

Research Report

The Beginner's Odyssey: Ethics, Participant Observation and its Challenges in Native Ethnography

Ugochukwu T. Ugwu

*Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Nigeria.
E.mail: ut.ugwu@unizik.edu.ng*

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Abstract - Classic anthropological fieldwork emphasized working ‘abroad’ – that is, doing fieldwork in societies that were culturally and geographically distant from that of the ethnographer. More recent discussions of anthropological fieldwork have drawn attention to significance of working ‘at home’ – including paying attention to the forms of social differentiation and marginalization present in the society to which the ethnographer belongs. There are arguments that native anthropologists are better qualified to study issues involving their group than outsiders are. This paper discusses the researcher’s field experience conducting native ethnography among the Nrobo of Southeastern Nigeria. This study adopted ethnographic methods of participant observation – adopting chitchatting and semi-structured interviews. Also, focus group discussion (FGD) was used to cross-check the validity of data from the other instrument. This study found among other things, that conducting native ethnography is a challenge to the ethnographer. The mutual intelligibility does not guarantee quick rapport instead it sets up suspicion. Furthermore, ethical issues in ethnographic research are culturally relative. The Nrobo case stipulates time value and as such reward is expected for every task that takes up their time. Also security threat poses challenges to native ethnography. This study, to the best of my knowledge, is the first attempt to conducting native ethnography among this group. As such it adds to the corpus of ethnographies on the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria.

Key Words: Challenges in ethnography, Participant observation, Ethnographic methods, Security threats and ethnography, Native ethnography.

Introduction

Classic anthropological fieldwork emphasized working ‘abroad’ – that is, doing fieldwork in societies that were culturally and geographically distant from that of the ethnographer. More recent discussions of anthropological fieldwork have drawn attention to significance of working ‘at home’ – including paying attention to the forms of social differentiation and marginalization present in the society to which the ethnographer belongs (Shultz *et al.* 2009). Kottak (2008; 2010; 2013) has even argued that native anthropologists are better qualified to study issues involving their group than outsiders are. I grew up in Enugu, different from the proposed area of this research. Much have changed in the Igbo’s life-ways since the mid-19th centuries when they began to encounter westernization. These continuing frictions and processes of change and adaptation to the wider, global system have been of interest to anthropology.

My participant observation informed my desire to understand the Igbo sub-groups better. In 2013, I enrolled for my PhD program, and in 2015, I began participant observation among the Nrobo, an Igbo sub-group. Kottak (2010; 2013), notes that it is common now to see anthropologists go into the field with a particular topic of study in mind. As such my aim was to gather ethnographic evidence on gender and economic relations. However, I kept observing the interconnectedness of religion, kinship, etc., as influencing my study.

Engaging the society presents another challenge of understanding the entire Igbo group. The challenge (Ember *et al.* 2007; Shultz *et al.* 2009), is that anthropology highlights the contrast between cultures. These contrasts are rarely experienced within the same space and time as they are during fieldwork among other ethnic groups.

Long-term fieldwork in my own ethnic group made explicit contrast with my customary life. I was moving from a specific experience defined by in-group into an in-group about whom I knew almost nothing. In the first part of this paper, I highlight the problem that informed my research. Then I share part of my experiences in accessing and setting up the fieldwork. I further highlight the challenges in participant observation as well as its prospects in prompting topical issues of research, as well as the issue of ethics. I end by opening up conversation on the issue of social security challenges as possible agents of bias in ethnographic methods.

Overview of the Research Problem

Gender relations among the Igbo of Nigeria attracted the attention of professional ethnographers following British colonization of Nigeria (Ugwu 2021). Leith-Ross (1965) narrates that the equality of the sexes is so marked in ‘Ibo-land’ [*sic*]. Lugard, the first colonial Governor-General of Nigeria, in a foreword to Leith-Ross’s book stated that the power that women wielded in traditional Igbo society was remarkable. Leith-Ross actually expressed fear that the Igbo contact with the European practices through colonization and Christianity was bound to affect the autochthonous Igbo gender relations adversely. As recently reported, pre-colonial knowledge on Igbo gender relations is altered (Uchendu *et al.* 2019; Ugwu 2016)

Amadiume (1997), suspects that the entire Igbo were once matriarchal at the level of power relations. McCall (2000) recalls that among the Ohafia, women wielded enormous power and can achieve whatever they want through hard work. Agbasiere (2001), Nwoko (2012) and Ugwu (2021) also narrate how women are unavoidably present in Igbo life and thought.

Nsugbe (1974), states that Forde and Jones have described the Igbo as a single people because of the broad similarities of their culture. However, he argues that to stress these cultural similarities might lead one to underestimate the differences, which a close study of the main groupings of the ‘Ibo’ [*sic*] discloses. When therefore the ‘Ibo’ are discussed, based on these groupings, such differences as those of dialect and social institutions become much more significant.

Floyd (1969), in his geographical review of Eastern Nigerian has identified Nrobo as a part of Nsukka culture division. However, the study did not explore gender roles in the subsistence strategies of the Nrobo (Ugwu 2022). In the light of the above, this study sets to understand gendered roles in the subsistence activities of the Nrobo? Furthermore, it explores if subsistence strategies of the Nrobo aided gender polarity or otherwise? Drawing from functionalism, using ethnographic methods, the study assesses gender in economic relations among the Nrobo of South eastern Nigeria.

Access and Setting up the Fieldwork

My first trip to Nrobo was quite challenging. I got the phone number of the person that would put me through some hitches when I arrive, from Awka. Nevertheless, prior to my trip, the contact failed. I became hopeless. I had called, on several occasions, the

person who gave me the phone number but I could not get through either. Nevertheless, the trip was very important, so I proceeded.

At the Barracks Junction, Nsukka, where I was to take off, was a 504 Peugeot wagon with only one person inside. It was 10.30 am already. There I stood hopeless and dejected. My hopelessness was because of the high price of *okada* (commercial cyclist) fare, which was the only alternative transportation. Although there was no doubt that, the alternative became unequaled, as no other means could have been easier.

The fare negotiation for the *okada* was over. However, which village I was going to was a question from the bike man that struck my mind as my contact had failed already. Okpala was the only village name I knew, which I also mentioned to him, but I asked him which part of the place he knew well? To my surprise, he was a native of Owa Oda, which was one of the villages that make up Nrobo that I was to investigate.

Then I asked him about the centre of Nrobo and he told me it was the Orié market square. We took off. Nevertheless, five minutes later, I found that the motorcyclist became suspicious of my trip. Because it was then clear that the cyclist would be useful, I opened up on my research interests, and how my contact had failed me. After asking me some questions, he became a little bit open as the journey progressed.

Thirty-five minutes later, we arrived at Nrobo. While on the way, he was unable to respond to some of my remarks. He asked if I was leaving the village that same day. I affirmed. However, I told him I would live in the village and that I would be happy if he would help me find an apartment.

He took me round some villages. Moreover, when his suspicions were gradually reducing, he told me that he would find an apartment for me but I was going to pass some security tests, which included knowing me up to the place I came from and my purpose of coming to stay in the community. At last, he revealed himself as the secretary to the community security group – neighborhood watch.

My quest to be guided without bias or purposive selection of the village that I would stay led me to make use of simple random sampling to select a village. That choice of randomization came because I was informed of the cultural homogeneity of the community. The nine villages that made up Nrobo were given the equal chance of being selected and at last, Umujiya was selected. Umujiya coincidentally became the village where the Orié market square situated.

I called the motorcyclist, and who later became my research assistant to find how he could get a house for me at Ūmūiya. He responded on the positive and began to arrange for an apartment. He informed me of the prices of the apartments he had found and advised me to settle for the one at the price of ₦1000 per month because that one was good enough to protect me from the impending winter cold.

I did not object to that. Therefore, I asked him for his bank account number to enable me to send money for him to acquire the apartment. He did send and I paid an amount of money that covers 12 months' rent and his running cost. However, I became upset when in the beginning of June 2015, I could not reach him. I tried as much as I could but to no avail. I decided to share that experience with my supervisor whose advice opened my eyes to many sides of participant observation endeavour that demands careful approaches.

I finally decided to go and find how I could get another apartment. However, when I arrived at Nrobo, I saw him at the Orié market. I explained to him how I tried to get through him via cell phone, but he apologized, narrating how he lost his phone. He took me to the apartment he had rented. From there we went to the Igwe to inform him of my mission and to get permission from him. Luckily, we saw one of his wives who directed us to where we could find him. When we got there, we were told that he had gone home. We got to his home and waited patiently. After some time, he came in, and we exchanged greetings. When he settled, he called us in. My research assistant began the introduction and after the introduction, I brought out a bottle of wine that I had bought for this purpose and handed to my research assistant, who also handed it over to the Igwe. The Igwe acknowledged the receipt of the bottle of wine and assured me of my security throughout my stay. He also told me that I am now one of them and assured me of his support any time. However, he admonished my research assistant to take me to the neighbourhood watch, to inform them. We affirmed and after some discussion, we left the palace.

We could not get to the chairperson of the neighbourhood until after four days. We also offered a bottle of wine that my research assistant had advised earlier on that I bought. The chairperson accepted the drink on behalf of the neighbourhood watch and assured me of fruitful stay.

I finally took up residence for my pilot study on June 20, 2015. However, I settled down fully on September 5, 2015. At the residence, the challenge of facilities

became apparent; the most of it was the toilet facility. I approached the owner of the house on that basis but she told me that they normally defecate in the bush, as it was a normal practice. What next? I thought about many things but I could not help myself. One-night episodes are still fresh in my mind. I had taken *obubu azuzu* (a type of food prepared with maize) earlier in the day. In the evening, I began to have a stomach upset. It manifested terribly in the night that I began to purge. There in the room, greeted with fears of stepping out in the night, I was contrived to find a solution. I had to use my bucket and thereafter dispose early in the morning.

Study Setting

Nrobo, an Igbo group of Southeastern Nigeria formed the area of this study. Nrobo is in Uzo Uwani L.G.A. of Enugu State (see [Fig. 1](#)). Among the sub-communities that make up Nrobo, which is in Uzo Uwani L.G.A. of Enugu State are: Ajayigo, Ofunu, Okpara, Owa, Ugo, Umuamuna, Umudiesue, Umuiya and Umuoyo. Nrobo is located East of Abbi Community, North of Okpuje, South of Ugbene and West of Ozzi Edem. These four communities surround Nrobo. Nrobo was justifiable for this study because of its cultural uniformity amid contact. This implies that Nrobo Igbo still maintains parts of her indigenous values and ways of life.

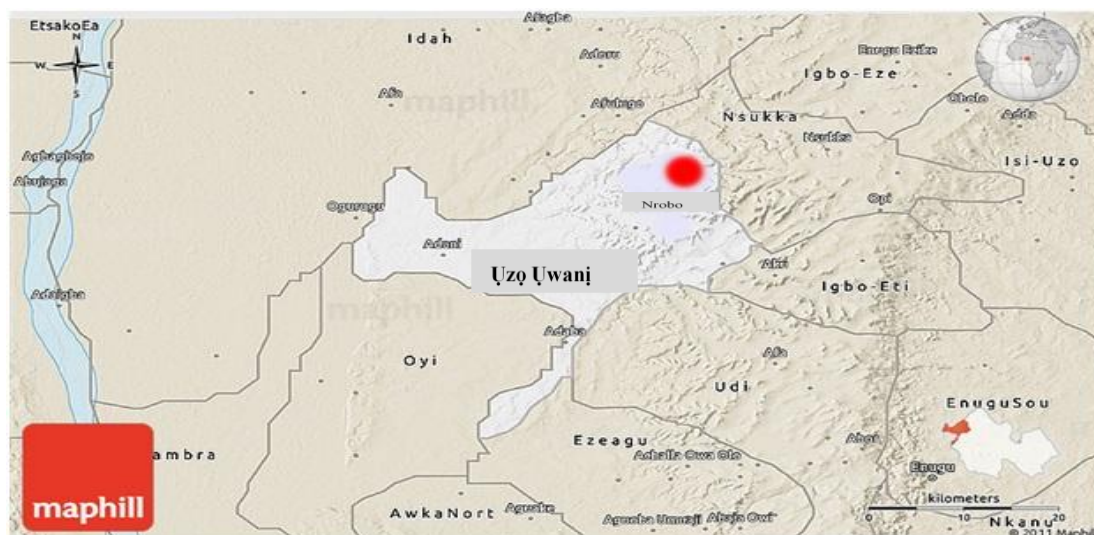


Fig. 1: Map of Uzo-Uwani as sketched by Maphill and modified by me ([Ugwu 2018](#)).

Nrobo is a patrilineal society, whose sub-communities trace their origin from diverse places. Some of the sub-communities lay claim of origin from Igala, yet others

lay claim to have originated from other Igbo groups but only the Ugo regards themselves as the true inhabitant of the area.



Fig. 2: Traditional Nrobo residence. Adopted from [Floyd \(1969\)](#) *Eastern Nigeria: a geological review*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger Inc.



Fig. 3: Modern Nrobo residence ([Ugwu 2018](#)).

Ancestral mediated veneration in relation to the divinity is by rule a religious practice here. Although most of the inhabitants claim to be Christians, they do not

dispute the spiritual potency of Ohe deity. In short, Ohe, which derives from *ohē*, contagious, metaphorically represent disease, and is contagious indeed to anybody who defaults its laws according to the Nrobo. In most cases, the present of moulded pot at the compound of a defaulting person is a symbol of Ohe. Moreover, the person must go for reconciliation by conciliating it because the person has contacted a disease. Although there are other deities, Ohe serves as important agent of moral and social control.



Fig. 4: Masked spirit of Nrobo (Ugwu 2018).



Fig. 5: The Researcher with masked spirits of the Nrobo (Ugwu 2018).

Pre-contact marriage institution favoured polygyny, which was fostered equally by men and women; in some respects, the latter are the chief supporters of the system. Patrilocality is a residence rule and the Nrobo political structure is uncentralized

Participant Observation: Challenges and Prospects

According to Bernard (2006) participant observation fieldwork is the root of cultural anthropology. My fieldwork among the Nrobo began with a pilot study that began in June 2015. That period offered a very big opportunity because I was less busy with my duties at Paul University, as the second semester examinations have been concluded. Therefore, I took the opportunity to begin a preliminary study among the Nrobo. This lasted for two months, that is, from June 20th, 2015 to August 22nd 2015. However, I fully settled in the Community on September 5, 2015. Because I was not given the full permission to leave my duties at Paul University Awka, my fieldwork was planned in a way that enabled me to leave for the field every Wednesday and return every Monday morning to continue with my duties. My fieldwork ended August 25, 2016.

During my fieldwork, I tried very hard to be abreast with all the events of interest to the research. For proper assistance, I decided to pick a research assistant from the community. He was proper for the task because he had finished his OND program at the Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) Enugu. Therefore, with that level of education and proper guidance on what I needed; he was very enterprising.

Also, with the help of my research assistant, I got acquainted with many informants knowledgeable in the area of data I was collecting. He arranged for visits often and that helped a lot in forming rapport. In the meantime, I decided to scale down the number of those informants. The decision was paramount given that the informants had a lot of convergence in issues related to their culture. Guided by a cultural consensus model (Bernard 2006; Ember *et al.* 2007), I select two, a man and a woman. The male informant is 87 years old while the female informant is 81 years old. My idea of limiting the informants was to have proper control of my data and to ensure that the informants were gender-balanced.

Once in the field, in the confusion of new sights and sounds, I clung to my notebook, which I had developed in it, a series of questions. It represented order and system; collation and comparison. The notebook defined my progress; it rationalized and legitimized my presence, mixing up with the Nrobo. The notebook kept reminding me of my own values; my own logical categories and why I was there.

However, the facts I was trying to collect by asking questions tended to slide away. It had seemed an easy matter of question and answer, but the answer never came simply and directly, and sometimes never came at all, even after a long discussion of the topic. Lengthy digressions were the rule, and after my initial frustrations wore off, I began to see that the important information lay in those very digressions, and not the answers I was seeking. Important, I mean, in that, my overall purpose was to comprehend the people in their own terms and not in terms of how they answered my questions, or of how they fitted into any ready-made logical categories.

In like manner, I found on the spot questioning very helpful as the past always revealed itself from such. For example, when my research assistant informed me that his uncle's wife gave birth, I decided to go with him to see them. After introductions, a woman there ridiculously asked him if he had given me a pounded yam meal. However, he told her that since I came, I had not eaten anything from his house. Then the woman instructed him to serve me *okiri*, a millet meal, and they all laughed. I decided to ask why they all laughed. The answer could not come but I asked my research assistant on our way back. He explained that it was a taboo to feed on millet because the first woman that made *ite* (clay pot) in Nrobo, Ugwunye Awoke, promised to make the biggest clay pot for the queen of the deity (Ohe) if she freed her from cooking millet and indeed her other predicaments. She was freed and from that day until now, it is a taboo to eat millet. Although my research assistant could not go on with that conversation because of his Christian faith disposition, it gave me the opportunity to include that to the themes of my investigation.

Also, the advice that better explanation is obtained at time of event occurrence was very helpful. For example, as I was resting one day around midday, I heard voices suggestive of wailing. At first, I lacked interest but my interest began when the shouting increased and I remembered the advice of [Malinowski \(1922\)](#) that his eyes could not escape the daily occurrences, and indeed [Okpoko and Ezeh \(2011\)](#) that better explanation is always given at the time of event occurrence. I left my room immediately to find out what was happening. Coincidentally I saw an old woman who was also going to the same place. Reaching there, we found something contrary that annoyed the woman. The woman was angry, not with me but the scenario that prompted the wailing suggestive of death.

A group of women who are married into one of the clans of Ụmụiya are preparing for *ishue ukpo*, an event that translate more or less of a feast of uniform

clothing. They have bought the clothes – Hollandaise wrapper. However, the present excitement is on the arrival of a cow to commemorate the ceremony. In short, it was the joy of the cow, which they contributed money to buy that culminated into what sounded like wailing.

The woman narrated to me how she had killed a cow ten years ago when she was taking a title and how she had bought several types of Hollandaise wrappers years ago when they were still of good qualities, and that many of them were still in her box. As she was talking about the title, *iyi eriri lolọ*, she pointed at a string tied above her ankles that I noted. She gave instances of many individuals who had been killing cows for the clan on yearly bases and wondered why a group of women who contributed money to buy a cow would be making such wailing as if someone died. While the old woman was still narrating to me, a younger woman who probably, by her actions was one of them, ridiculed the old woman for not being happy with them, that it was not easy to buy a cow. The point in all that was that it led me into the investigation of titles taken by both the men and the women, and how their economic opportunities have reflected such.

[Malinowski's \(1922\)](#) advice on fieldwork included the well-known appeals to learn the native language. Such advice would have been inappropriate for my fieldwork. Granted, Nrobo is in a different local government area from mine, we share the same Igbo language, apart from the dialectical variations. Unlike anthropologists abroad, fieldwork at home is not a matter of memorizing a new vocabulary; only slowly did I realize that I had to learn another Igbo vocabulary different from my own variant albeit mutual intelligibility.

We are always reassuring ourselves ([Ember et al. 2007](#); [Schultz et al. 2009](#)) that anthropology highlights the contrast between cultures. These contrasts are rarely experienced within the same space and time as they are during fieldwork at different ethnic groups. Long-term fieldwork in my own ethnic group made explicit contrast with my customary life. The anthropologist abroad has a different relationship with society within which the group studied is embedded. He or she is usually a stranger to all contexts. By contrast, in my case, I was moving from a specific experience defined by in-group, into an in-group about whom I knew almost nothing.

I remember reading some publications that cautioned that the anthropologist's very presence in the field could itself change the ambiance and alter the very reality one seeks. Actually, apart from my initial periods of despondency, my experience living

among the Nrobo did not validate such an admonition. Very quickly, I found myself swept up in daily village life. Despite my close identification with, and commitment to the Nrobo, I did not feel I had lost the detachment necessary for objective scholarship. Identification had led to empathy and sympathetic understanding; but hopefully, intellectual distance had largely been preserved. The greatest challenge had been to maintain my psychological equilibrium as a new identity, merging the newly acquired rural and the more familiar urban elements of my persona, had been shaped and formed.

The Mad Man and I

Another example was a scene that played out between a madman and me. Around 3.00 pm that day, I proceeded to the Orié market where a man approached me aggressively and hit my chest with his hands several times, with all seriousness. When I looked around, I sensed danger as everybody was in rather alert mode and immediately, he left me and pursued a commercial motorcyclist with his passenger, who was a woman. When he could not catch-up with the cyclist, he rushed another cyclist whose passenger was alighting. When he got to them, he hit the cyclist with the same force with which he hit my chest, but left the passenger.

I asked to know what was wrong with him and was told that, '*O na-akwu igiri,*' what rather could be translated, 'running mad'. When I tried to know why he was in that situation, a man told me that he caused what was happening to him. The man recounted that he (the mad man) impregnated a woman and sent her away. The woman as I understood had been staying with him for a long time without her bride price paid. He (the mad man) sent her away, married another one, and incurred the wrath of the land. That also facilitated more investigation of what the community treated as taboos.

Ethical Challenges

Financial obligation

The desire for compensation was a very big challenge during my fieldwork. Having formed a desired rapport, I outlined a number of cases to examine thoroughly. These cases included the processes in clay pot creation, and how the material used was sourced. Another was to explore the spiritual bases of the pottery.

At the site where the clay for moulding is dug, I sought to interview an old man who was in charge. I visited the hilltop for three occasions before the man could afford to offer a detailed interview. He requested that I had to pay a certain amount of money before we began the interview. Knowing what he wanted for the interview became a challenge. Is it ethically right to bargain or use discretion to reward the interviewee for their time? Would this be a source of bias for the data? However, I agreed to his terms and we fixed a day for the interview.

My desire was that the interview be conducted at the hill (site) but he insisted that if that was my desire, I would have to add money to the agreed price. I agreed. The day came and we were at the site. He granted the interview that lasted for an hour. However, a scene played out when he refused me the opportunity to take a photograph of the underground hole where the clay is dug. He told me that if I dare to try, my camera will spoil. When I asked him what to do to enable me to take a shot on the spot, he requested that I bring another money for libation to enable the earth goddess to permit my intrusion. I did as he requested.

I further paid a potter before she could allow me an extended interview. I had visited her after I met her at the hill where clay is dug out and sold to them. We had chats about my interests and she was interested in chatting with me each time I visited. I have tried a number of times to have her tell me when I can meet her moulding. Her reply was always that I did not need that for the information I sought. When I leveraged on what she said and asked for an extended interview, she declined. One day, I asked her how much I would pay for the interview. She looked at me suggestively, so you know what to do. We reached an agreement and she told me the day to come. I went, and even observed and helped her in the pottery processes.

Conducting Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was a big challenge on its own. The first day of the Focus Group Discussion was a flop because the participants never turned up except me, and my research assistant. The arranged day was on Sunday, and the scheduled time was 3.00 pm. We waited at the Owa Oda venue but at one stage, my research assistant suggested that we check them house to house to know why they had not appeared even when we took time to remind them the previous day, and as such, all agreed that Sunday was a better day. At last, we could only get one of them who told us

that she was not feeling fine. I sympathized with her and I pledged for another opportunity. When we got back to the venue, the father of my research assistant, who was supposed to be a participant, was there, and of course, the venue was right behind his house. He asked me how I thought that the plan would work when I had not specified to them what they stood to get for offering their time. I explained to him how it was not proper to promise them anything, as that would influence them. However, he insisted that if I wanted what I was doing to be a success, there was the need to make provisions for time compensation even in the form of refreshment. When it became obvious that the success of the FGD was dependent on the compensation, I agreed with him to make provisions for drinks after the FGD session.

Surprisingly, he asked me whom I had invited, and I told him. He told me that he could not get to them then but promised to assemble them next Saturday, by 4:00 pm and that if I wanted, he would assemble two other sessions on Sunday between 12:00 and 4:00 pm. That seemed a perfect arrangement to me and I really appreciated his kindness.

I came back to Awka on Monday morning to make other arrangements that would permit my absence from my work. On Wednesday, I went back to start the preparation. I met the man and he assured me he would not fail.

On Saturday, around 3:30 I was there with my research assistant fully prepared for the session. At last all came one after the other and we started by 4:15 pm. When the session was going on, I found out the women were not vocal. They were not as free as the men in responding to the questions. I later contacted one of the women who told me that I should have arranged it separately. I related that to the father of my research assistant who told me that it was normal but could not explain why. However, he assured me the Sunday sessions would be arranged separately. We finished with refreshments and I thanked them for their time, and they pledged their support any time.

On Sunday, we got ready by 11:40 am. A first session started by 12:08pm, and a second one started by 3:15pm. We had the men first and the women after, although women turned up later according to the arrangement. All went successfully at last. In addition, refreshment followed each session.

The whole scenario seems culturally relevance. First, the natives spend much of their time doing farm and other related activities that add value to their lives. Second, it is only rational to choose those tasks that capture adequate value. As such, time is of

essence and there is the need for adequate compensation for it. This explains the natives' demands to be compensated for every activity they were invited to partake in.

Coloured Other and Native Ethnography

Foreign-coloured ethnographers enjoy greater benefits than local ethnographers. For example, natives tend to be suspicious of the local ethnographers especially given the security threats prevalent today. This has implications on the nature and quality of data.

This situation played out at every level of data collection during my fieldwork. First, I could not have reasoned that I would be treated with suspicion even when I have stayed long enough to have garnered the appropriate rapport. One of my acquaintances often asks me, "is there anything about us that you do not know if you claimed to have come from Edem?" The woman is not alone; for many of them find it funny, why I was wasting my time in the community if it was their culture that I was actually studying.

The interrogation

Anthropologists abroad both today and in the past have had to work under the shadow of officials and their policies towards subordinate groups. My case was not the same. Anthropologists also have to negotiate for permits and visas. Similarly, I depended on some official consents before I took up residence (Ugwu 2019). Moreover, that consent saved me embarrassment from the community's security team. The episode below describes my experience. In addition, if I had no consent from the Igwe (the traditional ruler of the community), who knows what could have been my fate.

What rather started as a joke became serious. It was around 1.30 pm when I proceeded to the Orié market. The Orié market is not only a market for buying and selling but also a theatre of social activities. At the market, I sat in the shade where palm milk sellers normally do their selling, although they do this in the morning.

While at the shade, a masquerade saw me and proceeded in a rather aggressive manner as if it were to flog me. I did not make any move to leave there until the masquerade arrived. That was because I had been told the masquerade would not harm me in any case. It came, muttered – suggestive of greeting, and requested that I give something. I pleaded not having anything but insisted. I got ₦20 from my pocket and it collected, waved (thanked me), and left.

The masquerade began to block and request money from motorcyclists returning from Eke Abbi. Then a man came into the place I was sitting and sat close to me. He showed disapproval to what the masquerades were doing, called one of them, and advised them to always leave people who could not give money. When the masquerade left, he turned to me and said, 'Nrobo never asked the masquerade to block or flog anybody' (translated).

Soon a woman came and asked the man if I was a youth corps and he objected to not knowing me either. The woman turned to me and asked and I denied being a youth corps. Then she asked again, 'Are you not the person asking for the stream two days ago?' I could not answer the question because I had lost track of when I asked her about the stream. She started asking me why I was there and who I was staying with.

One after the other, three men joined and a series of cross-examination began. I was not upset but was thinking a clever way out of what seemed to me an embarrassment. The woman narrated to them how I asked a lady named Regina, where the stream was located and her inability to direct me. Then it happened that I left through the route she came back from, and Regina was asking if she saw me. That was when I remembered that incident and I agreed I was the one.

I told them that I was a university student sent to the community to conduct research. They asked what kind of research and I explained to them that I am interested in learning about their culture. They asked who brought me in the community and where I was staying, and I answered duly.

Another man came in, asked one of them something, and advanced but they called him back and asked why he left when he saw them ask a stranger a question. The man turned to me, asked who I was and I told him. When I saw more questions coming, I informed them that the Igwe knew my mission because I had visited him. They asked me when, and I told them. They asked if I had met the chairman of neighbourhood watch but I told them that I had not. They informed me that they were the members of the neighbourhood watch, and that I should make them know me. I told them that I had it in mind. They accepted and one of them told me that people like me brought good or bad to the community, but they were watching. The woman later empathized with me

and told one of them that that was how the university students suffer but at the end of the day no work. They left one after the other.

This experience is clear. Methodological accounts of foreigners who had engaged this culture area never reflected these challenges (Floyd 1969; McCall 2000). They were seen as special breeds. Their presence attracted the attention of people who would offer help even when there is no need. Everybody wanted to be seen around them. However, this may also be time-bound as there is much insecurity today.

Conclusion

Fieldwork experiences vary. It seems clear from the foregoing that nothing that is available methodologically today is enough to predict what an ethnographer may encounter in the field. The reason has partly to do with the diversity of the field and social systems. With the current security threat around the world, ethnographers are treated with suspicion. All these have implications to ethnographic research and anthropology, especially in our region where anthropology is fraught with challenges.

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