

# Of Participation Roles in the Field

Akinyi Wadende P.<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Education, Administration, Psychology, and Foundations, University of Kabianga, Kericho, Kenya

\*Correspondence: Department of Education, Administration, Psychology, and Foundations, University of Kabianga, P.O BOX 2030-20200, Kericho, Kenya. E-mail: Pamela.wadende@gmail.com; pwadende@yahoo.com

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## Abstract

This article examines the benefits that can be realized when a study contrives a poly vocal environment that allows the participants a larger stake in the conduct of research among them. The article, therefore, does not dwell on the main findings of the study conducted among *Bang' Jomariiek* women group of West Reru. The main objective of the research study was to explore the teaching and learning processes utilized by women artists in the art forms of basketry, pottery and indigenous architecture. This article, however, dwells on the observations the researcher makes of the experiences of the study participants which emanate from their being allowed more control of the study conduct. Thus, by focusing on a collective of indigenous women engaged in the education and production of the art forms of pots, baskets, and indigenous architecture, this article explores study participants' roles in fieldwork. The study site was West Reru area of Western Kenya. Scholars Adler and Adler (1987) among many others have suggested behaviors and attitudes that make up ethical researcher conduct. In this article, the researcher draws on the post feminist and post colonial theoretical perspectives to explore the participants' identity construction in an arguably poly vocal research context. Additionally, the study reviews the consequent epistemological concerns that emerge in such a study environment. These women, referred to their educational and production processes as *chwuech*. The researcher coined the phrase "*chwuechogical* study methods" to describe the study methods and instruments.

**Keywords:** *poly vocal research context; post feminism; post colonial; chwuechogogy*

## 1. Introduction

This article does not try to give a report of the research process and its findings but dwells on the observations the researcher makes of the experiences of the study participants which emanate from their being allowed more control of the study conduct. Thus there will be no sections on the study findings but one on observations made of the participants responses to the various study processes. What makes up this essay, then is the serendipity finding from the study this researcher did among the *Bang' Jomariiek* women group and for which she collected the teaching and learning processes utilized by Luo women artists in their productions. Research is crucial for knowledge creation and development in the world. Good research results in dependable knowledge. To this end, it is important that all parties involved in research draw good experiences from the process and findings. So apart from researchers being equipped to be sensitive to the needs of the participants and thus to be satisfied and happy with their field experiences, scholars should also explore ways in which participants can be facilitated to enjoy similar experiences. That research should not unduly tax participants, and if anything participants should gain from engaging in it, cannot be underscored. This requirement is latently suggested when Institutions sponsoring research studies only allow their researchers into the field after appropriately training them in research practices and methods. Indeed, examples galore of research conduct that harmed participants in both the process and the handling of the collected data. Post colonial and many other scholars, examining early research practices, criticize both the research conduct and reports of early Europeans scholars, colonizers, religious groups, and travelers who first came into contact with indigenous communities in many parts of the world. The reports these people made about the communities they encountered shaped views held by Western institutions about populations in these regions. Some of the destabilizing acts that the superior force, embodied in these colonizers, religious groups, and visitors, meted out on indigenous populations at this first contact included brutalizing them, rubbishing their ceremonies as evil and outlawing them, and interfering with their family

and community structures. Inaccurate and biased reports from early travelers were included in libraries in the Western world as research work that scholars depended on for information about indigenous populations (Tuhivai-Smith, 1999).

Though at a lesser magnitude, such unfair practices persist to date. Okediji (2002), when discussing African art work, notes that while Western art pieces are identified with their creators in museums, much anonymity surrounds pieces from Africa. Indeed, many are the times they are identified with the collectors or their ethnic community of origin at the expense of their creators. This illustrates the poor image and relationship that these collectors and museums maintained with the African Artists. Further afield in Western countries such as the US, unethical research practices by a few scholars persist even with the current concerted efforts. Example are documented of a myriad of unethical practices in research conduct including the Laud Humphrey's "Tearoom Sex" study in which the researcher collected information from participants through disguise and trickery (Sieber, 1992). Because of such practices, it became necessary to protect research participants from "evil" researchers and studies. The Belmont Report and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was formed to watch out and stop bad research plans before they were implemented in fieldwork. Currently, all institutions worth their salt require that research proposals they sponsor be acceptable by their Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards. When research sponsoring Institutions' IRBs evaluate research proposals they act as representatives of the study participants and so they convey an unwritten assumption that the participants will be happy and willingly engage in the study without any inhibitions (Sieber, 1992). This assumption may not be accurate, especially when the study is among a population made vulnerable by various forces in society among them social, economic, and physiological forces. Such vulnerable groups include women from indigenous communities.

## 2. Indigenous Women as Study Participants

Now that scholars have tried their best to streamline research conduct, it is important to focus more attention on research participants. This study focuses on indigenous women participants because, perhaps, they are most vulnerable to research practices that do not actively seek out their voices. Findings of studies, that do not allow such women to express themselves freely, may misrepresent them. Indeed, scholars have taken note of such misrepresentation. When discussing African women's art work Okediji (2008) refers to the absence of African women's art pieces such as pottery and painting in world museums. He dubs this trend "gender-blindness" to art pieces from Africa. Such misrepresentations may be a function of the historical trail of field research for which Western institutions developed the research instruments that scholars still use today. This study suggests that such research instruments were male oriented, getting this bias from the initial researchers' gender.

That these Western institutions may have drawn much insight from the biased sensationalist tales about the life style and practices of indigenous populations as weaved by early travelers, colonists, and religious groups that made first contact with these populations (Tuhivai-Smith, 1999) cannot be overstated. To utilize research instruments, developed by these institutions and which had already proved to yield unreliable data, with indigenous populations, and without adapting the said instruments appropriately, may continue to misrepresent the resultant research engagements. Such research findings, then, may harm rather than improve knowledge creation. Further, Tuhivai-Smith talks of the ability of research to 'objectify' and thus 'dehumanize' and the need for researchers to allow the indigenous communities in which the study is situated, a chance to deliberate on the process and outcomes of the study (1999, p: 39). Research that allows the participants a stake in the study process goes beyond just providing words or, 'an insight that explains certain experiences-but it does not prevent someone from dying' (1999, p: 3), and enters the realm of usefulness for the community involved. Indeed, it is the suggestion of post colonial scholarship that indigenous communities be first in line to use the findings of research carried out among them (Tuhivai-Smith, 2001; Menzies, 2001; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Fitzgerald, 2004). The disenfranchising effects of the intrigues of colonization and modernization on women in indigenous communities such as those in Kenya (Kiluva-Ndunda, 2000; Okeyo, 1980; Srujana, 1996; Robertson & Berger, 1986) make women in such communities additionally vulnerable to misrepresentation by the findings of studies in which the researcher does not create a poly vocal study environment. The aforementioned scholars discussed laws enacted by the colonists such as the registration of land in men's names and which gave the men close to absolute ownership of communal lands and initially allowing men the advantages of paid labor in urban centers as the women remained in the rural areas taking care of other family members.

Additionally, it is the consensus of scholars in the feminism discipline that researchers, working among women participants, need to be aware of such issues that may be part of the research context and which may impact the

participants' involvement in the study. These scholars propose some important methods for research that utilize feminist study methods. These are methods that seek to underscore: women's experiences and knowledge, enable appropriate research with women, solve problems that will benefit both the researcher and participants of the study, create a rapport between scholars and participants of studies, demolish hierarchy in scholarship relationships, express feelings and concern for values, and encourage the use of nonsexist language (Weiler, 1988). Feminist methods eschews any study approaches and processes that position women as objects, or mere passive recipients of other people's actions, as opposed to being subjects actively engaged in their world, defining their own destiny. Feminist theories, therefore, postulate fairness in relations between the two genders at any Geographical location in the world (Parpart, Connelly, & Barriteau, 2000). Weiler (1988) specified a tri-thematic base for feminist methods. The base is composed of the appreciation of women's subjective experience, recognition of the consequence of that experience, and a political commitment that comes from the union of feminist theory and policy. This base demands that researchers carry out studies with, and not on, women. Studies with women affirm the women's intelligence and valuable everyday experience.

As one of the feminist theories, post-colonial feminist theory postulates approaches that endeavor to give voice to the voiceless by appreciating their circumstances. This is important for women empowerment, a necessary condition to their movement away from their position of oppression (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Moreton-Robinson explained four major feminist research paradigms as: concern with less privileged women; an aim to challenge production of knowledge by the powerful; giving participants' voice; and advocating for change in the status quo. Such a poly vocal research context allows participants to engage in knowledge creation in relationships that have some structural resemblance to action research. Since the researcher wields more power (from their educational and even social achievements) in the study context, she/he has a responsibility to initiate the creation of a viable context that allows participants to engage as fully as they are able to, in studies. Consequently, the researcher needs to invite the participants to make relevant adjustments on the research plans. Participant roles refer to how the participants construct their research identities and the resultant epistemological issues emanating from the spaces the participants and the researcher, collaboratively curve out for themselves.

This article refers to study participants input into the study plan as "field adjustments" because by nature most research plans require that the researcher has a completed study arrangement before they can get permission to make contact with the participants. Institutional review boards (IRB) would hardly consider giving a study permit to a researcher who appeared unsure of her/himself by claiming that "the participants will help me decide" about particular issues in the research process. However, the same boards acknowledge that minor adjustments may need to be made in the field for the success of the study. Indeed, many a researcher has had to make adjustments to their plans once in the field. This articles' suggestion is that any researcher, who is conceptualizing a study whose participants are populations of indigenous women, needs to carry out preliminary research on that population. This would enable her/him get information about the study participants and so prepare to request for their input as appropriate. Such plans make for a smoother entrance and engagement in the fieldwork, when participants know their value and responsibility in the research process. Additionally, the researcher would also be obliged to honestly reflect and re-examine the power issues in her/his relationships in the field and put some effort in address such issues for the health of the research relationships.

### **3. *Chwuechogical* Study Methods with Indigenous Luo Women**

In the summer of 2010, this researcher carried out a study among women artists in her native Luo community of Western Kenya. These women, members of *Bang' jomariiek* women collective are involved in pottery, basketry, and are indigenous architects. The study collected the indigenous educational processes that the women used to teach, learn, and engage in the three art forms. The researcher proposed that this study be informed by, mainly, both the feminist and its complementary post-colonial theory. It was determined that this research would somehow enrich the experiences of the participants as it did the researchers.' In both the aforementioned theoretical schools of thought, an ideal research study was one guided by a give and take relationship in which both the researcher and the participants gained, in some way, from the study. This mutually beneficial relationship is so important that scholars such as Mohanty (2003) and Okeyo (1981) espy that some scholars described as Western feminists are reluctant to politicize feminism in ways that enable the movement to fully interrogate issues that face women in developing countries. The two scholars, and others who hold similar views, think that women will feel that they belong to a collaborative sisterhood only when the Western feminist movement, in its range of shades, display comprehension of the various dynamics that impact the lives of women in the developing world. For the research among the *Bang'*

*Jomariiek* women group, the mutual gain emanated from how the researcher conducted themselves in the study context, the kind of relationships built between the researcher and the others, the experiences that the study context construed in all the participants, and the report made of the study.

#### 4. The Researcher Invitation to the Participants

The main study method in West Reru was participant observation. The researcher became a novice-apprentice to the three forms of art that the *Bang' jomariiek* women produced; pots, baskets, and indigenous architecture. The participants referred to their art activities as *chwuech*. The researcher referred to the collective participation in the study as *chwuechogical* participation. Assuming the position of a novice-apprentice to *chwuech* allowed the researcher a platform from which to both invite the participants to contribute to the design of the study and to access the field in its various possible contexts of engagement. These contexts included both the physical and emotional environments created by the various study procedures and processes. The physical context encompassed the study site, participants, and the educational material and processes availed to the researcher in West Reru. The psychological context included the feelings and thoughts, the researcher and the others had before, during, and after the study. This context was also made up of how far the participants accepted the researcher into their fold. This participation process allowed the researcher to build both her mental and physical capacities through engaging in the various educational processes and contexts available. Further, *Chwuechogical* participation allowed the participants a stake in how the study proceeded and how the results are eventually handled. It gave them an avenue through which they opened various doors and let the researcher into different chambers of their lives such as their “public,” “collective,” and “private,” lives. “Public” in as far as they related with other community members who were not part of their collective, “collective” refers to how they related with each other in the *Bang' jomariiek* group, and “private” refers to the individual lives they led as members of West Reru.

In the study with *Bang jomariiek* members, simplicity and fairness ranked supreme. This allowed the researcher and study participants to avoid issues akin to colonial arrogance as reiterated in post colonial studies. Post-colonial scholars, (Fitzgerald, 2004; Marker, 2003; Menzies, 2001; and Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999) stressed the importance of forthrightness in not only getting the required permissions but also in discussing the research intentions and use of study results with participants in indigenous communities. When researchers are fair to the participants in their studies, they all enjoy the research process. Since this researcher wished to enjoy the time in the field with the other participants and avoid any misunderstandings, the researcher set out to explain her intentions to the participants. She first did this by making contact with the “gate keeper” for this study. The “gate keeper” was a woman the researcher had the fortune of having related with in various contexts and on friendly basis. The researcher had known her as a friend and a public servant who had worked with women groups before retiring from public service. For this study, the researcher asked her to introduce the researcher’s intentions to the women’s group as a way of preparing them for the research engagement. The researcher made the “gate keeper” aware that she wished to learn the art forms to the level where she could produce them, that she wished to make both audio and visual records of the educational processes, that the study was part of her Ph.D studies, that she would disseminate the findings in her academic constituency, and that she intended to compensate the women for the time they would spend with her in the study and therefore away from their daily commitments.

Apart from the issues the researcher could clearly articulate overtly, she also inwardly made a commitment to allow herself to access the study site at both the “physical” and “spiritual” levels. The “physical” is represented by the steps she made to be apprenticed to expert artists in the group. The “spiritual” level is represented by her decision to get psychologically involved in the study. This emotional involvement would enable the researcher to have a higher level of connection with the participants and further enrich the research experience. The researcher prepared for this kind of involvement by keeping a pre, on-, and post-fieldwork journal in which she wrote her thoughts, assumptions, expectations, apprehensions, and her strengths and weaknesses going into, conducting, and reflecting on the study. Such a journal, of her personal deep reflections on the study, was necessitated by her choice of feminist and post colonial theoretical framework and consequent research methods for the study at West Reru. These study methods seek to underscore: women’s experiences and knowledge, enable appropriate research with women, solve problems that will benefit both the researcher and participants of the study, create a rapport between scholars and participants of studies, demolish hierarchy in scholarship relationships, express feelings and concern for values, and encourage the use of nonsexist language (Weiler, 1988). As mentioned earlier, these methods eschews any study approaches and processes that position women as objects, or mere passive recipients of other people’s actions, as opposed to being subjects actively engaged in their world, defining their own destiny. These methods stipulate that researchers

carry out studies with and not on women. Studies with women affirm the women's intelligence and valuable everyday experience and challenge power hierarchy in the society.

When the researcher first arrived in the field, she had a first group meeting with the study participants. In this meeting she again, let the participants know her intentions in the study and asked for their opinion about her proposed procedures and processes. The researcher determined that seeking the participants' opinion about various processes in the study was the ethical and procedural thing to do. Scholarship fields such as feminism, post colonial studies, ethnography, and anthropology have stressed the need for researcher forthrightness when relating with participants (Behar, 1993; Mead, 1946, 1975, 1977; Mintz, 1960; and Wolcott, 1978). The aforementioned scholars allowed their participants to know that they were involved in research studies and the results of these studies would be disseminated in scholarly circles. In the meeting at West Reru, the researcher and participants got to know each other and again went through the discussion the researcher had had with the contact women. The researcher invited the participants to make suggestions that would improve the study experience.

The researcher further invited the participants to take charge of visual recording in the site. As a novice-apprentice, the researcher invariably had her hands full as she was busy handling learning material and receiving instruction so she felt that handling the cameras would hamper her learning experience. The researcher solicited volunteers who were willing to learn the rudiments of photography, from her, for this purpose. Further, Briggs (1986) had raised a note of caution on the possibility of visual recordings going against the community norms of the participants. So, to abide to community norms, it becomes necessary for the researcher to gauge when to record interactions and with which instruments. The researcher at West Reru acknowledged that the participants were better placed to negotiate the dynamics of making photo records in their community. She also hoped that allowing the participants to make photo records would increase the participants' ownership of this study and free the researcher to direct her attention to the processes unfolding in the various moments of the study. Indeed, after a few days in the study the participants took almost exclusive control of the cameras and consequently made most of the photo records of the study.

Although with the responsibility of making visual records in the hands of the participants, the researcher discovered that letting go of the cameras was hard. She was continually disconcerted when participants trained the cameras on her. She became vulnerable to the participants. The researcher discovered that she had effectively gone from "researcher" to "researched" in that one move. At first, she experienced discomfort comparable to withdrawal symptoms at being stripped of the power that the camera bestows on the visual recorder, being removed from the status of the knower to that of known, becoming the gazed at instead of the one doing the gazing, the researched instead of the researcher. This feeling led her to reflect on the power status and meaning that emanated from the camera. Effectively, the participants had appropriated her camera to tell "their story" inside of the researchers "story." They chose what to highlight by making a visual record of it. The researcher realized that however much she would have tried to tell their story with the camera, she would have only succeeded to tell her own story in theirs as she would have taken photos according to her own ideas of what was important and what was not in the study context. The researcher was overwhelmed when she imagined how indigenous communities must feel violated when researchers relentlessly pursue them with cameras and other instruments of data collection. Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) had discussed this violation of privacy and total unsuitability for data collection with indigenous communities. These methods of study, that make the researcher superior to the participants, result in unreliable data (collected under conditions of intimidation) with consequent unreliable inferences made from the data thus collected.

## 5. Adjustments the Participants Made

In the initial meeting at West Reru study context, the researcher had solicited input from the participants and then taken a brief break after presenting the participants with information about her intentions. During the break the participants conferred. When the researcher and participants reconvened, the chair of the group let the researcher know of their decision to spend more time with in the study so as to teach her the creative forms she had chosen to learn. The participants had just realized that the time the researcher had requested and which they had set aside (about two hours per day) was not going to be enough for the researcher to learn the art forms as she had chosen. The participants had decided that for every art form they would let the researcher spend up to eight hours a day, on a five day week. They also decided to invite an expert potter from the nearby Nyalaji area to train the researcher in pottery. They needed to create more time in their typical day to attend to their farms and this necessitated waking up earlier to weed their farms or doing it later in the evenings after the day's activities. Additionally, the participants informed the researcher of the importance of starting with pottery because they could let the pots cure in the following weeks while they engaged in the basketry and indigenous architecture. They could fire the pots at the end of the study.

In the early meeting the researcher had wanted the participants to let her know how they would like to be referred to in this study. Participants requested to be referred to according to their maiden home areas; those being their common referents in the community. In the cases where there was more than one participant from one area, they specified what more to add to their referent to tell them apart. The researcher did not think it important that participants address her in a particular way, consequently she happily answered to *Nyar Ugenya, japuonjre, japuonj, mwalimu*; all polite salutations; the last three of which referred to the researcher having been a teacher in the community.

Further, as part of the agenda for discussion in the first meeting, the researcher and participants discussed and reached an agreement about how participants would be compensated for their time in the study. The researcher was aware that the study period coincided with the busy weeding season and the participants, being women, were commonly the ones who did the agricultural work in such rural areas, according to the women and development (WAD) development framework (Parpart, Connelly, & Barriteau, 2000.) The participants thus needed to hire other people to take over their work in the farms. Additionally in the study, the participants made all decisions about how to procure the materials needed for the research study. This also worked well for the researcher because she believed the participants knew where most of the study materials could be sourced.

## 6. Epistemological Issues

From the researcher's invitation to the participants and the adjustments they made to her plans for the study, the researcher realized a better research process than she had anticipated in her plans. These adjustments functioned to create a feeling of shared responsibility in the study. This responsibility onus manifested itself in how the participants engaged the researcher in the study context and away from it. The women felt free to instruct the researcher in the various educational processes unfolding in the field. Some even went further to contrive other contexts that would illustrate better the essence of their art-based educational activities. One evening, for example, the researcher went to admire a participant's new fishpond, and at another time, took a few minutes to go the block or two away from the study site, to admire another's goats. These two women utilized the two contexts to affirm to the researcher how valuable their creative activities were because the activities generated the funds and ideas for their new projects. Indeed, early ethnographers (Mead, 1977, Malinowski, 1922) acknowledged the importance of relating with study participants in non-study linked activities. These could be in community contexts that had no direct links to the focus of the ongoing study. Suffice to state that these ethnographers commonly carried out studies in "exotic research sites" Wolcott (2008: 30), this advice is still relevant even for the researcher in her context, although she liked to think of herself as an indigenous scholar and researcher.

## 7. Re-examination of the Researcher's Earlier Assumptions about the Study Processes

Allowing the participants a larger stake in the study also helped the researcher let go of some assumptions she had held for a long time and which emanated from her many years of engagement in educational institutions. Some of those assumptions included her feeling that for a successful teaching and learning experience, a teacher needed to follow a rigid lesson plan. The educational processes in the West Reru context were not based on a lesson plan yet the researcher learnt the three art forms quite successfully in that she was able to make them on her own.

The researcher had always contemplated the dominion of the teacher in classroom interactions. All the participants in West Reru were teachers and learners interchangeably. Some participants took the opportunity of engaging in the study to learn an art form they had not learnt before. The instructional processes in the study site were conducted more in line with what Reagan (2005) observed about non-Western systems of teaching and learning. He explained that it is the duty of all in the community to learn what they do not know and teach what they know to others. He submitted that:

'education and child rearing have commonly been seen as a social responsibility shared by all the members of the community. Although individuals may play greater or lesser roles in this undertaking, it is significantly seen as the province of everyone. The concept of some adults being teachers and others (presumably) being *non-teachers* is a somewhat alien one to many traditions...The idea of teachers engaging in a profession, with specialized knowledge and expertise not held by others, appears to be a Western and relatively recent innovation' (p. 249).

## 8. Participants' Learning

The researcher had not known how much she had been watched, evaluated, and considered inspiring until she heard the sentiments that her fellow participants expressed on the last day of the study. They had organized a debriefing meeting on this last day. In this meeting, the researcher and participants reflected on their experiences during the study. It was the first time the researcher had involved herself in such a study. This was also true of the others in this study. Although, initially, the participants had been skeptical about the study's objectives and goals, they had progressively comprehended and appreciated both. For this reason and at the close of the study, the participants wished to share their reflections with each other and the researcher. They let the researcher make her comments first, and then took it up from there, one after the other with their thoughts about the study and its process. The "gate keeper" in the group, made her comments at the end of the meeting. Selected reflective sentiments are presented below.

As a member of the *chwuech* environment, the researcher had challenged some participants to learn forms of *chwuech* they had not given much thought to. They were reminded of this neglect when they watched the researcher learn pottery, basketry, and *muono* with relative success in the study period. One woman, said:

"I have been involved in basket weaving for many years, and I have used the proceeds to run my home. I had not learnt pottery; you have enabled me to learn the skill by this exercise. I can make pots at any time now, as I know where to collect potting clay. I will go on improving my skill in pottery, and I know I will be a good potter. About *muono*, we have houses that we always *muono*. We know how to *muono* well."

By the researcher's engagement in West Reru, she was proud to have affirmed the virtues of diligence and hard work, that the participants value. A basketry expert had this to say on this last meeting:

"In what we did and how we related in this study, I learnt a lot. I learnt the character traits of four personalities; the person who takes matters lightly (never learns), one who collects worthless gossip from all over (destructive), one who listens to advice (learns), one who never listens to advice (never learns) and one who loves what they are engaged with (excels). I have learnt how to make a pot which I can take to the market, and exchange for a chicken, and start raising chicken. I have learnt that, if I have a house that is falling apart, I can repair it, and live in a hygienic environment. I have learnt that, I can be prosperous if I love what I am doing. I have learnt the truth that poverty that affects the mind is the most destructive one."

A participant studied the positive attitude the researcher had displayed in the study. She commented that this attitude made it possible for her to relate intimately and productively with their group, of hitherto, virtual strangers. She saw this as a function of a deep seated desire in the researcher's spirit, which drives me to seek knowledge. She said:

"I thank the student (me). She came and got among us wanting to know pottery, basketry, and *muono* and is leaving having learnt the three skills. You know, there is the kind of person who wants to do something that they do not know, and they do not want to learn so they cannot do it. Another would love to have a basket like this one, and they are able to weave one but do not want to. She (me) came with a desire to learn, and that is why she learnt the three skills."

One participant argued that the researcher's involvement in the West Reru community in the capacity of novice apprentice to the *chwuech* forms, had affirmed to her the importance of valuing the skills that one has. She said:

"I have learnt one important lesson [in this study] that any skill that a person has is important. The person needs to continually develop their skill in it. In this way, only, can that skill help them in their lives when they need it."

One study participant who was relatively new to the West Reru area and the *Bang' jomariiek* women group also made her comments on this debriefing meeting. She had relocated there from Central Kenya after the post election violence that came up after the 2007 presidential election results were disputed. She credited the study design with enabling her to get to know and engage with fellow potters and women in the community. She got to know where to collect potting clay and who she could collaborate with in ceramic work. She said:

"I thank my mother-in-law and you [me] because I am a visitor here, and did not know people in this community. When I was told that this group is in Konywera, I said that I did not even know where that Konywera was. Through this study, you have enabled me to enter this women group, and I hope we will keep up the good work that we have been doing. I do not know how to weave baskets, but I am confident I will learn the skill soon."

*Jakom*, the group's chair woman commented about the conduct of the members during the study. She described how this had enabled all participants to successfully complete the study. She said:

"I want to first thank (the contact person) for bringing us all together. Since we started this project, she has taken care of us well. She has a multiple of responsibilities in the village but she suspended them to ensure we succeeded in this project. Lastly, I want to thank our *japuonjre* [me]. She came among us to learn *chwuech* and I can see her departing having learnt it. The diligence she has is best copied."

The: gate keeper" closed the meeting by reiterating the importance of the collaborative relationship that was initiated in this study. She commented on the unlimited opportunities that could be within the member's reach if they kept this liaison alive. She articulated:

"I am very happy because we have had a successful project. I only want to ask members to keep up this strong spirit of involving ourselves in the group.... For the rest of us, we also need to maintain our unity and diligence in order to succeed with our development plans."

## 9. Conclusions

The researcher's purpose in this article was to highlight the importance of contriving a space that lets in the participants into the design process of a study. She has done this by referring to the study she conducted among the *Bang' jomariiek* women collective of West Reru in Western Kenya. She utilized both feminist and post colonial theoretical perspectives in conceptualizing and conducting the study. The researcher conceived of this study as one way in which researchers may collect credible and dependable data from the field. She enjoyed her experience in the field and believed the same was for the participants given their comments at the end of the study. The various levels at which she accessed and engaged the participants developed her researcher capacity making her feel equal to any such research assignments. The researcher also challenged the participants by her diligence and commitment to the indigenous art educational processes in the field. This diligence is important because through it the all involved in the study collectively affirmed the importance of these art activities for the development of the West Reru community.

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