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Why are you not doing research in your home country? dissecting expectations of southern researchers

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ABSTRACT

Why are you not researching your home country, and why did you choose "elsewhere"? Would research in another country in the South be familiar to you? Assumptions and prompts are often posed to southern researchers when they select their fieldwork and case studies. This article dissects the rationale behind southern researchers based in Western academia choosing countries other than their home, the fieldwork experience, and the creation of post-fieldwork knowledge. Through a reflexive approach, we discuss pre-fieldwork training, moving positionalities, gender and religious identities during fieldwork encounters and the imposition of Western perspectives in knowledge creation. To do so, we interrogate the entrenched inequalities in global power dynamics within the architecture of knowledge creation, emphasising the need to decolonise knowledge and (re)evaluate research ethics and training. This article advocates for re-considering knowledge creation and power shifting as a process rather than the outcome, and fieldwork as an essential knowledge creation component enabling post-knowledge production and doing research differently.

1. Introduction

Producing post-fieldwork knowledge uncovers layers of power that either amplify or ignore scholars' voices. Instances where Global South researchers conduct research outside their home countries often prompt questioning and necessitate justification from researchers' perspectives. There is an implicit expectation for already marginalised Global South researchers (Amarante and Zurbrigg 2022) to conduct their studies within local contexts, leveraging their expertise and insider knowledge. Western scholars are often encouraged to approach the Global South as outsider development scholars. In contrast, scholars from the Global South are expected to return to their native countries to occupy insider positions (Bayeck 2022; Bilgen, Nasir, and Schöneberg 2021; Ladino 2002). This ignores how some local researchers deviate from studying their home countries for security issues or to avoid the psychological toll that the research on "home" imposes. However, what if we put these difficulties and challenges aside and consider why the local researchers are perceived as assets to explain their homes as case studies while limiting attempts to become "experts" elsewhere?

Global South researchers are under-represented in producing knowledge for development studies. According to Crawford, Mai-Bornu, and Landström (2021), scholars in the Global South

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publish 3 per cent of articles published in leading Western journals, and less than 5 per cent are articles written by Southern authors. Similarly, Amarante and Zurbrigg (2022) note that only 16 per cent of development research is generated and disseminated by Global South researchers, with most of their work centring on their countries or regions of origin. Tilley and Kalina (2021) show that examples of Global South researchers conducting fieldwork in the Global North are rarer still. This is apparent in the recent debate sparked when the Journal of African Cultural Studies published a satirical scenario about a Tanzanian researcher undertaking fieldwork on the sexual practices of academics in North Oxford.

Moreover, in their research on the representation of African scholars, Briggs and Weathers (2016) found that the number of African-based authors in two leading African journals (African Affairs and Journal of Modern African Studies) was only 15 per cent in 2013. Another study by Chelwa (2021) found that research with an African focus was authored mainly by US and EU-based researchers, with only 25 per cent of surveyed articles having an African-based author. To foster Southern researchers' representation in development studies – among other disciplines – Open Access (OA) strategies are often promoted as a step towards shifting the power in knowledge production. However, Faciolince and Green (2021) argue that while OA provides a positive step towards making knowledge available as a public good, it does not solve the structural constraints of unequal participation of Southern scholars in knowledge creation.

The dominance of Western academia in knowledge creation in development studies, shaping research methodologies, ethical considerations, and thematic focus creates entrenched inequality within the architecture of knowledge creation. This has led to establishing developmental, geopolitical, and imaginative polarities – such as the distinctions between First, Second, and Third Worlds or developed and developing countries – contributing to (re)constructing mental, symbolic, and material realms of dependency and peripherality (Bilgen, Nasir, and Schöneberg 2021; Waisbich, Roychoudhury, and Haug 2021). It underscores the explicit manifestation of one-way knowledge creation and power imbalance within the research practice of development studies. For example, a recent article by Kamruzzaman (2024) argues that existing practices of knowledge production favour "white" and northern donor staff members of development organisations at the expense of local Bangladeshi researchers in knowledge production processes – a common scenario in development knowledge production among the Global South.

In this article, we critique the division of expertise between researchers based on their origins and aim to reflect on the power structures of knowledge creation in development studies and the suitability of current research training, ethics, and positionality to decolonising knowledge in development studies for Global South researchers based in Western academia. This article attempts to challenge current bias in development studies by unravelling the complexities of Global South researchers' positionality working in another Global South context from Western academia. Nevertheless, this article does not aim to present any causal analysis but instead to portray the moving positionalities of Global South researchers through illustrated self-ethnography episodes.

In the next section, we establish our conceptual discussion by focusing on Global South researchers' – based in Western academia – reflexivity, positionality, and knowledge creation in development studies. Further, we adopt a reflexive approach as our primary methodology. Then, we share our reflections on pre-fieldwork training in Section 4, followed by a stimulating discussion on power dynamics during fieldwork in Section 5. We conclude with remarks on shifting the power in knowledge production by highlighting the complex positionality of Global South researchers' experience in development studies.

2. Conceptual discussion: reflexivity, positionality, and knowledge creation

Preparing for fieldwork requires a profound reflection on the politics and power dynamics of the researcher's positionality, subjectivity, and reflexivity. While this discussion is nascent in development studies, most literature discusses Northern researchers working in the Global South (Giampapa

2011; Riley and Manias 2002). Only a few studies have examined the position of Southern researchers in other contexts (Adu-Ampong and Adams 2020; Elie 2015; Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020), and a recent study scrutinises the North/South divide in positionality debates (Ibrahim, Kuppens, and Nfundiko 2024).

Reflexivity is defined by Macbeth (2001, 35) as "a deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and the world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself." It is "commonly viewed as the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality" (Berger 2015, 220). Scholars such as Sultana (2007), a pioneer in this discourse, emphasise the importance of openly reflecting upon researchers' own positionality. Positionality often refers to the situated knowledge in which the researcher positions themselves within social and political contexts in the field. Their identity markers, such as race, gender, age, religion, and political views, shape their understanding of the world and the knowledge they produce (Brasher 2020; Rose 1997).

Similarly, Giwa (2015) argues for the importance of situated reflection, which considers the dynamic interplay of shifting identities and expectations within the sub-identities of Global South researchers. Gidwani (2008) conceptualises this process as an ethical–political moment. He argues that such self-reflection serves not only the researcher's self-fulfilling purpose but also constitutes a political act aimed at transforming knowledge production.

While certain aspects of positionality, such as ethnicity, class, culture, spirituality, and political stance, hold universal significance (Berger 2015), the positionality among researchers from the Global South within Western institutions entails additional complexities. This complexity involves navigating the sub-identities that blur the lines between insider and outsider roles (Giwa 2015) and striving to avoid replicating established colonial and hegemonic norms of knowledge production. Such complex positionality influences the research process, impacting their access to the field, the focus and breadth of their inquiries, establishing trust with local communities, and how research is conceptualised, articulated, and shared.

Postcolonial scholarship underscores that power configurations of knowledge creation define the rules and standards for evaluating science in the West and can be used to dismiss local or indigenous knowledge for lacking rigour or not lifting to academic standards. Along with this argument, Ismail (2024) shows how influential academics in development studies have held racist views during colonial and post-colonial eras. Building on this critique, Waisbich, Roychoudhury, and Haug (2021) advocate for the importance of incorporating pluralities from the Global South as a countermeasure against universality, employing strategies like "strategic essentialism" (Spivak 1985) to challenge Western-dominated knowledge paradigms and foster South–South knowledge alliances. Critical scholars support initiatives wherein Global South researchers explore and study other Global South countries, aiming to foster horizontal knowledge, power relations, and dismantle hierarchical one-way relationships (McFarlane 2006), such as Western researchers studying the Global South as "the other".

Khanijou and Zakariah (2023) shed light on the challenges Global South researchers face in Western academia, emphasising the importance of diverse scholar positionalities in navigating knowledge creation and dissemination to advance their academic careers. They highlight the subtle pressure Western academia exerts to conform to certain theoretical discourses, adding complexity to the dynamics of educational engagement. Dannecker (2022) and Mokhachane, Green-Thompson, and Wyatt (2023) further underscore the impediment posed by the "myth of universal scientific knowledge," which inhibits the full embrace of diverse scholar positionalities and knowledge creations. Addressing this myth is crucial and urgent for fostering equal collaborations between the Global North and Global South researchers and (re)evaluating historically and geopolitically informed power relations in knowledge creation in development studies.

In the same virtue, in his call for the primacy of epistemic freedom, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020, 154) asserts that the "struggles for epistemic freedom across the world are ranged against existing and resilient cognitive injustices, cascading from colonialism and maintained by an uneven global

intellectual division of labour". Thus, it becomes essential to address this cognitive injustice by embracing the plurality of epistemic virtues of knowing that Southern researchers can bring to development studies debate, particularly to Western academia, from various contexts across the Global South.

In their timely work, McFarlane (2006), Sultana (2007), Bilgen, Nasir, and Schöneberg (2021), and Dahl (2022) propose that the diverse experiences in knowledge creation by Global South scholars have the potential to enrich pluriversal dialogues and challenge the notion of objective knowledge creation within development studies as a neutral discipline. This suggests that embracing perspectives from the Global South can lead to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of development issues, moving away from traditional Western-centric narratives. As Giwa (2015, 8) highlights, "If the South is worth knowing and exploring, voices from the South should be heard in 'knowing' the South."

In the following sections, we argue that (un)layering data collection and fieldwork encounters is essential to addressing power imbalances in knowledge creation. We highlight Global South researchers' experiences and the plurality of positionalities in the fieldwork as a step towards "shifting the power" of knowledge creation in development studies by bringing these often concealed or censored experiences for the fear that they would affect academic analytical production and rigour.

Ultimately, this article contributes to ongoing debates in development studies on the validity of binary distinctions, such as the Global North and the Global South. We subscribe to the arguments Sud and Sánchez-Ancochea (2022) put forward, emphasising that the notion of the South is a dynamic concept with territorial, relational, political, and structural conceptions. Thus, the concept is still relevant to our analytical lens today, and there is no value in shying away from using the concept of the South in our analytical endeavour.

3. Reflexive methodology

For this article, we initiated self-reflexivity sessions to temporarily scrutinise our fieldwork experiences: pre-fieldwork, during, and post-fieldwork. The self-reflexivity sessions are a methodological approach rooted in conceptual discussions on navigating the researcher's position in the field. In our self-reflexivity sessions, we delved into our experiences for each phase, posing detailed questions. This format was mirrored in the analysis of this paper: First, we compiled our auto-ethnographies to analyse the challenges comprehensively. Second, we pondered over the characteristics of our fieldwork participants (whom we were interviewing, their power, their age, and their vulnerability), and communities' perceptions of Western institutions versus home country, language barrier, and religious closeness, moments of "power" and "weakness" during fieldwork, moments we revealed that we were researchers from the South and moments we downplayed our identity, and how our identity was evolving throughout the journey. Finally, we delved into power issues in knowledge production in the last part of this section of the paper, making up for the post-fieldwork phase, where we discussed our power as researchers of the Global South in the fieldwork and how it dictated our roles. Our research focus is on different fields and occurred at various times. However, the questions we had during our fieldwork and the vulnerabilities of being researchers from the South brought us together.

The first author is a female researcher from Azerbaijan (a former USSR republic with a majority Muslim population with a strong socio-economic shift to capitalistic relations from socialism), residing in the Netherlands, where she is conducting her doctoral studies and the first part of her fieldwork, which extends to Kenya. She is educationally trained in Western academia on political and social sciences, though her cultural and historical background situates her as a researcher and development practitioner from the Global South. The author conducted research in Kenya (Nairobi, Mombasa, and the Lamu Archipelago) within five months between June 2022 and April 2024 and in the Netherlands in 2023 for four months, combining interviews, community visits, and participatory observations. The decision to explore circular economy discourses and practices

in Kenya was a natural fit, as a pioneering country in the Global South and African continent, with rich remanufacturing and recycling community practices to study.

The second author is a male researcher from Egypt, who also resides in the Netherlands, where he is conducting his doctoral research as part of a European Union (EU) funded research project on poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa. Before joining this project, the author has been a practitioner and researcher in the development sector for a decade in several parts of the Global South. Most of his education has been in Egypt, except for his postgraduate studies, similar to the first and third authors, rooted in Western academia. His data collection took place over two phases, lasting five months between April and November 2023. It was part of a secondment period at Makerere University in Uganda – as part of his research project. He adopts a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative interviewing and participant observation with surveys and qualitative comparative analysis. The research project investigates the political economy of accountability initiatives in public service delivery, focusing on Uganda's social protection and education sectors. His field sites included Kampala, West Nile (Nebbi and Yumbe), and Northern Uganda (Amuru and Gulu). The decision to work in Uganda evolved from his interest in exploring connections between North and East Africa, expanding his expertise as an Africanist, and theoretical interests in Uganda as an essential case study of a highly dependent aid recipient country. Moreover, working in Uganda also challenges the view that North African researchers should only work in Arabic-speaking countries to benefit from their language familiarity, as if their expertise is limited to their language skills. Capitalising on his previous professional networks as a development practitioner, he facilitated entry points to several development organisations in the country to support the data collection process.

The third author is a female Egyptian researcher who shares a parallel educational path with the second researcher. She conducted her undergraduate studies in political sciences and development studies in Egypt and pursued her graduate studies in Western academia. She developed her academic and professional language from Western academia, which she tries to underscore with where she comes from. She has studied and analysed the relations between societies and the Nile since her master's degree. Hence, it was a natural path to move upstream the Nile and travel to Uganda and Kenya to study the local realities of communities and especially fishermen around Lake Victoria. She also wanted to do a social and environmental analysis with her counterpart – fishermen in the Delta lakes in Egypt. Conducting this study was not only important to draw parallels to the environmental challenges and social struggles of fishermen around lakes along the Nile, but it was also an important reality check to the positionality complexities. In a far-war context but close to neighbouring African countries, it revealed nuances about race, colour, and religion that were not expected or prepared for. In the local context, it is now distant because the researcher is currently seen as "alien" to the locals with her Western academic background and her freedom to travel independently. The researcher conducted ethnography and semi-structured interviews with the fishermen, supported by archival research. In this research, using the lens of lakes and surrounding communities, the researcher aimed to document and analyse voices usually concealed within the discourses and practices of transboundary Nile management.

4. Going to fieldwork: training and ethical dilemmas

From our doctoral training experience, we observed that current training programs for fieldwork and data collection in Northern institutions do not necessarily reflect the complex positionalities of Global South researchers. In this section, we argue that who we are and where we come from directly affect how we are perceived in the field and the opportunities we acquire to interact with our participants, manoeuvre gatekeepers, and access information.

During a research methods summer school in 2022, attended by one of the authors, several participants raised concerns about the need for meaningful diversity among the program instructors and the readings provided to the participants. As part of a module on conducting fieldwork,

discussions mainly addressed Northern researchers' needs when conducting research in developing countries, disregarding the diversity of scholars sitting in the room. There was a general feeling among the participants that the instructors' language and examples reinforced stereotypical notions that only Western scholars are the standard for conducting research anywhere in the world. Social science departments prepare Western students to go to developing countries, assuming that the African students are, by default, prepared for their "homogeneous African context".

This "homogeneity of African context" sometimes becomes internalised in the Global South researchers' minds. The third author assumed that being in Egypt and living all her life in the country, with previous fieldwork experience in Ethiopia, equipped her to conduct the PhD fieldwork in other developing countries. As previously mentioned, having training designed around Westerners doing fieldwork elsewhere internalises the better preparedness of researchers from developing countries to do fieldwork, negating the need for designed orientation and preparations. The assumption is that coming from developing countries prepares you to manoeuvre daily challenges and unforeseen circumstances. This becomes evident when approaching other foreign colleagues, who need more explanation of the preparations, assuming that if you survived living in Cairo, you would be able to manoeuvre or struggle less. This belief becomes rooted in an expectation that the destination will be familiar, close to home, and within arm's reach of cultural and social settings.

Another significant point is that doctoral researchers, particularly in Western academia, must abide by strict ethical procedures that entail developing consent forms to safeguard research participants. In principle, consent forms are widely celebrated as an essential ethical measure in data collection to ensure that data gathered from the research participants is voluntary and non-harmful. Nevertheless, the written consent form requested by both Western and Southern institutions can also create mistrust between the researcher and the participants. Previous scholarship highlighted the negative impact of research practices on communities that have long suffered from colonial legacy (Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021), a significant factor to consider when conducting research in the African context. Filling consent forms without understanding what they entail can be interpreted and compared to harmful practices such as the "indentured servitude system" that was revived in the early nineteenth century as a coerced form of labour after the abolishment of slavery throughout European empires. It was widely used during colonial times to strip workers of labour rights by signing an indenture (Dowlah 2020). Another example stated by Cramer et al. (2015) shows how the consent forms used during focus group discussions on women's experiences of sexual harassment and exploitation in Ziway, Ethiopia, backfired and exposed the research team to security threats. In these discussions, Ethiopian researchers were even more inclined to security threats than their British counterparts, which shows how reversing harmful practices may affect local researchers and communities more than Western researchers.

Throughout several moments in our fieldwork, collecting written consent forms from research participants, a requirement of the second author research project, was a negotiated process, demonstrating the researchers' power while conducting their fieldwork. For example, during a semi-structured interview with a senior education official in Uganda, the participant asked to acquire a copy of the consent form signed by the researcher before the official signed his consent form. The same official also refused to record the conversation with the researcher due to discomfort with recording and the sensitivity of the research topic. This discomfort might be due to the researcher being introduced as a doctoral researcher from a research university in the Netherlands, researching accountability relations in Uganda's education sector. The cautious behaviour of signing the consent form or recording the interview with this public official can also be due to the highly politicised nature of the Education Sector in Uganda. This was also noticed during another interview with a senior official at the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) when he lowered his voice when the researcher asked about the political dynamics surrounding the education policy in Uganda and the influential role of the First Lady, Janet Museveni, as the Minister of Education and Sports. Another interviewee working for an International Organisation requested that our meeting remain informal, hence not recorded or

documented, given the sensitivities surrounding any critical discussions about Education policy in Uganda.

Finally, our experience shows that affiliation with a national university or research institution is a significant research procedure for organising fieldwork activities. Such partnerships are fundamental for outsider researchers, considering knowledge gatekeepers, safety, and ethical viewpoints. Being affiliated with a national university or research institution gives credibility to the researcher when organising and setting up fieldwork activities with domestic stakeholders, mainly when the research involves political elites from national and sub-national government bodies. Additionally, being directly supervised in the field by scholars who are embedded in the research context provides valuable insights and guidance to identify relevant stakeholders for research activities on both national and sub-national levels – such supervision can be the sounding board of the "outsider" researcher to navigate the complexity and surprises of fieldwork activities. Engaging with the local context through scholarly discussions and readings of local scholarship sources and being part of a host institution is a defining feature of ethical and moral field research. However, we should emphasise that these partnerships should be established based on equal agreements, not exploitative relationships. The role of doctoral researchers in establishing equitable partnerships can take different forms; for example, during the second author's secondment at Makerere University, a formal partnership agreement was signed between the European university and the host university in Uganda. Through these partnerships and knowledge exchange, researchers from the Global South can bring a comparative perspective to teaching or any other academic endeavour from their home countries, which might be considered relevant to the host country context and not foreign.

While the last two points in this section on consent forms and academic collaborations may also be valid for Global North researchers, they reflect broader unequal institutional power structures, particularly for researchers positioned within Western academia, seeking partnerships with academic institutions and researching the Global South. We propose that such procedures be considered in training programs and fieldwork preparations for researchers conducting research in the Global South.

5. Fieldwork encounters: moving positionalities and power dynamics at play

Positionality and the interplay between insider and outsider statuses are not static but dynamic, subject to change based on time, space, and context (Bayeck 2022; Merriam and Tisdell 2015). The simplistic dichotomy of insider and outsider positionality has been challenged through nuanced discussions on identity's fluid and context-dependent nature (Bilgen, Nasir, and Schöneberg 2021; Chavez 2008; Kezar and Lester 2010). These discussions highlight how identity (re)shapes and informs research decisions during fieldwork, contributing to our understanding of social reality (Acevedo et al. 2015; Giwa 2015; Ladino 2002). In the first section, we discuss the moving positionalities of the authors from the North to the South or Northern Africa to Eastern Africa. Then, in the second section, we discuss reflections on our positionalities based on complex gender, religion, and identity dynamics based on the communities' perceptions of the authors.

5.1. Moving positionalities for a southern researcher in the Global North and Global South

Our fieldwork reveals some of the problems that Global South researchers encounter due to the complexity of their positionalities, particularly when they are perceived as outsiders. Ladino (2002) and Chavez (2008) illustrate their experiences as Global South researchers as being partial insiders. For instance, Ladino, a Latin American researcher studying in another South American context, is perceived as a partial insider. However, she reflects on how even this partial insider identity transforms, as she is also perceived through the lenses of her gender and affiliation with Western institutions. This "partial insider" dogma could describe our unsettling experiences with the continuously re-

constructed positionalities. Similarly to Ladino's experience, our experiences reveal that our positionalities are constantly moving in both the Global North and Global South. Indeed, the described encounters from the fieldwork below are not fixed encounters but changing and self-shaping positionalities.

The journey of the first author in Kenya was a self-reflection on her family history, including the travels of her academician grandparents to the African continent, their interactions with fellow African researchers during the Socialist Soviet Union era in Angola and South Africa through their stories and the Soviet Union's overall historical involvement in Africa, supporting leftist and Marxist-Maoist movements. Unlike her grandparents, whose identities were shaped by the ideological framework of the Soviet Union, she comes from a different geopolitical context, representing Western institutions rather than a socialist state. However, one of the significant challenges in the power balance and vulnerability she experienced in the field was the perception of whiteness associated with financial privilege, deriving wrong expectations of her as an early career researcher living off a PhD stipend in the Netherlands. Sometimes, she observed expectations of material or direct transactional benefits from her study visits to the communities. To counter the narrative, she had to explain her background (of not being European) as well as her social and economic status as a non-Dutch PhD researcher in the Netherlands while recognising the privileges but also hardships associated with this precarious position.

Nevertheless, these perceptions and self-perceptions have changed throughout the fieldwork as she moved from the urban capital Nairobi to the remote islands of the Lamu Archipelago and back to the Netherlands to conduct the fieldwork. Moving spaces – different socio-economic, cultural, ethnic, and political realities and contexts – were detrimental in shaping the experiences of the first researcher. For example, after being perceived as a white researcher in Nairobi, she suddenly turned into a non-white, non-European researcher in the Netherlands, and from being a complete outsider in Nairobi, she was perceived as a culturally Muslim woman in the Lamu Archipelago.

On the other hand, working in the Netherlands as a non-Dutch, non-European researcher conducting fieldwork in the Global North, she encountered the reverse situation. Even when succeeding and upon initiating conversations, she was immediately questioned about her origins, country, and previous expertise in Circular Economy in the European Union. Questions such as, "Why are you interested in the politics of circularity in the Netherlands when you are not Dutch?" were common, casting doubt on her competence, abilities, and legitimacy to research Circular Economy Policies in the Netherlands. Her experience echoes Stojmenovska's (2023) account of her exploration of gender dynamics in the context of the Netherlands, prompting critical reflection on the legitimacy of her knowledge production and being questioned by her respondents and Bayeck's (2022) experience as an African woman researcher accessing New York as a research site and seeking validation for her multi-ethnographic research spanning the USA and Cameroon – her home country.

Being from Egypt and doing fieldwork in East Africa came with a complex set of positionalities shared between the second and third authors that moved from being fellow Africans to being seen as privileged foreigners. Although the researchers define themselves as African citizens and researchers, the tensions mentioned above may affect how they are perceived during the fieldwork. At the same time, they are not Western researchers but based at a Western university. While they define themselves as Africans, they might still not be perceived as entirely African, with their skin colour and their affiliation with Western institutions. The two authors encountered situations where they were called out as "Mzungu" (a term often used to describe people with white skin) amid fieldwork. In one of the field visits to a primary school in Nowya, Uganda, a head-teacher referred to the second author, asking, "Will you not give us money for our time, 'Mzungu'?" In another incident, the fishermen pitched a business idea to one of the authors in exchange for sharing information to support their research. The third author was also stopped after a focus group with fishermen to be asked why she worked with fishermen along the Nile. She showed pictures of the

Nile in Egypt to bring to the front a common denominator with the communities, as the running waterscape connects societies as a shared source of life.

During a community gathering in Nebbi, Uganda, one of the research interlocutors introduced the second researcher to the local community (speaking in the "Alur" local language) as someone from the program funding agency. Only later did the researcher know how he was introduced to the community members who were supposed to participate in some of his research activities. This was justified by the interlocutor who introduced the researcher: "because if they know that you are from the funding agency, they will be more transparent and speak freely with you". The researcher insisted on being reintroduced during each research activity and ensuring that the participants in the research activities were fully aware of his affiliation with a research institute and that he was conducting this research for a doctoral degree.

Another incident occurred when the researcher was taken by a sub-county chief and another research interlocutor to visit one of the program participants; he knew later that his visit was meant to replace another visit to the same household by a member of parliament (MP) – who was supposed to visit a number of the program beneficiaries, but the MP cut his visit short. In this scenario, the sub-county chief used the researcher's presence as an outsider to keep his promise to the household that someone from outside the village would visit them to see their success story and how they benefited from the program. It should be recognised here that the positionality of outsider researchers (in this case, outsiders meant to be anyone from outside the village) in the field is partially under their control. Research interlocutors and community members will interpret them in various forms. Current positionality debates often refer to the researcher's positionality as either an insider who conducts research at "home" or an outsider to the research context. We join other scholars in arguing that the researcher's positionality is not a dichotomous perspective, and such a narrow view misrepresents the variety of positionalities researchers carry in the field. We argue that such dichotomies are not exhaustive in describing our multiple identities while conducting development research, deciding which methods to use in our study, and interpreting the research findings. Moreover, based on our experiences, we argue that the positionalities are not static; they change as we move across the spaces, times and realities we are researching.

5.2. Gender and identity dynamics in the field

While talking about moving positionalities, it is essential to reflect on certain important aspects, such as gender, religion, political position, and overall identity we carry in the field. Sultana (2007), drawing on the insights of feminist scholars such as Staeheli and Lawson (1994) and Nagar and Ali (2003), emphasises the significance of applying a gender lens to the concept of positionality and its impact on shaping the dynamics of fieldwork. She recounts her experiences of encountering gender-based challenges during her research. In these instances, older men in the village she was studying looked down on her and refused to engage with her work. Feminist geographers challenge the notion of neutrality and objectivity often associated with positivist approaches.

The experiences encountered by the third author reveal much of this complexity. The expected financial privilege summarised in the word Mzungu to a woman can also cause further harassment and discomfort. The researcher was exposed to this side because she studied a male-dominated space: the fishermen around Lake Victoria. The dynamics of fishing as a job requires physical strength. This is shown in the fishermen's answers about the presence of women in the waters; they usually respond with ego and pride in their masculinity, which makes this field exclusive to them. In some islands in Uganda, it is often believed that water would be cursed if women tried to fish in them. There is an apparent differentiation between men and women in the field, which also entails a power hierarchy between the sexes. Women in fishing receive fish (capital); conversely, men – who own access to the water to extract the capital – decide between the women to give the fish. The women are recipients of the power from the other end, highlighting the interplay between

power and masculinity in this realm. Being in this space to conduct the interviews, the researcher often felt more visible and uncomfortable with her gender.

The women were also uncomfortable with her presence. On one occasion, she felt that the women were shying away from the questions, although she asked general questions about fish prices. She asked her interlocutor for them to withdraw, and he explained that this place is a hub for "sex for fish" phenomenon, where women are obliged to sell their bodies to receive fish. Hence, women in this market did not see the researcher as a fellow woman; they saw her as a foreign expert, or perhaps they were uncomfortable by the male interlocutor, but in all cases, the women in the markets decided it was safer not to be cornered into questions or a situation they could avoid. Later that day, she met with a leader in the Beach Management Unit (BMU) overseeing the other fishermen. When she asked him about the "sex for fish" phenomenon, he got defensive and explained that this happens in all fields and not only in fishing. He elaborated that foreign experts want to stigmatise small-scale fishermen by focusing only on this issue. After meeting a few times, the leader confined her to more profound and complicated discussions on fishermen. She did not understand his first reaction until a year later when she met a Ugandan journalist who replied to her discussions on struggles and the misery of small-scale fishermen, that they oblige women to have sex and have so much income. She responded to him with the same defensive tone as the BMU because it sounded like a reason for further discrimination and racism against those fishermen.

Religion as an identity is another factor that played an essential role in the authors' experiences. For the first researcher, during her time in the Lamu Archipelago, a predominantly Muslim community, the first researcher's Arabic name and culturally Muslim identity facilitated her acceptance into community spaces sometimes perceived as conservative by local Kenyan scholars based in Nairobi. The community members invited her to join them on a mangrove cleanup visit to Pate Island and dinner, where they shared their daily struggles with plastics and aspirations for the future of the West Indian Ocean region that is heavily influenced by climate change and microplastics. Being from a relatively young and lesser-known country often helped establish a sense of neutrality and managed expectations. As an engaged researcher in the field, it is impossible to remain neutral regarding the interplay of one's sub-identities, as they continuously shape research practices through factors like empathy and relatedness to developmental challenges, informality, warmth, and acceptance within the community.

The Islamic background of the second researcher played a distinct role in how he was perceived during part of the research activities in one of the dominant Muslim districts (Yumbe) in Northern Uganda. With the complicated religious history of Uganda, particularly during Idi Amin's era, who was from Koboko, a neighbouring district to Yumbe, residents in Muslim districts in Northern Uganda often felt discriminated against or marginalised due to Amin's historical legacies. During fieldwork conversations, some participants and interlocutors felt more comfortable sharing this historical perspective. They usually used "Brother", which is used among Muslims, to reference sharing the same religious identity; thus, "we are family" or inviting him to join them during prayer time. In one of the conversations, he was told by a senior religious figure that the reason for having the "Bidi-bidi" refugee camp in Yumbe – one of the largest South Sudanese refugee camps – is to change the religious composition of Muslim districts in Uganda. Being perceived as a Muslim allowed some of the participants to express their opinions freely, assuming that, as a fellow Muslim Brother, he would understand how they have been marginalised and how, in some instances, their identity is at risk.

6. Conclusion

This article attempts to shift the power dynamics in post-fieldwork knowledge production by bringing reflections and discussion to the critical subject of changing positionality, complex reflexivity, and nuanced fieldwork ethics for Global South researchers embedded in Western academia, and

to address post-fieldwork knowledge production. It is a reflective journey and a trial to find ways to collaborate and disseminate knowledge ethically and respectfully after the fieldwork.

With the complexities of the identities and positionalities, questions of shifting power did not solely become confined to the post-fieldwork process but also to knowledge production before going to the fieldwork and during fieldwork experiences. Upon return, we asked; how knowledge can be produced to document these experiences, how can researchers from the South be prepared for fieldwork, and how the assembly of these experiences change perspectives about the easiness of South – South fieldwork experiences and the essentialisation of the Global South as case studies rather than the North. Our experiences showcased the complexities and the changing identities within the fieldwork experiences. However, we acknowledge that reflecting on positionality only through fieldwork does not lead to post-normative changes in knowledge production for development studies. As the three of us are based in Western academia, and some are working within projects, deviating from the existing theoretical frameworks for the study design is challenging.

This article reflects on the moving positionalities of the Global South researchers and complexities in the field across the Global South and the Global North. These personal and institutional journeys of discovery and reflection add a unique dimension to the research experiences of Global South researchers. The subsequent self-reflection after fieldwork in Uganda and Kenya prompted the importance of increased research and collaboration within Global South contexts. In line with existing literature (Bayeck 2022; Stojmenovska 2023), the experience of Global South researchers conducting research in the Global North presents a significant departure from the norm. While Western researchers often engage in research across both contexts, the reverse is less common, resulting in a predominantly one-directional flow of knowledge creation. This article brings in self-ethnography reflections to highlight the importance of reflection on positionality and beyond, challenging the one-directional knowledge creation through producing post-fieldwork knowledge differently and shifting the power within the development studies.

A growing discourse on power dynamics in knowledge creation by Mende, Heller, and Reichwein (2022), Elie (2015), and Hausermann and Adomako (2021) advocates for a transformative post-colonial approach. They assert that setting agendas, conducting research, and creating knowledge should be actively challenged. Both individual and institutional reconsideration are necessary to effectuate these changes. In light of this discussion, our paper considers the positionality and reflexivity of the Global South researchers as an essential element for the potential power shift in post-colonial knowledge creation in development studies by addressing important questions such as who can do research where, how it changes over time, and how these choices impact knowledge production. Though the article does not provide thorough answers, it opens a space for this discussion and builds upon the existing voices of fellow researchers from the Global South. The discussion could also be built further by drawing similar or different experiences of Global South researchers based in Global South academia rather than their home countries.

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