist for people without an affiliation with a known organization?</td>
<td>How will security protocols impact on the research process? Do the same protocols and procedures apply equally to all researchers on the team?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would an independent researcher travel through roadblocks and check points?</td>
<td>Do national members of the research team benefit from the same protections as foreign members?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What security protocols does the organization have in place for academic and research partners?</td>
<td>What is the history of the particular organization in the research site, and the reputation of humanitarian actors in general? Does an affiliation with a humanitarian organization potentially increase security risks faced by researchers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without an organizational partner to weigh the potential benefits of the research against the security risks, who will decide when it is safe to do research? Will all researchers on a team (international and national) have sufficient information and feel empowered to speak up when there are safety concerns?</td>
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| **Methodological** | How is the potential organizational partner perceived by people in the research areas? How much is it trusted? | How important is “insider” status for the research methods? How much will that status be undermined by |
| Are independent researchers likely to be received with suspicion without accreditation from a recognized presence in the region? | affiliation with a humanitarian organization?  
Will reference to the humanitarian organization make certain dispositions, needs, attitudes, or behaviors especially salient in the minds of research participants?  
What measures will the researchers take to establish independence from the organization, and mitigate the biases introduced as a result of their organizational affiliation?  
How will researchers contextualize the study’s findings and acknowledge the humanitarian affiliation in the study’s write up, given the likely bearing of this identity on the data elicited?  
Without a partnership with a humanitarian organization, will researchers be able to establish adequate referral pathways for addressing critical needs?  
How is reciprocity defined by the research team and by the organization? Do these definitions align and how might either impact on research encounters?  
What outputs/services are organizational affiliates expected to provide? How will researchers respond to requests for that type of assistance?  
How will the provision of services or the refusal to provide services affect the relationship with research participants and broader members of the community in the research site?  
How realistic is it to expect researchers to maintain distance from the organization during data collection? Which types of challenges to neutrality (for instance, requests for particular types of support) should be planned for in advance?  
What emotional burdens will the project’s efforts to establish autonomy place on those conducting research / interacting with research participants? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ethical | Without a partnership with a humanitarian organization, will researchers be able to establish adequate referral pathways for addressing critical needs?  
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What emotional burdens will the project’s efforts to establish autonomy place on those conducting research / interacting with research participants? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Will managing expectations of assistance or protection by local populations put researchers at any greater risk?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will asserting independence and declining requests for assistance damage the organization’s reputation in the community?</td>
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