

HISTORICAL MEMORY RESEARCH IN LUWERO TRIANGLE

METHODOLOGY

This was a pilot study targeting sub-counties in Buganda which formed part of the Luweero War Triangle. Historical memory is a qualitative research method which was used to solicit information from respondents in Luweero Triangle area specific to selected sites. The selected sites were Masuliita and Nakaseke sub-counties which were affected by the war as early as 1981 and right up to 1985. Most people were driven into concentration camps and were also part of the forced march into Singo county when both food and physical insecurity tightened. They experienced starvation and death at the hands of government security agencies. **The report was written using reported speech and considering majority answers to issues pointed out with a strong emphasis.** This method had various techniques underlying its intentions. For example, focus group discussions (FGDs) with 10 – 17 people were conducted.

Sampling took into consideration factors like: ethnicities, age, sex, geographical location for start of the war, displaced persons and former Red Cross camps, former war combatants, NRM supporters, Ganda monarchists, and Northerner settlers. These factors were used as background information on the group dynamics. Still, there was an inherent limitation in selection of sites; it was researchers' relatives or friends in the selected areas who could be contacted quickly to arrange for FGDs that were used to allow acceptance by communities at short notice. Thus these relatives/friends became the

community facilitators for the study. They recruited and invited the FGD participants. Through these means, a bond of trust and rapport could easily be established because the research issues held sensitive political elements since they touched on ongoing political debates like demands for “federo” (federal) governance and yet some of the respondents could very well be security/intelligence operatives who could scuttle the process of historical memory reconstruction. While there was no way of avoiding particular political orientational biases among the respondents recruited, the researchers were confident that as the study became more fully-fledged, this deficiency would be cured by the very process itself.

Other issues are:

- It is important to take into account the fact that the time scheduled for the fieldwork was short and this was a pilot study whereby the methodology was being tested too.
- Personal narratives or stories were purposively used to unearth views, insights, meanings emotional intensities.
- Topics for discussion were sensitive and needed an in-depth or detailed analysis which militated against quantitative methods like use of a questionnaire. Therefore, researchers resorted to a conversational approach to ease tension and reduce suspicion among respondents.
- Emphasis was put to understanding linguistic usage, that included action, movement, facial expression and singing war songs. For language is the primary means for transmitting culture. Culture is encoded in linguistic form. For example it was noted that use of words

like “anyanya, ebisajja ebicholi” literally translated as “dark skinned, tall male Acholi northerners” turned out, on probing, to carry implied meanings or wider connotations. Furthermore, social patterns and relationship to these words is not analysed but left to the person synthesizing the data. Therefore, there is no detailed exegesis to the words, folks, proverbs and symbols in the report

- Information was solicited using an FGD guide and key informant (KI) probing to clarify issues. Information was recorded using notebooks and videotapes. Video-taping was useful in recording verbatim responses and capturing expressional feelings and group dynamics as people narrated histories of the causes and contexts of war using personal experiences. Irrespective of the fact that the researchers explained the purpose of the research during introductions and prior to probing, respondents gathered wanted to know what the information was going to be used for and why they would be video taped. It was discussed and agreed that the video was useful for preserving what had transpired in the FGD for further reflection, study, inter-community exchanges of historical memory materials, etc. On the other hand since this was the first time that these people were videotaped while giving their testimonies, there is almost certainly a possibility that some may not have opened out fully. The research remained open to new perspectives, insights and meanings that people gave about various war-related themes and issues. Gender analysis was used to explore roles of men and women during the war and also to identify interests

and needs relating to conflict management. Finally, data was analysed thematically.

- It is worth noting that focus group discussions by their nature need homogeneity and perhaps this brought out similarities in responses and strong emphasis of certain issues, Thus the preponderance of a certain line of thinking, the seeming group cohesion far from being misleading actually captures the FGD reality as it was the videotapes indeed testify to that. The participants seem, in the majority, to espouse pro-NRM, pro-Federo, pro-monarchical sentiments albeit tinted with varying levels of commitment/support to the current NRM Government policies and practice. Respondents also held similar views due to geographical location during the war.
- Proverbs were used to clarify situations such as “federo” or describe other unique circumstances.
- Key informants were selected as a result of their good knowledge of the research topic. They clarified on matters that were identified as knowledge gaps during the FGDs.
- Although researchers could give a statistical breakdown, the presumed or hoped for statistical significance could be misleading. This is because the methodological framework did not target numbers as is the case in a questionnaire used for a survey, but looked for recollections, understandings, insights, meanings, interpretations which could and did shift as the participants listened to each others’ narratives.

Researchers' Observations

I. Gender Perspective

- Gender was used in terms of subdividing the groups of selected respondents to find out whether it held any special connection to the way information in the FGDs was given. Furthermore, gender played a crucial role in emphasis of issues. For example, during an FGD comprising of women alone, women acted emotionally by shedding tears on recalling what happened to their children and husbands or relatives through murder, rape, infringement of cultural taboos, etc. They also felt there was need to forgive each other for the atrocities committed during the war so as to put a stop to conflicts spirals. Unlike the men, women identified the role of civil society, church and non-government organizations in conducting counseling programmes within the communities. This spelt out how women deal with conflicts and also their management. Women sang war songs and used proverbs to describe circumstances. Women held more interest in saving lives and telling about their food searches. On the other hand men held different interests such as discussing politics as noted in the FGD with men alone. Even within the mixed FGDs where there were both men and women, all participated equally depending on topic of discussion and social status or political position held in the community. Some few women in these mixed FGDs could only talk if talked to. All men were at ease, especially the youths in their recount of war events. Both men and women wanted to be compensated for the destruction of their

properties and gain federalism to eliminate further conflicts resulting from multipartism.