Archiving as embodied research and security practice

Abstract

This article explores the importance of embodiment in (state) archival practice, researching counter-terrorism policy in Nigeria. In doing so, the article seeks to contribute to ongoing discussion around methodology and methods in critical security studies and other related fields in International Relations, by focusing on (researchers') bodies as sites of knowledge production and intervention. Building on three empirical themes of fragmentation, labelling, and gatekeeping which emerged from fieldwork in Abuja, Nigeria, I demonstrate how embodiment operates in active research contexts in producing –and problematising– in/security. To do this, I draw inspiration from ideas around state archival practice, embodiment in critical security studies especially as discussed in feminist and postcolonial work, and in/security theory to scaffold my broader methodological approach. Such a focus on embodiment, the article argues, marks the researcher's body –and research– as integral to the development of theories and findings about security. At the same time, exploring the ways in which the (researcher's) body is (re)produced in relation to identity and subjectivity encourages greater reflexivity in our research practice and fieldwork, as we are continually reminded that our work and our words are grounded in the standpoints that we occupy. The article concludes by identifying some useful strategies from my fieldwork for grappling with the challenges and tensions that emerge from bodily encounters in (security) research process.

Keyword: critical security studies, embodiment, ethnography, archives, Nigeria

Introduction

Archival process involves situated knowledge(s) and material practices –including sorting, storing, preserving, assembling, and so on– in active contexts through which the archive is reproduced. These processes or practices, however, are increasingly complicated in security research in which the embodied presence, and encounters, of the researcher conjures implicit —but ever-active— norms of insider/outsider and insecurity at multiple sites, producing varied ideas of (state) security practice. This article analytically situates the (researcher's) body, understood here as a product of discursive practices, as the focal point in (researching) archival practices on state counter-terrorism policy. Thus, approaching archiving as embodied research and security knowledge/practice offers significant normative and methodological insights, as well as implications for critical security researchers and research.

There is an emerging scholarship and increased attentiveness to methodology and methods in critical security studies and other related

fields, demonstrating the messiness of security research and the 'security life of methods,' driven more directly by what actors –including researchers and researched– in security and politics *do*, how they do it, and the effects of their actions (Aradau, Huysmans, Neal, and Voelkner, 2015: 5. See also Aradau and Huysmans, 2014; de Goede, Bosma, and Pallister-Wilkins, 2020; Salter and Mutlu, 2013). Therefore, in 'attending to methods' (Mol, 2002: 157), a plurality of these studies draws upon a range of conceptual and methodological approaches, including ethnographical tools such as participant observation, to make visible the complexity surrounding security research processes and findings, and to do justice to their reflexivity while developing potentially useful fieldwork strategies (Salter and Mutlu, 2013).

Still, embodiment has been surprisingly neglected in this discussion even though the underlying premise of this research enterprise conceptualise 'methods as practice' (Aradau et al., 2015). Specifically, methods are what researchers –and those they encounter in their research process– *do*, and how these are shaped by, and shape, new forms of knowledge and social arrangements. In a few examples where the body is considered –de Goede's (2020: 261) work on secret vignettes, for example– it is treated as providing supplementary evidence ostensibly to 'accompany more formal writing in order to incorporate the excluded, invisible or unsayable' (de Goede et al., 2020: 263). This, however, allows for a certain level of 'proximity' –or distance– and the privileged 'critical' space or position of security researchers, ignoring the fact that research itself is an instrument for emancipation or intervention.

To be clear, the relevance of the body has been discussed in archival research, feminist security studies and qualitative research more widely (Gentile, 2009; Maynard, 2009; Monaghan, 2011; Magnat, 2011; Wilcox, 2011; Parashar, 2014), as well as in discourses and practices of security (Noxolo, 2014; Adey, 2009; Puumala and Pehkonen, 2010). With this in mind, the aim of this article is the re-centring of bodies in critical security studies as sites of knowledge production to show how they work in research process in producing and problematising in/security. Put otherwise, the article argues that we are all embodied beings and embodiment operates in charged research contexts and mediate data elicitation practices and fieldwork, as well as the development of findings and theories about security.

In making this argument, the article contributes methodologically and empirically by showing how embodiment operates in security research through my fieldwork in Abuja, Nigeria, researching archival records related to state counter-terrorism policy. At the same time, the article contributes conceptually by building on three core empirical themes of fragmentation, labelling, and gatekeeping from my fieldwork. More specifically, I conceptualise fragmentation as an embodied bureaucratic process which produce obfuscations, labelling entails embodied constructions of secrecy and insecurity, and gatekeeping points to embodied practices of setting criteria for 'access' and evaluating risks of releasing sensitive documents. I demonstrate through these concepts how bodily practices and encounters during my fieldwork enabled the (re)production of in/security, highlighting different notions of state security practice including gendered, bureaucratic/individual interests, and neo-colonial/imperialistic designs.

Such re-centring of bodies in security research, as argued in this article, marks the 'privileged' bodies of security researchers as integral to the development of findings and theories about security. Also, analyzing the complex ways in which the body is (re)produced and implicated with –but not reducible to– questions of ethnicity, nationality, gender, and other aspects of our identities (and subjectivities) draws attention to the plurality of bodies who are (security) researchers and researched. What is more, including researchers' bodies is an essential part of our reflexivity as we are continually reminded that our work and our words are grounded in specific standpoints that we occupy which has consequences in our research process and findings. This argument indeed has salient resonances for other discussions beyond critical security methodology, including state archival practice, postcolonial archives, political geography, secrecy studies, ethnography and fieldwork, securitization of research and the conceptualisation of security more broadly, among other related fields and discussions in International Relations.

To do this, I draw on three main sources of theoretical and methodological inspiration, including the idea of (state) archives –or archiving– as embodied security practice (Gentile, 2009; Maynard, 2009); ideas around embodiment in critical security studies especially in feminist and postcolonial work (Wilcox, 2011; Wibben, 2009; Parashar, 2014;

D'costa, 2016); and in/security theory (McDonald, 2008). The rest of the article unfolds as follows: I begin in the next section by detailing the methodology, including the above-identified conceptual tools, and methods employed in this article to theorise archiving as embodied research and security practice. Then I elaborate on my fieldwork ethnography in Nigeria and provide a brief account of the state archive in Nigeria to contextualise and distinguish my own intervention. A final section demonstrates and interrogates the multi-sited emergence of in/security in my research process (and findings) through the concepts of fragmentation, labelling, and gatekeeping.

Archiving as embodied research and security practice

This article draws on two months (from February to April 2020) of fieldwork undertaken in Abuja, Nigeria at various (non-)governmental sites – including the Ministry of Justice, the Office of the National Security Adviser, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Interior, the British High Commission, and the British Council in Nigeria– which forms part of my doctoral thesis exploring state counter-terrorism policy. This research was specifically interested in texts produced by Nigeria's federal executive, offering official articulations about counter-terrorism strategies in Nigeria, such as policy documents, speeches, minutes of meetings, reports, security handbooks, among other texts designated as 'public records' in circulation since 2009. Indeed, archival processes and practices at governmental sites especially in the context of research around counter-terrorism or security more generally, offer significant insights to understanding the reproduction of archival knowledge, state power, and in/security (see, for example, Gentile, 2009; Peterson in Bevernage and Wouters, 2018).

Yet the role of the researcher and research in this production is often not adequately accounted for. Thus, taking cues from Aradau and Huysmans's (2013: 603) idea of methods as 'inscription devices and acts,' I approach archiving as embodied research method through which security and insecurity emerges. As 'devices' and 'acts,' methods enact and disrupt social and political worlds in multiple ways which permits for situating and questioning the knowledge(s) produced through my research process and findings. Motivated thus, the next move I make in this article is to draw upon an assemblage of ideas on archiving, embodiment,

and the social construction of security to scaffold the methodological standpoint adopted herein.

There is a significant body of work on archives as social and cultural constructs, reproducing asymmetrical power relations, grand narratives, silences, nationalism, colonialism, among others (McKemmish and Gilliland, 2013; Nesmith, 2002; Stoler, 2002; McEwan, 2003; Harris, 2002). Even more importantly, state archival practice has been explored to illustrate the ways in which security is re-enacted through acts of classification and secrecy (Peterson, 2018), surveillance (Maynard, 2009; Weld, 2014), and restrictions (Gentile, 2009). Gentile's (2009) ethnographical study of counter-terrorism policies in Canada, for example, illustrates how the researcher's presence and encounter with the state archive permits the reproduction of opposing identities and national security. They demonstrate the queering of state archives, in which particular (queer) bodies are marked as potential security risks, denied access to relevant information, and/or erased from Canadian history. I draw on this idea of state archives as (re)produced through embodiment and located ideas in active research contexts; though this produce complex outcomes than Gentile's work suggests. In view of this, I draw insights from other work in critical security studies and beyond to develop a broader conceptualisation of embodiment to show how it operates in security research settings.

Indeed, questions about the significance of the body in research processes and knowledge about security have been posed in critical security studies especially by feminist and postcolonial scholarship. Embodiment as a term, often refers to a recognition that we (researcher/researched) access –and act upon– the world through our bodies because we are situated in space and time. However, such ideas of 'flesh-witnessing' or about the materiality of the human body, has increasingly been questioned by feminist scholars in international relations and security studies by demonstrating how the body is (re)produced through social and political relations, and its relationship to identity and subjectivity (Wilcox, 2011). Feminist security studies, in particular, show how the concept –and practice– of security is underpinned by particular (gendered) conceptions of the body. They illustrate for instance how 'war bodies' or bodies that can be killed, or injured are (re)produced through discursive

practices (Parashar, 2014: 1), as well as how the body of the soldier, the body of the rape victim, and the body protected by the laws of war constructs (international) security in various ways (Wilcox, 2011). Feminist methodology across the disciplines as such think of how the body matter politically and pay attention to the inter-relationship between the researcher and researched (Parashar as cited in Sylvester, 2011). Furthermore, postcolonial renderings about the body offer a complex and nuanced understanding of embodiment which often overlap, extend, or build on feminist ideas (Parpart, 2020; D'costa, 2016). Much of this work argue that in our increasingly global, postcolonial world, the body has emerged not only as a site of (articulating) oppression and colonial violence but also for resistance, change, and challenging social injustice (Parpart, 2020).

Building on this important collection of work, and in writing my own body and research into the (re)production of archival knowledge vis-à-vis in/security, I take cues from Wilcox's (2011) call for thinking through, and beyond feminist/gendered (as well as raced/classed/(dis)abled/among other) theorizing of embodiment. Such a conceptualisation of embodiment invoked in this article, sees 'the body' as changeable, fluid, and transformable in its social (and political) meanings within active research contexts. More generally, ethnographic fieldwork has been described as an embodied practice in which the researcher's body is implicated in the research process and knowledge production (Coffey, 1999; Monaghan, 2011). Also, the complex identity and positionality of researchers especially those from the global south who reside and work in Western institutions have been explored (Parashar, 2019; Giwa, 2015; Macaspac, 2018; Sultana, 2007). Ellingson (2006) in this regard, argues that researchers' bodies matter in research processes and findings irrespective of the research method adopted.

Thus, a range of strategies has been advanced for writing the body into research to demonstrate how it operates in knowledge production, including through incorporating auto-ethnographic narratives (see, for example, de Goede, 2020); drawing on bodily senses in research process and findings (Sparkes and Smith, 2012); interrogating the specific ways in which bodily practices and encounters affected knowledge production (Ellingson, 2006); and

by semantically writing the body as self, portraying it as fluid and changeable (Spry, 2006). The approach developed in this article draws specifically on how bodily practices and presence activates certain bodily inscriptions and identity markers (including race, gender, class, age, nationality, and ethnicity) producing different notions of identity and subjectivity, to highlight and query the emergence of in/security in my encounters with the state archive in Nigeria.

In view of the preceding discussions, I approach security as practice –in its broadest sense– as described by McDonald (2008). According to McDonald (2008), security/insecurity emerges from, or are (re)produced through, social and political practices within different contexts, producing different notions of security. Accordingly, I examine the ways in which in/security emerges from, or is located in, different sites and through different procedures during my fieldwork. This involves bureaucratic processes of fragmentation which diffuses and obfuscates, (embodied) constructions of secrecy and threats through labelling, and gatekeeping practices of setting criteria for access and assessing risks of releasing sensitive documents. These processes and practices essentially entail evaluating and juxtaposing my embodied presence against (unstated) norms of insider/outsider, in/valid researcher, or significantly threatening. Finally, I conclude the discussion in this section by outlining the methods, which forms part of my broader methodological framework: this includes fieldnotes detailing daily observations, conversations, and other research activities; and two unstructured interviews with individuals, including one archivist, at the Ministry of Justice, Nigeria.

My fieldwork ethnography in Nigeria

The following section demonstrates the re-articulation of identity and, more importantly, the significance of the researcher's body in its production. I actively performed different identities through bodily practices such as speaking with a 'British' or 'Nigerian' accent, dressing mostly in a suit as a way of transforming my body to project certain class/age/gender

image, and presenting copies of my published works and my university's business card, which were always attached to my body (stored inside my pockets) and displayed to security guards, archivists, and other state officials voluntarily. These bodily practices invigorate certain bodily inscriptions especially my skin colour (categorised as Black African), as well as other identity markers such as (male-)gender, nationality, ethnicity, and age which were significant in gaining 'access' to particular research sites or document, or audience from various state and non-state actors.

More importantly, my identity was precariously (re-)articulated in three ways. First as Nigerian-diaspora due to my affiliation to a University in the UK, speaking with a British or Nigerian accent, my skin colour, and inter-racial marriage. On one occasion I explained that I was as 'Nigerian' as anyone else, but a state official at the Ministry of Justice insisted that the diaspora label was well suited since I reside in the UK and was affiliated to a university in the UK.[ii] This meant that my relationship with archivists was, often, less cordial, and more formal. Second, as Nigerian-Ibo which highlights my ethnic connections and in so doing exposes the layers of my Nigerian identity with regard to my Igbo ethnicity (see, Giwa, 2015). Third, as an academic-researcher owing much to the display of my published works, introduction letter from my university explaining the purpose and scope of the research, use of academic terms, and dressing corporately to evoke an image of a serious-minded researcher in spite of my relatively young age. Moreover, my masculinity contributed, whether directly or otherwise, to reinforcing this identity of academic-researcher as (counter-)terrorism and security (research) is routinely gendered as male, and this often determines who is regarded as a 'serious' researcher (Wilcox, 2011). The gendered dimension of my embodiment was especially crucial in setting criteria for entry by security guards at government ministries, as I show later in this article.

Beyond these, I generally smiled during conversations and avoided showing frustration even when asked probing questions by archivists or other state officials regarding my research focus on counter-terrorism policies, or my interest in official texts. Also, I ensured that I was seen to be abiding by the procedures and rules at each governmental site to avoid putting my

motivations in doubt, such as going through security checks promptly, in the process present my body for inspection, and walking slowly from the organisations' gate into the main reception area making myself –and body parts– visible to security cameras, security guards, and other individuals particularly by keeping my palms open and out of my pockets when not in use. Overall, these bodily practices in my encounters with the state archive enabled the (re)production of in/security, whether through designating a threatening identity, or invoking implicit norms of insider/outsider.

Recordkeeping at the government sites that I visited encompasses the management of organisational registries, departments, online repositories, and the reproduction of memory in which archivists, librarians, and other state officials shared stories about state counter-terrorism policies and practices in Nigeria (Jarvis and Holland, 2014). In a sense, this expands the 'field of security professional' through the formulation of 'truths' about counterterrorism on the one hand, and, managing security threats in archival processes on the other hand (Bigo, 2002). According to a librarian at the Ministry of Justice, organisational registries are typically used for managing staff records,[ii] while other documents related to my research focus circulated within different organisational departments, online repositories, and memory. This was in part due to the ongoing issue of terrorism in the north-east of Nigeria, which meant that different aspects of the state's counterterrorism policy were managed by –and within– separate state organisations and departments. Indeed, Nigeria has faced issues of 'terrorism' since 2009 and the state counter-terrorism policy and practices has continuously been scrutinised and criticised by human rights groups, foreign media, researchers, and other internal/external actors (Agbiboa, 2015). Thus, research on counter-terrorism policies –or practices– often bring about questions of secrecy, suspicion, and obsfucations (Mateja and Strazzari, 2017). Yet, my embodied presence and encounters increasingly obscure and transform these processes and show exactly how the researcher's body –and research– is integral to the production of in/security.

A brief history of the state archive in Nigeria

The discourse and practices around state archives in Nigeria can be located in the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern regions by the colonial administration in 1914, which brought into being the Nigerian state. In particular, discussions about the custody and safekeeping of official colonial records and other referential documents are described in various colonial dispatches in 1929, 1936, and 1948 (Ukwu, 1995). For example, the 1948 dispatch was accompanied by a memorandum from then Deputy keeper of Public Records in England and Wales, Sir Hilary Jenkinson, emphasising the subject of preservation of official records of the Nigeria government. However, it was not until 1954 before the Nigerian Record Office (changed to National Archives of Nigeria in 1957) was established by the colonial government, citing the lack of storage facilities and personnel (Abioye, 2007). Arguably, this so-called 'lack' served as legitimation for producing, circulating, and organising the colonial state archive in ways that sustained colonialism (for similar discussion see, Harris, 2002).

The literature on state archival practice in Nigeria typically approaches the composition of state archives as fixed, autonomous, and self-accounting (Adelberger, 1992; Abioye, 2007). Yet, such rationalist assumptions ignore the social and political relations embedded in the reproduction of the state archive. For example, the National Archives Act (1999) makes provision for a 25-year access rule to public archives, and restriction on the disposal, transfer, or sale of private archives without permission of the Director of National archives of Nigeria, among other regulations (Abioye, 2007). Furthermore, the continuing effects of colonialism in state archival practice in Nigeria, including in producing, preserving, and circulating records, are often taken for granted. The preservation of records in the different regions that constitute the post-colonial Nigerian state (this includes the North, South, and East), including colonial records specific to each region, illustrates this point (Adelberger, 1992). Such practices of fragmenting and dispersing records which, at least in part, reinforces the idea of a collective (nation) as well as its splits, functions in other significant (embodied) ways in my research process, which I now turn to discuss.

Fragmentation as embodied bureaucratic process

State archival practice in Nigeria often involve managing records within different departments (or regions, as described above), given various reasons or justifications. For example, the continuing problem of terrorism and the lengthy period of prosecution of suspected terrorists, as an individual at the Complex Case Working Group (CCG) described, justifies recordkeeping within this sub-department in the Ministry of Justice.[iii] However, the notion of *fragmentation* developed here suggests a bureaucratic process shaped by bodily practices and encounters involving different of state/non-state actors during my fieldwork, rather than a singular moment of storing records at a particular (sub-)governmental location. This bureaucratic process, in effect, diffuses and obscures. Essentially, my embodied presence (and practices) is juxtaposed against tacit assumptions of insider/outsider, or reinforces a significantly threatening identity in these encounters, as I show in what follows.

During my fieldwork, I was informed by officials at different state ministries about the collaboration between the British government and the Nigerian government in the fight against terrorism. For instance, the CCG –which is a sub-department in the Ministry of Justice, Nigeria, responsible for the prosecution of terrorist suspects– was described as the "brain-child of the British High Commission" by a state official.[iv] This is within the broader, and far-reaching, intervention of the British government in security processes and practices in Nigeria, including prison building and policy recommendations such as the abolition of the death penalty[v] (For similar discussion see, El-Enany, 2020: 89). British involvement in counterterrorism policy and practice in Nigeria was widely acknowledged and, as such, I was consistently referred to the British High Commission and the British Council in Nigeria as alternative sites, or rather a more suited avenue for collecting data due to my diasporic identity reinforced through my presence and other bodily practices.

In one instance, these British (state-)organisations were described as an extension of the state archive in Nigeria, or part thereof, by an official at the Ministry of Interior: "if they don't give you the documents you need, just go to the British High Commission and the British

Council [they should] have copies of them. And those ones would not have a problem releasing them to you."[vi] My identity as Nigerian-diaspora implicitly informed this deferral not least because my affiliation to a UK university, (speaking with a) 'British' accent, among other elements and bodily practices that re-inscribes my diasporic image, were perceived as threatening to the Nigerian state organisations. At the same time, the 'liberal values' promoted by the British government was pertinently emphasised, which supposedly contrasts dramatically with the gatekeeping norms and practices of their Nigerian counterparts. The overlapping of the national/racial dimensions of my embodiment permit the construction of multiple storage points –Nigerian and British–, producing obscurity with regard to the (un)bounds of the Nigerian state archive, how it might be accessed, and by who. Indeed, as Hughes and Garnett (2020) observe, such fragmenting and obfuscating process differ considerably from obstruction/restriction as there was no specific moment of refusal or denial of access but rather a series of deferrals to different organisations.

My visits to the British High Commission and the British Council for information around counter-terrorism in Nigeria, foreign intervention and assistance, further illustrates this bureaucratic process of fragmenting, diffusing, and obscuring, shaped by embodiment. Moreover, the relationship between these British organisations and the Nigerian government sheds light on the governance of security threats in Nigeria, including terrorism, and tacitly highlights the continuing effects (and practices) of colonialism.

> From the British High Commission, I was directed to the British Council for further assistance. The member of staff at the British Council admitted that a library and an archive was managed by the British Council and was open to members of the public. However, they have been closed down due to security issues in Nigeria, as requested by the Nigerian government.[vii]

According to the staff at the British Council, these records were dispersed accordingly by the British Council to other organisations and individuals, such as the Managing Conflict in Nigeria (MCN) programme which I was, again, referred to. Much of the debate around researching

security policies and practices especially in so-called dangerous or undemocratic countries, often reproduce limiting assumptions about the securitizing of research sites, participants, or objects, closing them off to (disembodied) ethnographers or security researchers (Chappuis and Krause in de Goede, 2020). Moving beyond questions about access/restriction –as suggested by de Goede, Bosma, and Pallister-Wilkins (2020)– allows for a deeper understanding of how such practices or processes are shaped by embodiment. Specifically, my encounters at these British organisations where I presented evidence of my university affiliation and explained the purpose of my research in a noticeably 'British' accent to reinforce a diasporic image, enabled the deferral to other (non-state) organisations and individuals for documents on Nigeria's counter-terrorism policy. The staff at these organisations portrayed this as an extraordinary favour, or privilege accorded a UK resident.

Furthermore, a letter of introduction was requested at the state ministries outlining the nature and purpose of my visit. As such I presented copies of reference letters from my university addressed to the head of the organisation, usually, the federal minister. Schwell's (2020: 92) idea of bureaucratic fetish in fieldwork, points to the collection of data (such as official permits and introduction letters) and categorisation of researchers within bureaucratic systems which makes their existence visible. In a sense, this bureaucratic process of collecting, identifying, and categorising researchers could be seen as a way of fragmenting and obscuring, occurring either within a particular governmental site or externally, primarily configured by the researcher's body. The purpose of my research and university affiliation as outlined in the reference letters, and the in-person follow up on the letters, largely determined which department within –or outside– a particular state organisation attends to my request for access, as shown in my conversation with an official at the Ministry of Defence:

> Although the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) stipulates those records within state organisations should be made available to members of the public, as long as they are not classified, however for security related documents…like the one you require…unfortunately, the rules do not always apply. The individual suggested that

> an executive summary should be attached to my original reference letter addressed to the minister of defence, explaining further the purpose of the research and my affiliation. This would help the minister decide on the appropriate department to treat my request.[viii]

Exceptionalizing and securitizing documents related to counter-terrorism or security –as in the above conversation– often bring about secrecy in research process which, inadvertently, conceal and obscure (de Goede and Wesseling, 2017). Hughes and Garnett's (2020) work for example, which involved accessing the US army's FOIA reading room website, illuminate the ways in which state secrets are reproduced through a series of ambiguous practices, including through redacting FOIA-requested data and restrictions on the US army's FOIA website. As the above fieldnote indicates, however, secrecy in (security) research process could be enabled by bodily practices and presence of the researcher, through production of a particular (threatening) identity. For example, the reference to my presence – "the one *you* require"– and the suggestion offered by the state official during our conversation, are underlined by implicit assumptions of insider/outsider which determines whether 'the rules (will) apply, or not.' My request for access was re-directed to the Army Headquarters from the Ministry of Defence (by the minister of defence). Interestingly, some of the officials that I spoke to at the Army Headquarters explained that this referral was absurd since the Ministry of Defence oversees most of the recordkeeping responsibilities of that executive branch of government.[ix]

In sum, state security and interests are often described as justification or the underlying logic of state archival practices or security practices more generally (Zin, 1977; Cox, 2010). The above discussion, however, demonstrates how the bureaucratic process of fragmentation is shaped by embodiment in security research, producing complex ideas about state security practices. More specifically, it highlights and implicates the above-mentioned British (state-)organisations and the British government in archival processes –and practices– in Nigeria which ultimately contributes to reinforcing state power and British (imperialistic) interests (Stoler, 2002). This has significant social and political implications, as my research findings clearly identify British influence in counter-terrorism policies in Nigeria

which reproduces a specific (problematic) understanding of, and approach to, counter-terrorism framed within the 'global war on Islamic terrorism.'

That said, archives as well as the production of knowledge through research, including theories and assumptions about counter-terrorism and security more broadly, are essentially fragmentary and incomplete. Even more so, my embodied presence and encounters during fieldwork in Nigeria increasingly influence this process, as well as my findings. The Nigerian government, for example, collaborates with several internal and external actors, including Western countries such as the U.S and the U.K, in the fight against terrorism which were alluded to during my conversations with state officials in Nigeria. However, my interlocutors during fieldwork shared information specifically about the collaboration between the British government and the Nigerian government and how much the Nigerian government values this relationship.

Labelling: embodied constructions of secrecy and insecurity

While secrecy permeates virtually all aspects of social life, it is increasingly pertinent in security policies, practices, and research processes (including before, during, and after research fieldwork). For instance, designating certain documents or sites as 'restricted' or 'secret files' operates as a code of concealment, reproducing privileged categories and subject-positions of the state and those who act on its behalf, including archivists, and other subjects (who may be) denied or restricted access (Peterson, 2018). The production of secrecy has received considerable attention in Secrecy Studies (Maret, 2016; Birchall, 2011) and, more recently, a growing collection of scholarship in css explore the (re)production and effects of secrecy in security research (de Goede et al., 2020). Rather than an obstacle to overcome, secrecy is approached in this literature as an object of study and analysis: looking at how it emerges, its implications, and what it tells us about security (and research about security). Building upon this, I show how embodiment enables –and shapes– the discursive construction of secrecy and insecurity, through acts of labelling. In this sense, secrecy is not simply relational

and productive but deeply embodied, given that the (researcher's) body is integral to its (re)production.

Some of the records encountered during my fieldwork were designated "restricted," even though they had been officially 'de-classified.'[x] This was mostly due to the fact that most of these records, especially court judgements on terrorism cases, were either encased in their pre-declassified form or had "restricted" stamps on them at the time of my fieldwork. Increasingly, it blurs the distinction between what is restricted or public, secret or non-secret, as well as who or how they are defined in different contexts. For instance, state organisations or departments may constitute certain documents as public, while individuals, archivists, and researchers may define them differently given several situated reasons. My interview with an archivist at the Ministry of Justice explains further:

> Although it is public document, but we know that people are always mischievous with such information. We do not know what you will do with these documents when you leave the shores of Nigeria. We do not trust the public (including researchers) that such information would not be used against the government. Also, we are not sure about the content of the information in our possession. This is because such information is not properly stored and catalogue to differentiate between restricted and public documents. This lack of proper record-keeping keeps us on the edge about granting access through which certain weaknesses may emerge.[xi]

The archivist expresses concern regarding the (mis)use of public files, especially how they may be used to undermine the integrity of the Nigerian government and its effort to address terrorism, and perhaps the interest of the organisation (and the archivist) where it emerged from. Yet, for the most part, this act of labelling and secrecy required evaluating my embodied presence against norms of insider/outsider, or a threatening identity. As discussed further below, I engaged in further conversation with the archivist explaining my research goals and affiliation and showing a positive or calm demeanour during this conversation (including by smiling, nodding to show agreement, among other bodily gestures). My affiliation to a university in the UK, indeed, evokes the idea of a 'native-informant' or collaborator of a foreign/western institution, perceived as inappropriately threatening (Spivak, 1993). At the same time, the complexity of my

identity as a Nigerian who normally resides in the UK temporalizes my fieldwork, fixing it to/within a specific timeframe which presupposes my (final) return to the UK.

In addition, the overlap and fluidity of the different categories of secret and non-secret due to the 'lack' of an effective cataloguing system (and my presence), also facilitates concealment or secrecy. As Belcher and Martin (2020) notes, holding up appearances of secrecy does not always indicate 'sensitivity,' but can instead show moments of inaction, a lack of clear policies, busyness on the part of the officials, or a reluctance to reveal internal tensions and disagreements. Thus, in one sense, labelling and the selective (dis)closure of information marked by embodiment in security research processes implicates the archivist in more complex ways than is often assumed. For example, in my conversation with the archivists, they expressed concern about (losing) their jobs and individual safety, as well as the lack of proper training to do their jobs effectively (which partly accounts for their suspicion and assessment of my presence). Many studies on state archival practice often take the state as a homogenous actor, and the archivist is constituted as a static state official (Harris, 2002). However, as demonstrated here, constructions of state secrecy and in/security by archivists (or state officials) may overlap with other referents, including individual/job security, as well as organisational security.

Besides the above, labelling functions in other important ways in 'disclosing' information that was either undisclosed to the public, or already de-classified at the time of my fieldwork. It highlights the production of secrecy through disclosures by the archivist, specifically through interpreting supposedly classified information on state counter-terrorism practices. This in effect collapse the boundary between concealment and disclosure, secret and non-secret. Much later in my fieldwork after several encounters with different organisations, individuals, and archivists, the following fieldnote and experience are illuminating:

> Having established a good understanding of the context, the archivist had little doubt about my familiarity with the organisation and the collaboration between state organisations in Nigeria and other institutions within and outside the country. The archivist pulled a file from a drawer and showed me, saying "this is what you are looking for…but can I ask you what you want to do with this information?" The

> archivist emphasised that it is 'restricted' from the public, including researchers, but summarised the content of the file.[xii]

The archivist summarised the content of the purportedly 'secret file' which included documents about the human rights allegations against the Nigerian government by different groups, and how the Nigerian government have responded to these claims. More specifically, the counter-terrorism approach of the state was said to uphold "human rights standards and good global practices."[xiii] The archivist's interpretation thus functions as a way of dis-closing and obscuring, given that the documents from which it was extrapolated were ostensibly labelled/defined as "restricted" or "secret files". This is puzzling not least because this construction of secrecy/disclosure was markedly informed by my embodied presence and identity, as the archivist attempts to articulate the state's counter-terrorism efforts in good light to a security researcher, or a Nigerian living abroad.

Indeed, trust-building during ethnographic fieldwork particularly in bureaucratic settings through various techniques including hanging out, self-declaration, ethnographic interviewing, among others has been described as useful tools for revealing 'secrets' or obtaining hard-to-find information (Bahira, 2001). Apart from an implicit assumption regarding the objectivity of secrecy, how do we know that trust has actually been established? Or that a particular secret has been revealed? Walters and Luscombe's (2020: 63) idea of postsecrecy partly captures this conundrum, in which what comes after secrecy might not necessarily be a clean break, a revelation, or a transparent time disentangled from the suspicion, memory, intrigue, hierarchy and fear that might once have attached to the secret. As the above note indicates, the imaginary of threat is ever-present, though less emphasised, as my embodied presence nonetheless evokes questions and suspicion. However, through practices such as speaking cautiously when responding to the probing questions posed by the archivist enabled the re-articulation of diasporic/researcher identity (at least to a less threatening degree).

In all, constructing secrecy does not simply involve material practices of labelling something, rather it includes evaluating and measuring threats in active research contexts, implicating the security researcher (and researched) in its

(re)production. This indeed may lead to multiple outcomes which obscures the boundary between secrecy and disclosure. Such off-the-records information or (post-)secrets, however, present important ethical challenges for critical security researchers: what do we know but perhaps cannot include in our research findings? Are we violating the 'trust' reposed in us by those we encountered during fieldwork? And more importantly, how do we 'write with secrecy' in problematising state security practices? (Rappert in de Goede et al., 2020: 129). Some useful strategies including anonymising, storing, and redacting sensitive information have been identified (which itself reproduces secrecy) (Glasius et al., 2018). That said, centring embodiment in research process and moving beyond questions of trust and disclosure, allows for interrogating state security practices. Specifically, the militaristic approach of Nigeria's counter-terrorism practices, which of course is clearly reflected in policy texts such as Nigeria's National Counter-terrorism Strategy (2016) for example, contrasts significantly with the claims of recognition and respect for human rights suggested by the archivist. And from my findings, so-called secret files do not necessarily divulge unknown –or new– information, rather they either reinforce already known ideas, or counter and distort them.

Gatekeeping as embodied security practice

Archival research and research more generally, often involve the participation of different actors whether directly or indirectly. Thus, gatekeeping is commonly used to describe how access to research sites, participants, and resources were obtained by the ethnographer or researcher (Parashar, 2019). This may include the intervention of individuals within or outside an organisation, as well as organisations that provide links to research sites and participants. Such an understanding of gatekeeping runs the risk of essentialism particularly by producing a fixed identity of a gatekeeper (often used interchangeably or distinctively with terms such as facilitator, fixer, go-between, broker, among others), or articulates gatekeeping as ultimately leading to a determined –either/or– outcome. Barzilai-Nahon (2009) suggests approaching gatekeeping as practice which encourages a wider examination of it functions, complexity, and effects in research process. In light of my encounters during

fieldwork, gatekeeping practices involved setting criteria for access and evaluating the risk of disclosing sensitive information which were shaped by embodiment. In what follows, I illustrate how the researcher and different actors, including street-level security guards at various governmental sites that are oft-ignored in archival practice, are increasingly implicated in gatekeeping (Boucher, Infantino, and Salter, 2014).

Security guards at the entrance of government organisations as a matter of standard procedure or routine (Crawford and Hutchinson, 2016), request for the verification of the visitor's identity, which includes stating the purpose of such visit; in my case, for research around state counterterrorism policy. Notably, this usually brooked further questions such as: "why are you interested in this topic", "why do you want to collect documents from the government," and "who do you know".[xiv] In these encounters, my identity of (male-)security researcher from a foreign university interested in state counterterrorism strategy intersects with the rationalities of the security guards, producing assumptions of insider/outsider in setting criteria for entry. 'Public access' is granted to all except visitors from foreign geographies (racialised as white, or other foreign nationals). However, the ephemerality and the deeper effects of embodiment shaping this was brought to light through mentioning names of personal contacts, speaking in different local/ethnic languages (this includes pidgin-English and Igbo), and displaying my body parts to security cameras and guards which implicitly reinforce my masculinity. The guards often reciprocated these gestures by saluting, bowing, or referring to me in dignified, gendered ways such as "oga" (meaning: a male-boss), conflating the racial/class/national/ethnic/and gendered dimensions of my embodiment in granting access.

What is more, personal contacts or other individuals and organisations who participate in research and often negotiate access to research sites or participants, given their presumed familiarity with the context, are increasingly aware of the researcher's body and presence. During my fieldwork –and after– these personal contacts performed other gatekeeping acts, including maintaining communication archivists

and evaluating the risk of releasing sensitive documents. The following notes illustrates further:

> Don't worry I assured the archivist that that information will not be used in any way that maligns the government. This does not mean, of course, that you cannot criticise certain practices of the Nigerian government as represented in the research data; as such criticism, if done properly, can help improve government practices.[xv]

As this indicates, gatekeeping in security research includes weighing and assessing the implications of releasing 'sensitive' documents to researchers by personal contacts even after fieldwork. Thus, keeping in touch with personal contacts after fieldwork or data collection is necessary for ensuring the appropriate use of archival documents. This shows how gatekeeping practices transcend time and space, as my (ongoing) research, bodily presence, and diasporic identity which suggests my return to the UK after conducting fieldwork, were considered –and acted upon– by the person contact in Nigeria. Indeed, such practices and relationships present significant challenges in writing up research findings, including issues of trust and the choices we make regarding selecting, excluding, remembering, and forgetting things. Rappert's (2020: 129) idea about 'writing with secrecy' suggests that we approach secrecy as an underlying condition of security research, rather than as something to overcome. Writing secrecy as embodied practice, as argued throughout this article, allows for greater reflexivity and intervention by (security) researchers. This may take the form of clarifying our standpoint and politics about our research (including through sharing our work, ideas, and research findings) with those that we encounter –or form relationships with– before/during/and after fieldwork and re-thinking our scholarship as a form of activism.

The distinction between scholarship and activism often suggests a certain level of detachment or critical distance, from the security issues we study and write on (Stavrianakis in de Goede et al., 2020). However, research itself, that is, deciding what topic to study, how we go about collecting and analysing data, and deciding on the appropriate journal or audience for our work, are all embodied and political (Ellingson, 2006). My interest in counter-terrorism policies in Nigeria largely stems from being a Nigerian national and

my keen interest in its politics, as well as my current career goal of researching and writing about security issues.

Conclusion

This article has argued that embodiment should be re-positioned as a core methodological concern in critical security studies (and beyond). It explored the ways in which in/security is (re)produced through archival practices or processes shaped my embodiment at various (non)governmental sites during fieldwork in Nigeria researching state counter-terrorism policy. Put differently, embodiment in security research makes visible the complex processes or practices involved in fieldwork and data elicitation, highlighting the different and overlapping ideas of state security practice, including bureaucratic/individual, neo-colonial, and gendered. This final section begins by restating the contribution of this study to debates around methodology and methods in critical security studies and theories of security more widely. To emphasise here, recognising the significance of embodiment implicates this article in the curation of theories and concepts about security and, as such, the outcomes sketched herein are fundamentally ephemeral.

This article demonstrates the complexity and messiness involved in security research process by exploring the workings of embodiment through the empirical themes of fragmentation, labelling, and gatekeeping. In doing so, this work contributes to discussions on state archival practice, including postcolonial archives, as well as to discussions around secrecy, ethnographic fieldwork, and critical security methods more generally. Importantly, the article provides a useful way to observe how in/security emerge and highlights the role played by the (security) researcher –and researched–, encouraging increased awareness in our research practice by being attentive to how our bodies, identities, and subjectivities are implicated in research processes and knowledge production. In fieldwork settings, for instance, this requires more active participation and engagement in disrupting and diffusing the tensions that emerges through our (bodily) encounters with different aspects of the state, or those that we research and write about.

An important contextual caveat: research on security policies and practices in contexts experiencing ongoing cases of insecurity, often provide room for suspicion and resistance (Helbardt et al., 2010). As was the case during my fieldwork where the Nigerian state still confronts the issue of terrorism as well as criticisms of human rights abuses from both local and external actors (Agbiboa, 2015). Therefore, the focus of the research as well as the researcher's body increasingly obscure and complicate research in these areas. Seen in this way, the research process becomes heavily charged. This sheds light on the connotations associated with the identities of academic, researcher, Nigerian-diaspora, although consistently flexible. Moreover, by paying attention to how the body is (re)produced in relation to identity and subjectivity, this article highlights the possibility for different outcomes. Therefore, some broad practical strategies for critical security researchers can be identified from my research.

Importantly, the gatekeeping practices which played out in different context and at various stages of my research instruct that researchers are aware of their embodied presence and adopt effective ways of researching, writing, and talking about security in the contexts that they engage in. For instance, the security guards at the entrance of the state organisations in Nigeria that I visited may know little about archival processes, however the researcher's body and the research focus informed their decision-making in setting criteria for entry, cutting across racial/national/gendered/classed/ and ethnic dimensions of my embodiment. This challenge could be overcome through explaining and clarifying (in simple terms) the purpose of our research with those we encounter whether directly or indirectly in fieldwork. Other practical steps include using research assistants and collaborating with local researchers, given the frequent suspicion raised by my foreign affiliation and the gendered/racial lenses through which in/security was re-enacted. Though this strategy contributes to addressing some of the problems associated with fieldwork and gatekeeping, security researchers should be attentive to the (often unequal) relationships that emerge from such research collaborations especially with local-based researchers.

Notes

[i] Field note 5/04/2020

[ii] Fieldnote 19/02/2020

[iii] Interview 1, 13/03/2020

[iv] The CCG was created through a joint effort between the Ministry of Justice and the British High Commission in Nigeria to train and equip lawyers for the purpose of prosecution of terrorist suspects. The CCG is a group (or sub-department) in the Department of Public Prosecution (DPP), within the Ministry of Justice. File no. DPPA/CCG072/14; Fieldnote 04/03/2020

[v] File no. DPPA/CCG072/14

[vi] Fieldnote 04/03/2020

[vii] Fieldnote 02/03/2020

[viii] fieldnote 17/02/2020

[ix] I obtained a copy of this internal correspondence between the ministry of defence and army headquarters for reference purposes. Ref. no. AE/HMOD/73/ABJ

[x] This includes records of court judgement on terrorism cases, official reports, and official correspondence between different state organisations in relation to my research and access.

[xi] Interview 1, 13/03/2020

[xii] Fieldnote, 14/03/2020

[xiii] Ibid

[xiv] Field notes 17/02/2020; 18/02/2020; 19/02/2020; 20/02/2020

[xv] Interview 2, 13/03/2020

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Interviews

Interviews were conducted at the Ministry of Justice on 13/03/2020