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This paper explores issues emerging from the authors' experiences of collaborative research in Ghana, by researchers from a Ghanaian and a British university. The text emerges from discussions between partners and in retrospective reflection on the research process. It is constructed by bringing together personal accounts of the different authors in which their identities shift and are reconstructed in the process of the research. Multiple perspectives across gender, nationality and institutional context create three fault lines to disturb the research process: the initiation of the research, the methodological engagement of the team with each other and the subjects, and the way these are played out in practical issues. The paper explores the problems created by the instabilities created but suggests that they open up spaces for decolonizing research.

Keywords: research methodology; intercultural collaboration; power; identity

Introduction

This paper explores some of the issues emerging during collaborative research in Ghana between researchers from a Ghanaian and a British university. Although the authors are proponents and advocates of such research, the stance taken towards this work is critical. In the interests of developing collaborative research in the future, this paper seeks to problematize the notion of collaboration its approaches and processes. As Bresciani (2008, 9) suggests, 'simply defining collaboration is not enough to ensure collaboration'.

The paper is written from multiple perspectives across gender, ethnicity, nationality and institutional context. The theoretical framework is broadly that of postcolonial inquiry and as such makes a virtue of its hybridity. This emerges partly from the location of the authors either as African academics caught up in the globalizing discourse of the university, or of European academics with interests in Africa and aspirations towards the decolonization of research. However, the hybridity of the paper is also apparent in that, although the text is structured in such a way as to make the arguments both coherent and accessible, we avoid homogenizing the voices.

The paper engages with Tuhiwai Smith's (1999, 197) claim that 'when indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched … questions are framed differently, priorities are ranked differently, problems are defined differently and people participate on different terms'. As well as asking to what extent this claim

holds in collaborative research, it explores how these differences are enacted and the struggles that take place around them.

The paper results from several collaborative research projects in which the authors have taken part. UK-based partners were relatively experienced researchers from a UK university who teamed up with academics from a Ghanaian university who were relatively inexperienced as researchers. Projects involved school-based research in Ghana on a number of different subjects but mainly concerned with equity and student voice. The procedure varied with the projects but generally partners came together to plan and design the research for which support had been provided by UK funders. In all cases research capacity building was among the aims and collaboration extended to designing and developing instruments, data collection, analysis and synthesis of findings. In this paper data from these projects are mentioned, but rather than being a report of substantive issues, the paper constitutes a reflection on the process of engaging with empirical research in an African educational context. The text emerges from discussions between the partners recorded in fieldnotes and in more recent retrospective reflection on the research process. It was constructed through a process initiated by the first author. Each of the partners wrote a personal account of the issues that they had identified during the collaborative projects on which they had worked. Every member of the team read all the accounts, making annotated comments. The annotated texts constituted the data set for this paper. At a face-to-face meeting of all the authors we discussed the data and drafted jointly the outlines of the beginning and end of the paper. After the meeting, the first author wrote this up in a more readerly form. For reasons of space we required a shorter way of presenting data. This was achieved by each partner summarizing another's account to produce the narratives which are the middle section of this paper. The final paper was passed around for final agreement and correction. Revisions to the text following refereeing have also involved face-to-face meetings of UK- and Ghana-based authors where possible, with researchers from both locations rewriting and corresponding through email. In the text we use the first person plural to denote our collective agreed authorship. Through this joint writing we were all attempting to engage in what Canagarajah (2002) describes as code-switching to produce a multivocal text. We have aimed for all the authors to be equally involved in writing the paper but inevitably the power issues that we problematize in the projects are evident in the writing of this paper. As Leon Tikly succinctly puts it: the challenge 'is how to go beyond the existing order of knowledge whilst being obliged simultaneously to work within its frameworks' (2004, 192).

Researchers' accounts

Christine

I started the collaborative research late having been employed as a lecturer in the department only three months before. Being my first research project apart from my master's, I underestimated my research ability. However, the first meeting made me realize that the UK-based collaborator had confidence, eliciting contributions from us to finalize the research instruments for the data collection. Our opinions were important, reasonable and acceptable to the collaborator, and we modified the instrument in an atmosphere of collegiality without her acting as a 'know-it-all' expert teaching us what we needed to know and do. Each researcher's data was important in its own right and we had to write out the full interview and copy to others in the team. It made me realize that my research capability was regarded as worth tapping and good enough.

However, the length of time collaborators are sponsored to stay in Ghana is too short. We hurry through the work and if it ever gets completed, it takes such a long time. For example, with one project we only had three or four days together and analysing interview data, a fairly new experience, was left with the local team. Compared with Máiréad and John I feel handicapped and the time with them is too short to gain some level of mastery. Nevertheless, as local researchers we learn from each other; as well as from them and they also learn from our local context.

Also we notice and make sense of different things. For example, the way pupils assembled – girls in front; boys at the back, surrounding the girls, hemming them in – seemed to suggest the boys intimidate them. Boys attempting to answer the teacher's questions would stretch their hands above the girls, rising, shouting, overshadowing and overpowering the girls. This fact had not really occurred to me before until the 'outsider' was allowed in by way of research. We take a lot of occurrences as the normal way of things. Through the eye of the outsider-researcher, I began to rethink. Two elite senior secondary schools had always appeared to me as being run similarly, but I now saw them as one producing authoritarian, bureaucratic leaders, the other liberal leaders, an insight which had never occurred to me as an insider.

In collaborative work much work gets shared and accomplished and, possibly, published in a relatively shorter time than an individual doing research and publishing alone. In this way, one's professional progression is facilitated as one's capacity as a researcher is enhanced concurrently. But as junior faculty, I only seem to learn about UK-based collaborators coming a day or two in advance and the research area is only made known upon arrival. It has also been frustrating when my work is dependent on another national collaborator, as this holds me back from my tasks. Nevertheless, collaborative research has built collegiality among local researchers and their international counterparts and it is now easier for me to identify and confer with colleagues who show good knowledge of research practices and analysis of data. I feel confident and competent enough to teach a course in Research Methods and supervise students' research better because of the experience I have gained and the knowledge acquired from my local and international counterparts, as well as the books on Research Methods provided through the link.

In collaborative research I have the fear that deadlines may not be met (by me or other national co-researchers) because of the combination of our regular jobs and personal research and this may be interpreted as (our) lack of commitment or lack of seriousness towards the international research collaboration.

Whilst in principle John and Máiréad were collaborators, in practice I saw them as teachers, I tended to look up to them for 'instructions' on the assumption that they had up-to-date knowledge and skills. This was exaggerated because in both projects, I lacked content knowledge – these have never been my research areas and I felt handicapped with analyses and discussion of emerging issues and so went along with what others suggested without question. Also, I was not familiar with methods of processing qualitative data. Though I had been introduced to it briefly, I knew I had not understood it fully but could not stretch the little time available to the collaborator because of my ignorance.

Máiréad

I was really excited at the potential for research with Ghanaian researchers. In particular, I was interested in alternative understandings of key educational ideas, engaging

in honest debate and working through some of my own tensions and contradictions. The 'grounding' of explicit and implicit theories in the Ghanaian context was a challenge I invited so I could engage in the multiple complexities of the social world and understandings of it.

I anticipated some difficulties in constructing common ground and in addressing assumptions about my position as a person, researcher and research leader. This consists largely of the communications and mis-communications that surround what people are expected to know and in certain protocols within social and formal institutional life. On reflection, I see that achieving the relationships has taken much longer than I had anticipated. I am not sure of the extent that these reached the critical debate that I had hoped for. There are multiple reasons for this, many relating to the conditions under which collaboration took place. Partly these relate to labour and pay, partly to the performance of research tasks emerging and funded in a pre-collaborative phase.

Again, my expectation was that gender would be an issue requiring particular performances from me – these would be an effort, as I had to establish myself first before my meanings would be listened to. My whiteness was also going to facilitate and limit my realm of engagement, physically and socially. However, it was overwhelming having access to local situations and interpretations – a window into another culture and sets of social relations with all the interested people, and with the sense of mutual learning, we could explore cultural differences between ourselves and in interpretations of social life. Nonetheless, I think an all-female team would have been really, really interesting, and the findings would have been different. Working with Alfredina and Christine gave me warm insights into this. I feel it might have gone into spaces that our exploratory research could not touch, partly because some preliminary arguments might not have needed to be discussed – though some anti-feminist women might be more obstructive than open men.

Another challenging thing about working in an international team was my uncertainty if my meanings were understood or if I understood properly. Trying to ask questions about this often reveals nothing more. However, this was reduced as I built stronger trust and relations with particular people. Nevertheless the lack of 'certainty' in communications has led to feelings that research was more a technical/ practical task rather than about thinking and re-conceptualization. This was evident in making arrangements and appointments where someone's word was not an indicator that they would do what they say, e.g. turn up to visit a school for research purposes. Face-to-face compliance and agreement was a way to get out of a predicament, but not an indication of commitment or agreement.

Funding processes have a limiting effect on the theoretical and methodological advance they are supposed to enable. In collaborative research, power over the research resides in the budget holder, who is bound to be a UK-based academic. The games circulating around this relate to Ghanaian researchers' estimation of what they must do rather than want to do and of the resultant reward. The politics of the institution and their relations with each other were difficult for me to understand, and also to distinguish between what was reasonable to me or not, as well as to the Ghanaians. I am therefore at a loss when a Ghana-based lead researcher underpays the team.

Also the cultural argument was frequently raised, directly or otherwise. This effectively disempowered me from having any say about things in the research and in the conditions of the research. The difficulties were in balancing sensitivity with a critical sociological attitude through which I want to question everything as it appears and to raise the possibility that things could be otherwise.

I try to work within some of the contextual norms and remain guided by the Ghanaian researchers (e.g. paying allowances) even when I think it is not correct. This is to reciprocate and facilitate positive relations on which to develop research and critical thinking. It might otherwise block the research process – good public relations are important.

Whereas John goes local to blend in, I do not always do so, as I need to sustain some hierarchies to support my position and do not have time to gain respect in a softly, softly manner. Hierarchical position is important in Ghana. John has softer lines at the front than I do resulting in a range of differences between us.

Relations between the research and researched were difficult to access and remained under-developed. For example, one researcher went into a classroom and publicly identified children who attended irregularly. This approach, added to frequent interruptions by a mobile phone, did not produce the best conditions for the respondents to talk to him. There are multiple dimensions to this in terms of ethics and data quality that have negative effects on research and its findings.

Nic

I expected the collaborations to provide the opportunity to understand issues either in a north–south or south–south and national context. Earlier projects had given birth to the attempt by some principals to introduce student voice to the teaching, learning and administration of the schools. My expectation was that I would be able to contribute towards sustaining the innovation. Gender in education is an issue that is receiving much attention today. My involvement in the Gender Violence in Schools Project was therefore seen as an opportunity for contributing towards the gender parity in education. The research provided a platform for finding out how schools created and sustained gendered patterns and behaviours. By understanding these patterns and sharing the findings with the relevant stakeholders, the project would contribute towards making schools a place of equal opportunity for boys and girls. The other key area of expectation was capacity building in carrying out research, from design, data collection and analysis to write up. Earlier collaborations with the University of Sussex had produced multiple gains. Apart from sharpening my research skills and making me confident, my computer skills were developed. The new projects were expected to bring similar gains, especially as their focus was on qualitative research. I would be learning techniques of qualitative research, including analysing qualitative data. Another expectation was that money would be paid up front to enable research activities to be smoothly carried out.

Most expectations were met and in both projects there were meetings with policy makers and administrators at local and national level who were impressed and undertook to implement policy changes as a result. Findings have also been documented in a book. The major way in which the expectations differed from the experience was with funding, where payment for activities was made after the activities were carried out. Since the Gender Violence project was not initially nested in any department which would have provided the support, researchers had to fund the activities personally. This created tension which eventually led to the resignation of a colleague.

Working in an international collaborative research team poses problems, especially when there are many countries. Some core team members from the other African country become dominant at the planning meetings. Consequently, some

items are irrelevant to Ghana. Overcoming the varied country experiences and perceptions which researchers bring into the project is also a problem. Sometimes, these experiences and perceptions coloured our views on issues and findings, making them more or less acceptable. For example, it took some time for Máiréad to accept the ranking and promotion process of teachers in Ghana. Similarly, varying perceptions on issues of student voice led to much debate. Understanding the project was also problematic. Project development was mostly undertaken by UK researchers. Even though there were workshops to get collaborating researchers in tune with the rationale and direction of the research, some of us left the workshops with hazy understandings.

The motivation for joining the research team was also a challenge – was it the quest to contribute to knowledge or it was seizing an opportunity to earn additional income? In some cases researchers quitted the project when their financial aspirations were not met.

There were often conflicts between meeting deadlines and satisfying workplace commitments. The majority of collaborative researchers are full-time faculty members involved in teaching and departmental duties. Meeting deadlines requires extra work and good team work. Teams have to settle for odd hours in order to meet commitments and deadlines and on many occasions some do not turn up or come late.

In international research, the output has to meet international standards. This calls for in-house criticism of the work of each team member and on occasions colleagues did not feel happy with this. Team members at times were unwilling to accept the fact that the research report was the collaborative effort.

Working in an international team offered opportunities for learning new things with experiences enriched by the fact that they are cross-cultural. For example, the Sussex team had a clear understanding of the Ghanaian system of education and therefore were able to support it better than we would have with the UK. An output of a better understanding of the system was a handbook for the headteachers of schools in Kurokese and also the involvement of the Municipal Director of Education in activities.

The other key area was capacity building, which started from development of the project, through data collection and analysis to report writing. Researchers gained new insights at each stage. All projects developed researchers' capacity to carry out qualitative research, through country and international workshops and fieldwork, many having had hitherto little exposure to this.

Alfredina

I was very excited to be part of a team of experienced researchers coming from a foreign university to collaborate with us on issues concerning my own country that had never crossed my mind as a research subject. My specialization is foreign language education, the teaching and learning of French. I was asked to research more of a sociological problem. Being a Ghanaian, I felt it was worth trying, as it is good to diversify one's position as a researcher.

However, the ideas did not come from us. Academics from abroad informed us through our senior colleague of a project to be done within a very short timeframe, which did not take into consideration the programme of the collaborators. The collaborators came at times more suitable to them than us. The rush and haste and speed did

not allow us sufficient time to study and assimilate the topics under investigation. A maximum of two weeks was given to carry out the fieldwork and we (insiders) had to find time to discuss the different approaches to the investigation.

A good thing about discussing methodology together is that, even though most discussions are led by our foreign counterparts, it opens my mind to other horizons. I was able to learn more about qualitative research instead of being imprisoned in quantitative methods. This is helping me in my own thesis today. But when it comes to the theoretical frame, I feel incapacitated. This is mostly handled by our counterparts, due to our lack of relevant resources; also the projects are not my area of specialization. Nevertheless, everyone was given the chance to contribute to the line of argument for the research. I think that is quite democratic enough. But after researching gender in school I do not know how we as local collaborators can get our findings across to the Ghanaian populace. It becomes a paperwork left to gather dust and may not count in advancing my area of specialization.

Funders dictate the framework within which collaborators should operate and we are facilitators because of our linguistic and cultural advantage. However, respondents seem surprised when you, as a native, ask them questions on practices that you should know better and even explain to the foreigner. They seem to say, 'You are a Ghanaian like me, why are you pretending to behave like an *obroni*?'[1] But in order not to lose face, they co-operate well, though I still sense that they might not be saying the right thing.

At times I am linguistically handicapped like my foreign partners, being from another part of Ghana. Sometimes I feel that they are leading all the time and we have to take instructions. I feel they come with preconceived ideas about cultural practices and judgement is clothed with a European eye conflicting with our own version. For example, some of us see seating arrangements (boys separated from girls) in the schools as part of our cultural practices and should not be considered as discrimination. To some, it is culture that dictates roles. This makes some of our male intellectuals rigid. When the term gender is mentioned, it is as if roles are being reversed, men are to become women and vice versa. Our arguments and entrenched positions sometimes confused me. Some of us have not understood the concept 'gender', seeing it as synonymous with discrimination against females. The concept needs redefining not to exclude males!

Some Ghanaian collaborators wanted projects conducted with an African eye, thinking their counterparts were trying to clothe it with a European world view. Our collaborators and some of us wanted to look at issues more objectively. For me, gender roles considered normal have become objects of scrutiny. It has opened my mind to dialoguing. As a new researcher, I learnt a lot of new ideas and new approaches to research from outsiders who are far more experienced. I see it to be a training session for the less experienced ones. For instance, developing instruments through discussions bridges the gap as everyone is considered important.

Collaborative research is a channel for me to get abreast with modern trends, to the use the internet to satisfy our new ideas. However, lack of facilities makes the research more cumbersome – the journey to consult mail at private internet cafes for a fee is often slow and discouraging.

Presenting a seminar in the UK was very useful and important. John took us through the different aspects and I felt we were actually under training. I was very nervous but I told myself 'Alfredina, the people sitting in front of you are human beings like you'. We were very excited when everything turned out successfully.

John

This work has been conducted in the light of earlier experiences. My recent expectations were that on the whole I would do most of the work and certainly most of the writing. For several reasons that has always been the way.

First, doing the work, as in getting it published, almost certainly mattered more to me than to anyone else. I think that being a 'researcher' is an important part of my identity and doing research is an important way of engaging with the world in a social and political sense. Getting published within the field is fundamental to my career and the possibilities of doing more work in an area that interests me. Although publications are important to Ghanaian academics' chances of promotion in the long term, in the shorter term getting involved in this research is a side issue and almost a fringe benefit.

Second, although I get easily overwhelmed by other work when in the UK, when I am in Ghana I am able to focus well on the research; by comparison Ghanaian colleagues are always very busy juggling their time with other responsibilities.

Third, the research is framed by and the publication is aimed at UK or other international (northern) institutions. From my position it is much easier to engage with these discourses. Moreover, the amount and type of theorization is accessible to me in a way that it is not to my partners. We almost always work methodologically within my comfort zone and their discomfort zone – qualitative research – though they may be keen to learn to be comfortable. Thus, I am always more experienced methodologically, cast at some level in the role of teacher, while they are students. My partnering of them could be seen as invisible domination. However, I am not very secure in that dominant role. Indeed, I see myself as subaltern rather than dominant with respect to a research field where I have a reputation, but by no means that of a world leader; yet in the circles where I function, this is the expectation or at least the goal. With funded research, my position relative to African partners is reinforced by the payment/funding system for researchers.

Collaborative research of any sort is fun and is the way I prefer to work. Virtually all the research I have ever done has been collaborative. The social relations of the research process are not separate from the intellectual work; and to a large extent drive it. This is a long-winded way of saying that I find the fieldwork and the discussion pleasurable. At one level I feel comfortable with this, but at another there is something more complex and not all altruistic going on. I gain knowledge and credibility from dialogue especially with my co-researchers. I have always enjoyed being a bit of a know-all and these discussions enable me to know it all. I am anxious to distance myself from people that use African researchers as mere data-collecting operatives, but my form of liberal acceptance is another form of invisible domination. Nevertheless, if it suits my partners then this form of domination has some positive aspects.

The epistemological dimension to these social relations is important. The research is not just a personal fancy; it generates outcomes, which I would argue are richer because of our dialogue and because of our disparate positions and research identities. The notion of ethnographic paradox is not just something that students rehearse in their theses, it represents my experience and the dialogue between insiders and outsiders does produce something. Apart from substantive knowledge and understanding issues my involvement has been crucial in that I have the confidence in qualitative research methods, which legitimates less technical approaches. Without this, the research would have adopted a more cautious approach relying on positivistic notions of

reliability and validity. That my collaborators have been generally nervous but in the end happy with this in some way suggests that it has not been a complete imposition.

Theoretical input from my partners has been underdeveloped. This is part of the local approach to research: when I read African academic journals, articles based on empirical research often lack a discussion which goes beyond the unproblematic reporting of the data. Especially absent is the contribution of what might be termed 'indigenous knowledge' and it is I rather than they who push for this. There may be many reasons, including the sense that they have not got where they are by valuing such knowledge which is liable to induce a sense of its worthlessness in comparison to scientific knowledge from the North.

Discussion

The process of producing these accounts and this discussion section was fraught by the same complexities as the research projects to which they refer. Thus the accounts were not produced in a vacuum but as part of wider social negotiations where each is aware of the potential impact of what we say on the others. Nevertheless, we have tried to be frank and all think that we have learnt from articulating our reflections and reading those of our collaborators. What emerges is a fairly complex nexus of individual expectations, anxieties and relational dynamics, which we contend are often unexplored in collaborative research, but which are highly significant to research processes and products, and are usually smoothed over in efforts to report substantive outcomes. From the edited accounts we have identified three structural fault lines in intercultural collaborative research.

Formal conditions

The first results from the formal conditions of the research whereby the resources for projects are usually provided by funding bodies who are engaged in the field of international development aid. To Ghana-based partners, especially more junior ones (Alfredina and Christine), this issue becomes personalized and relates to the UK-based researchers. However, when we look at Máiréad's and John's accounts we see that their room for manoeuvre is constrained. The field is constructed more by the structures of the funders than by the thinking of the academy. Even a cursory look at materials produced for the major funders such as the World Bank and Department for International Development demonstrates that the discourse of development privileges epistemic, universalized knowledge and research is seen as a way of providing answers and interventions that can then be made to 'go to scale' at a national or regional level (Kabeer 1994; Shiva 1997; Chilisa 2005). The research report is seen in terms of an evaluation rather than a platform from which to develop new ideas and theories. This cuts across the possible benefits of involvement in the research for the different players. Issues of income generation and the importance of publication to career prospects are salient here.

Although in the case of 'non-funded' research[2] there appears to be more freedom, even here researchers have needed to find some subsidy and proposals need to be constructed that will align with the priorities of development donors. This in turn affects the positioning of different members of the research team. Those from the North are usually cast in the role of proposers or initial responders to research, whilst the Ghana-based partners are seen as local facilitators. This ensures that UK-based

researchers are working well within their area of subject knowledge, which may or may not be so for the Ghana-based partners. Good practice incorporates the notion of capacity building and, indeed, is expected by the donors. However, the assumption is always about it being unidirectional, thus reinstituting hierarchical relationships within the team. Nevertheless, as John's reference to the subaltern suggests, all of the collaborative researchers are caught in hierarchical relations, which may be constraining.

Nic's account highlights how this impacts in terms of money within funded research. The structural conditions position the UK researchers as reluctant employers who hold the purse strings but are only allowed to make payments under set conditions, and the Ghanaians as employees or supplicants, where it is difficult for money not to be at the front of their minds.

Tensions around knowledge

The individual accounts express tensions around the knowledge that partners bring to the work from their own institutional contexts and experiences. The UK-based partners are predisposed to theoretical and methodological knowledge, which does not come easily to Ghanaians, apparently for lack of exposure and resources in the area. By their nature, funding practices also seem to place the UK-based partners at an advantage given the condition that funding gets granted when an 'expert' proposes the subject of collaborative research. The Ghana-based collaborator is thus handicapped in the subject under study. Indeed even in constructing this collaborative the Ghanaian collaborators position themselves as lacking capacity to theorize the identified issues as confidently as their UK-based counterparts,

Additionally, African researchers are often seen as 'insiders to the field'. However, on closer examination this 'insiderness' is often relative, as the move from village school to university lecturer involves a transformation of perspectives. Some of their accounts show different levels of insiderness (Alfredina and Christine) where for one, it is a revelation of her 'outsiderness' due to ethnicity and the other, cultural awareness. Along with their linguistic and cultural knowledge comes their positioning within the authority structures of the local context and education system. This creates tensions around the ways that different partners maintain field position; for some this requires maintenance of social distance, for others it involves attempts to narrow the gap (Bourdieu 1988). Moreover, gender is as much an aspect of this as is post-colonial relations (Mohanty 1990). The differences between Máiréad and John are not just matters of personal taste but are in some senses produced by their gendered nature of their contact with the African 'other'. Similarly, the tentativeness of Christine and Alfredina can be compared with the certainties of Nic and may not just be ascribed to their relative seniority.

Similar issues are played out in positioning with respect to epistemology. Personal and institutional issues about what is legitimate knowledge form a constant backdrop to discussion about the framing, accomplishment and products of the research. Nor can this be neatly characterized in terms of decontextualized positivist/anti-positivist splits, as the process of collaboration brings with it further complications. Although the desire for the certainties of epistemic knowledge can be seen in all the Ghanaian accounts, there is also the sense that qualitative research with all its *un*certainties is an attractive proposition and that knowledge about it can be derived from collaborative research encounters.

Practical processes and dynamics

Finally, we move to consider how the different issues already identified inform the practical processes of research and the dynamics of international collaboration. Resources made available by funders do not usually allow sufficient space for the emergence of the indigenous insights that post-colonial developments demand, since they tend to see research as a linear, end-on enterprise that privileges product over process. Indeed a textual concern for process is much more salient for the UK-based than for the Ghanaian researchers, in whose research training it has not featured strongly. It is clearly demonstrated in the accounts that in the entire process of the collaborative research, that is developing a theoretical basis for research, designing, data collection and analysis, the Ghanaian collaborators look to their UK-based counterparts to impart relevant knowledge and skills. However, knowledge of this kind is not so much imparted as constructed through the practices whereby the UK-based partners tend to take a lead and 'model'. Lack of time contributed to an uncertainty in the Ghanaians about whether they had 'got it right'. However attractively the qualitative proposition was parcelled, it was always underdeveloped for them. This reinforced the tendency to grasp after the certainties mentioned in the previous section.

The formal and informal relations evolved in bidding for and planning research are carried over into fieldwork where social cues – when to lead and when not to – become fraught with questions of deference and knowledge. Máiréad expresses anxiety about sustaining hierarchies to support her position as a research leader. Her identity as a person, researcher and leader as well as her whiteness both facilitated and limited her realm of engagement, physically and socially. These issues were overlaid by strong cultural differences with respect to issues such as timing.

Despite ideological commitments towards equity, it can be seen that both Máiréad and John seem to have as a primary agenda getting the research done. When their social positioning along lines of gender, seniority, age and nationality puts them in a position to take a lead to further this, then it is difficult not to go along with it. Relative attentiveness to the Ghanaians, and ostensible ideological commitment to equity, what Máiréad calls John's softer lines, opens up possibilities for a form of invisible domination, a liberal governmentality which contributes to this agenda (Pryor and Ampiah 2004).

Also, cultural position leads to sensitivities about what lines of inquiry are permissible and by whom, which in turn affects relations to respondents and thus the division of labour within the team. That research respondents are unsure how to respond to the *obroni*, the UK-based researchers, is clear to all, although this may be an exaggerated form of respondents' reaction to Ghanaian researchers (see Alfredina's account). However, it is the Ghanaians who have to work with the consequences and to mediate between respondents and UK colleagues. Importantly, even though the UK-based researchers defer to their interpretations of local culture and context, ambivalence about taking a lead in these situations is clearly seen in Christine's account.

Conclusions

The personal accounts albeit in this edited form can be seen as narratives that construct the identities of the researchers in each case. However, the notion of identity in play here is removed from the classical model where identity represents an unchanging core or the goal of a developmental journey (Erikson 1965). It is rather

'a strategic and positional concept … constantly in the process of change and transformation … Identities are never unified … [but] increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions" (Hall 2000, 17). We have used personal narratives as our 'data' for this paper, an approach that would seem to emphasize the agency of the writers. However, what is striking is the way that they highlight the extent to which all the identities are produced by the discursive formations in which the researchers operate. The fault lines we have identified are indeed structural. Despite the researchers' openness to each other, what might be seen as their 'good faith', the enterprise of collaborative research emerges as problematic, fraught with instabilities which are liable to produce conflict and constraint, and which have also been apparent in producing this analysis. Moreover, we are conscious of a degree of simplification whereby foregrounding the fault lines along a UK–Ghana axis inevitably veils the further tensions produced, for example, by gender and ethnicity.

Nevertheless, the accounts also suggest that these instabilities can also be very productive so long as the process of the research is held as continually problematic, which we intend this paper to exemplify (Appiah 1991). Collaborating with UK-based researchers actually affords more scope for a decolonizing research agenda in that it has given the Ghanaian authors a degree of methodological licence, which they might not otherwise have, as is seen in the frequent references to qualitative methods and skills. Thus, despite all the conceptual, methodological and practical difficulties described, collaborative work seems to offer many interesting and potentially productive possibilities.

Fundamental to our argument is the feminist adage that the products of research emerge from the particulars of the process (Stanley and Wise 1990). This has often been interpreted with respect to researcher–researched relations and remains an important area of concern for emancipatory research (Habermas 1972). Efforts to 'give' voice to marginalized groups researched demand careful attention to the conditions of research, such that relations are not exploitative, include elements of reciprocity and avoid theoretical imposition (Lather 1991). If the researched are to voice their own perspectives, they will require space away from the structured agenda afforded by, and in the terms of, the researcher. Although of significance to all research, these power dynamics in the research process have been widely debated in reference to qualitative methods. The focus of analysis on the conditions of knowledge production in the research encounter alongside the substantive concerns explicitly links the products with the processes of research. Informed by insights from post-structuralism, recent work using discursive notions of power has explored the textual interplay and positioning strategies of the researcher and researched (Mutua and Swadener 2004).

All this is relevant to our collaborative work. However, in this paper we are extending these arguments to focus on relations between researchers as they engage in collaborative empirical work and writing. This adds a further dimension that moves beyond the individual and solitary researcher. The explicit intention for collaborative research and capacity development inserts another layer of complex relational dynamics that are significant to the connection between the process and products in research. In this sense the contexts of the collaborative researchers' engagements have important bearing on the development of the teams and the dynamics of their interactions in themselves and in the construction of the substantive field.

In this paper we have focused on collaborative research in international contexts and through reflexive accounts from team members have opened a discursive space within which to explore the multiple and complex dimensions of researcher identity and relations. We have conceptualized this in terms of fault lines, which can be seen both positively and negatively. As is apparent to us as authors of this paper, the social relations engendered within the research team produce knowledge which transcends the positions of any of the contributors (Pryor and Ghartey Ampiah 2004). However, they are also severely constrained by the discourses of the field in which we operate.

This paper has addressed some of the under-developed understandings of collaborative research, highlighting complex theoretical and methodological positioning, by talking about multiple dimensions of power in amongst others, North–South relations, qualifications, gender and access to funding. As such it makes these elements present what is often absent, and draws attention to the implications of this absence for collaborative knowledge production. This endeavour, to open a discursive space about researcher collaboration, is thrown into relief through the multiple perspectives and positioning of researcher biographies that refer to cultural politics of international, institutional and gender relations.

A particular insight is that in working together on funded research projects the ostensible task is to aim for consensus about the interpretation and significance of the phenomena under investigation. Yet, paradoxically, the value of this kind of research may lie in its disagreements and unevennesses. Lack of consensus opens up a discursive and transgressive space that may lead to a greater awareness of how we are caught in the intricate web of our cultural assumptions. Thus, it may induce us as insiders and outsiders to engage more critically with each other and the teachers, children and community members who are the subjects of our research. Managing this is not easy socially or emotionally, though the framework provided by exercises in reflexivity such as writing this paper is useful in bringing to the surface what has been assumed but often unsaid between us.

However, there is little room for manoeuvre in much research in Africa, a position created by current conditions involved with the commissioning, scheduling and evaluation of research. Ideally there would be more opportunity for reworking the research so that alternative perspectives might emerge. To do this, however, would require a great deal of time, which is clearly in short supply, as we are swept up by the imperatives of our funders. We have managed to achieve some of these more speculative and unofficial texts including papers such as this, but they have been produced under great pressure and have rarely reached mainstream audiences in a way that our other publications have.

Notes

1. Literally one from over the horizon, a foreigner, a white person.
2. In the 'non-funded research' the British Council/Department for International Development provided travelling and subsistence expenses only; 'funded research' involved paying for researchers' time and expenses.

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