



**MALMÖ UNIVERSITY**  
FACULTY OF CULTURE  
AND SOCIETY

# The transmission and replication of security practices in development research

A case study of the Busara Center for Behavioral  
Economics

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# Abstract

This project investigates how the everyday practices and supporting narratives surrounding personal security for development researchers in Nairobi, Kenya, are communicated, transmitted and replicated among the community of practice. Everyday practices affect development, but are understudied. A Communication for Development approach show us how these practices are communicated, transmitted and replicated.

It does so through a case study of one organisation, the Busara Center for Behavioral Economics. 8 interviews have been conducted with Busara staff.

The most prominent personal security practices concern transportation and observed security measures at malls and compounds. At work, the main security practices are seeking expertise, community engagement, election-related office closures and improvisation in the field. The most important narratives informing these practices are Kenyanness and local rootedness, the need to balance effectiveness against duty of care, and a lack of information. There is strong variation in all this, evident between Kenyans and expatriates, by gender, and over time.

The means of transmission for these narratives and practices have evolved over time in Busara. They presently include formal methods such as update emails and a WhatsApp group, while briefings are rarer. Unofficial means of transmission include conversations with peers, personal experiences, and broadcast and written media.

Security practices and narratives are more varied, and the means of transmission more informal, than is commonly understood. Dominant narratives of insecurity and technical best practice are certainly important – but organisations are aware of these, and may deliberately deploy other counter-narratives. Above all, the means of transmission matter, and practices, narratives and means of transmission are intertwined and mutually supporting.

*This essay is dedicated to Alan Wein, my Dad. He died during its writing. His school made him, education mattered to him, and he taught me much.*

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# Introduction

This degree project aims to contribute to the literature on everyday practices and habits among development workers. It does so by focusing on the ways in which those everyday practices, and their supporting narratives, are communicated, transmitted and replicated. To do so, this project focuses on a single development research organisation as a case study - the Busara Center for Behavioral Economics.

This project consequently attempts to answer two research questions:

- How are the everyday practices and supporting narratives surrounding personal security for development researchers in Nairobi, Kenya, communicated, transmitted and replicated among the community of practice?
- Supporting question: what are the everyday practices and supporting narratives surrounding personal security for development researchers?

This introductory section explores the motivations behind the selection of this topic, defines terms, and provides theoretically-grounded justifications for studying the everyday and for studying security practices, as well as for doing so through the lens of Communication for Development.

## Motivations

Research in development often faces outwards: 'we' study 'them'. Research more rarely looks inward, examining itself, its practitioners and their assumptions about the world. Yet to do so is essential: if we are to conduct good research, and if we are to advance development as a field of study, we must continually reflect on how we conduct our research, and the ways in which we are implicated and involved in existing assumptions and structures (Fechter & Hindman, 2011; Mosse, 2011).

In conducting that reflection, one of the most common approaches is to examine the political assumptions embedded within the development project. This generally means describing the liberal democratic value system subscribed to by most development donors, practitioners and researchers, and to pinpoint the ways in which this affects their work (Fechter & Hindman, 2011; Autesserre, 2014).

However, there is a second way to approach this topic. That is to examine the daily practices of development researchers (Bourdieu, 1977). These are the often-unexamined habits, and supporting narratives, in which the group under study engages (Autesserre, 2014). They are not necessarily political in nature - though these habits can be put into a political context, they do not derive directly from a set of political values - but they have a profound effect on the conduct and outcomes of development research. Among the most important of these is practices and narratives of security, which has a major effect on the conduct of development programs (Autesserre, 2014).

This project hopes to extend that reflexive literature, by applying it to a new case study.

## **Validity and definitions**

In proposing to study the everyday security practices of development researchers, a number of things must be demonstrated: first, that the group under study form a sufficiently cohesive 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998). Second, that their narratives and practices have a noteworthy effect on the conduct and outcomes of their work. Third, that security practices are a particularly valuable category of practice for study.

In investigating this topic, a number of key terms should be defined. First, practices. Practices are "routine activities (rather than consciously chosen actions) notable for their unconscious, automatic, un-thought character." (Swidler, 2001). They are "sustained by a repertoire of ideational and material communal resources," such as "routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, symbols, and discourse" (Adler, 2005) – what we have called here narratives and means of transmission. Narratives are "stories that people create to make sense of their lives and environments" (Autesserre, 2014).

It should be noted that 'security' is by no means a stable construct (Taylor, 2004; Buzan et al, 1998). For instance, some researchers distinguish between 'safety' as protection against accidents, and 'security' as protection against deliberate actions by others - while other authors do not (Stoddard et al, 2014). Many conflicting or overlapping terms are used in the industry (Dick, 2010). No firm definition is offered here; participants offered a variety of definitions. However, we may broadly conceive of it as identifying and responding to perceived threats – to people, to the course of work or to the organisation.

The development research community may be described as a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998). Many of its members have received similar education (often postgraduate education in economics at US universities), share similar values, and engage in similar practices. One example may suffice for now: one colleague at the Busara Center received a PhD in economics from the University of Hawaii, conducted postdoctoral research at Princeton University, and has variously worked for and with both the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA). In transferring from Innovations to Poverty Action to the Busara Center, he uses many of the same training materials as he did in his previous role. Apthorpe (2005) argues that "aid workers inhabit a separate world with its own time, space, and economics"; this he christened 'Aidland', and we may make a similar claim about our community of practice, development researchers.

## **Studying the everyday**

Practices in general can have an extremely important effect on the conduct and outcomes of development work. We should not claim that everyday practices explain everything. Objectives, and the politics that shapes them, matter too. Yet these topics are widely studied; we know a great deal about how policies, institutions, ideologies, and discourses affect the development project; in comparison, practices are understudied (Fechter & Hindman, 2011; Verma, 2011; Mosse, 2011). In Autesserre's (2014) words, the study of everyday practices and the narratives that support them can show how the "constraints, interests, and liberal values that other scholars study are created, sustained, and reinforced - or challenged - on the ground." Or more pithily, the 'how' is just as important as the 'what' and the 'why'. This contention is in line with an increasingly widespread call in development research for greater attention to the everyday (see for instance Richmond & Mitchell, 2011; Tadjbakhsh, 2011; Higate & Henry, 2009). Hopf (2010) argues that too often, we focus only on instrumental or normative rationality in our examination of political projects, using an incorrect assumption that organisations do precisely what they (say they) intend to do. In fact, argues Hopf, both Bourdieu and Weber recognized that habits, everyday practices and the narratives that support them are just as important - a finding which is also in line with the results of modern psychology, which demonstrates that much human behaviour is done automatically, without the intervention of rational consideration (Wyer, 2014). In doing so, we follow an integration theory of society in which social groups follow a normative

consensus, and in which individuals and their actions help construct those norms (Knorr-Cetina, 1981). Thus, we study the everyday.

## **The relevance of security practices**

This project specifically investigates the security practices of development researchers. That development research carries at least some risk is not in doubt. Security is a constant topic of discussion (Last, 2010); as early as 2006, researchers were documenting a trend of increasing security threats to development workers and a response of increased security professionalism (Stoddard et al, 2006). That trend has continued, and in the peak year of 2013, 251 attacks affected 460 aid workers (Stoddard et al, 2014). In 2016, an American researcher, Sharon Gray, was killed during protests in Ethiopia (Whitcomb, 2016). That was one of 158 incidents in 2016 (Humanitarian Outcomes, 2017).

Auteserre (2014) demonstrates convincingly that security practices are among the most important of the everyday practices, and that insecurity is among the most important supporting narratives, affecting the conduct of work by expatriate interveners and humanitarian aid professionals. They do so by tending to separate expatriates from locals, thereby reinforcing divides between groups that are notionally working towards the same objectives. Security practices are a good example of how a set of practices may emerge, with supporting narratives, and may have a profound effect on the conduct and outcomes of development, without directly deriving from the political objectives and political values of its progenitors. It is a category of practices that represents the apogee of technical knowledge and 'best practice' approaches to development, at the expense of programs adjusted by local knowledge and embedded in the local context. It is furthermore an example of a category of practices which is conducted despite a widespread view among practitioners that it may be detrimental to the achievement of objectives (Autesserre, 2014). Van Brabant (2000, quoted in Smirl, 2015) argues that everyday practices send implicit messages that may harm development, urging readers to "consider the image that is projected". This is part of a wider literature on 'bunkerization' and security practices by humanitarian aid workers (Duffield, 2012). However, this topic has not yet been investigated in relation to another community of practice, development researchers.

## **A communication for development approach**



If development research will benefit from reflexive self-examination, the field and methods of communication for development have a particular contribution to make to that project. The ways in which ideas diffuse within groups is a central topic for communication for development (Dearing & Kim, 2008). If it matters what the practices and narratives of a community of practice are, it also matters how those practices and narratives come about. That puts this project firmly in the domain of communication.

## **Literature review and existing research**

This review discusses the available literature on the security practices of development workers, the (limited) available literature on the security practices of development researchers specifically, the (limited) available literature on how such practices are transmitted and replicated, and available statistics on security threats in Nairobi.

### **Security practices of development workers and researchers**

Development workers employ a wide array of security practices. There is not space to describe all of them here, but Roth (2009) has categorized them into three broad security strategies: setting organisational policy; integrating with the community; and trusting to faith and fate. Smirl (2015) has charted the ways in which the built environment is intentionally constructed to produce security, ground also trodden by Duffield (2012). Others have noted that transport is a major field in which security practices are deployed (Mac Ginty, 2017). The EISF handbook 'Security Risk Management: a basic guide for smaller NGOs' (Bickley, 2017) is split into twelve chapters, covering in turn: fulfilling duty of care, developing a framework, governance and accountability, policy and principles, operations and programmes, travel management, awareness and capacity building, incident monitoring, crisis management, security collaboration and networks, and compliance and effectiveness monitoring. Even this document, aimed at smaller organisations, argues that good security management requires everything from "Creating an effective security risk management structure" to "Incident logging and analysis" (Bickley, 2017).

State providers of security are not much mentioned in the available literature, and where they are, it is often as an additional source of security threat (Felbab-Brown, 2014). Policing in Kenya has been repeatedly criticized as ineffective (Omeje & Githigaro, 2012) and abusive (FIDH, 2017). There are a large number of private security companies in Kenya (Soft Kenya, 2009); many development organisations hire these to provide on-gate security and to respond to distress, sometimes fulfilling what elsewhere would be considered police functions (Mkutu & Savala, 2007).

There are some security practices that appear to be specific to development researchers. Most of the available literature focuses on conflict researchers, and the practices described are therefore surely an extreme case. Practical considerations are rarely focused on in the general development research literature; for instance, the widely used Handbook of Field Experiments focuses on the methodological considerations of experimentation, and contains only one chapter on practicalities, covering “Partnerships, Measurement, Ethics, and Transparency” - this mentions security (Glennester in Duflo & Banerjee, 2017).

Those papers that do examine security specifically for researchers identify a wide range of practices - but generally lament that too few researchers bother to engage in them. Felbab-Brown (2014) calls for specific security actions during preparation, whilst in the location, during interviews, exit, and after the researcher returns. She notes that planning and specific practices are required with regard to supplies, means of communication, documents, money, food, medicine, fixers and staff (Felbab-Brown, 2014). There are discussions of the dilemmas of keeping a low profile or choosing to stand out, and how the researcher represents themselves (Felbab-Brown, 2014). She notes that security threats and practices are very often gendered. Data security is, argues Arias (2014), important - but rarely practiced. Duran-Martinez (2014) makes the overall argument for good safety planning - while suggesting that many researchers fail to do so.

That professionally recommended security practices are not always followed is a theme of the wider humanitarian aid and development literature. Though they may represent a community of practice (Autesserre, 2014), there is considerable diversity within the humanitarian aid profession (Fechter in Fechter & Hindman, 2011), and that diversity is surely reflected in a diversity of individual everyday decisions about security. Bickley (2017) advises those responsible for security in smaller NGOs that “It is important to be realistic, recognise that

establishing a positive security culture is a long-term process, and plan accordingly. It is better to start with easily achievable targets, which will help create a momentum for ‘cultural change’, and build up from there.” Whether that is true among development researchers will be studied here.

## **Transmission and replication of security practices**

How such practices are communicated within the community of practice is curiously understudied. Some of the studies above are themselves attempts to communicate good security practices to academic colleagues (see for instance Felbab-Brown, 2014). Though some authors allude to transmission mechanisms in their reviews of security practices (e.g. Roth, 2009), no peer-reviewed literature appears to exist devoted to the specific topic of the transmission and replication of security practices among development workers.

However, we may turn to the non-academic literature for additional guidance. Even here, there is little available specifically on the transmission of practices of development researchers, but guidance is available on development workers generally. Once again, these focus on humanitarian work, rather than more routine development activities. Methods of transmission and replication that have been observed include training courses, handbooks, security update messages, and in-organisation and external security professionals and experts.<sup>1</sup>

Many organisations, including private security companies and specialized NGOs, provide training in topics such as security awareness or first aid (ReliefWeb, 2017). Some of these training courses target humanitarian and development workers (see for instance RedR, 2017). The RedR ‘HEAT’ course promises “real-life simulation exercises”, “designed specifically from an NGO perspective” “to put you under stressful circumstances, preparing you for the worst case-scenario.” (RedR, 2017). Many larger organisations also run internal training sessions, especially for new staff or when staff transition to new locations (Bickley, 2010). As an example, the DG ECHO handbook (2006) describes a training curriculum that aims “to familiarise aid workers with essential concepts relating to security and provide a foundation for operating in

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<sup>1</sup> One independent consultant, Shaun Bickley, appears to have had an outsized impact on the development of such security practices; he has authored the security handbooks for CARE International, Save the Children, and part of the DG ECHO Security Handbook, as well as two editions of the general security handbook ‘Safety First’ (Bickley, 2010), and has additionally consulted with the British Red Cross, Merlin, Islamic Relief, Oxfam GB, Christian Aid, Plan International, Medecins sans Frontieres – Holland, VSO, People in Aid, and RedR UK (EISF, 2017).

insecure environments”. CARE International makes an online ‘CARE Safety and Security Awareness Online Training’ mandatory for all staff. It also offers additional self-paced online training courses, and its handbook recommends other online security courses developed by UNDSS and IFRC (Bickley, 2014), while the DG ECHO handbook (2006) recommends RedR Security Training Videos and DVDs.

Many larger development organisations produce handbooks containing advice on security in different scenarios. For instance, the handbook produced by CARE (Bickley, 2014) covers personal safety and security in general, gives specific guidance and checklists for different threat scenarios, and describes further resources that CARE maintains. That handbook focuses heavily on personal responsibility, and begins with the warning “Aid work is risky! Ensuring a safe and secure working environment requires a commitment from all staff.” Throughout its 191 pages, it uses relatively simple English and employs colour, boxes and other aids to navigation extensively (see image below). Identifying a range of scenarios, it offers bullet pointed ‘dos and don’ts’.

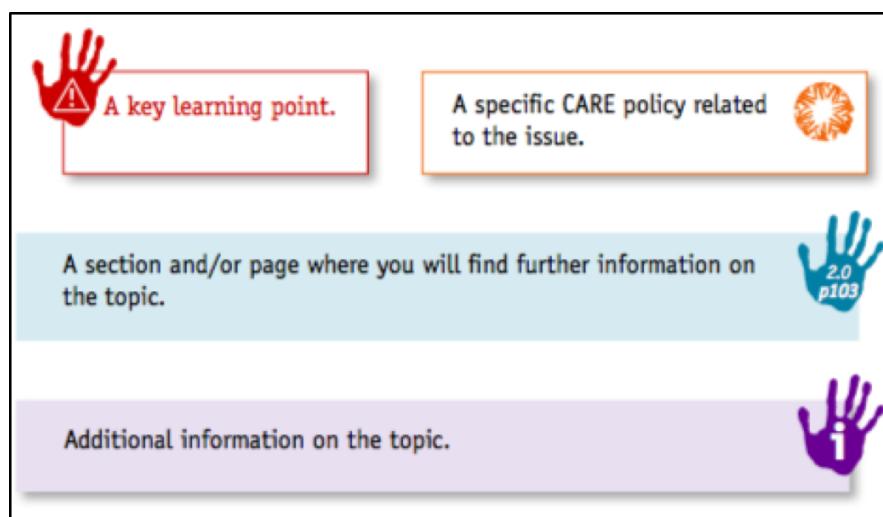


Figure 1 CARE 'How to use this handbook' (Bickley, 2014)

Not all organisations employ the same communications style. For instance, the DG ECHO Security Handbook for Humanitarian Organisations (2006) opens with the drier paragraph: “This handbook brings together the results of the two DG ECHO Security Reviews undertaken in 2004 and 2006. This printed handbook provides a brief introduction to each of the outputs. The full text of each product is provided on the enclosed DVD and is also available on the website of DG ECHO.” In general, the report makes less use of formatting techniques like those observed

in the CARE handbook. It offers several disclaimers, as well as a critique of its limitations as “A Western Perspective”. In its 142 pages, it includes: a Generic Security Guide for Humanitarian Organisations; a Security Collaboration Guide; a Security Training Directory; a Security Training Manual; a Report on the Security of Humanitarian Personnel; and a discussion of funding for security (DG ECHO, 2006).

Many organisations produce other written resources in addition to such handbooks. For instance, the CARE handbook (Bickley, 2014) mentions: safety & security risk ratings; a safety & security briefing checklist; a health facility assessment guide; a stress self-assessment test; a travel checklist; a record of emergency data (RED) form; a basic vehicle check; a residence assessment checklist; and a safety & security incident report form (Bickley, 2014). Information from the safety and security incident report form is maintained in CARE’s Safety and Security Incident Monitoring system (Bickley, 2014).

In addition to standing written resources, organisations may provide regular written updates to staff. Many organisations also encourage (expatriate) staff to register with their local embassy (Bickley, 2014); many (developed country) embassies undertake to provide online guides to safety and security, and may contact subscribers when these are updated in response to certain incidents. For instance, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office offers advice on “Safety and security, Terrorism, Local laws and customs, Entry requirements, Health, Natural disasters, Money, [and] Travel advice help and support” for each country (GOV.UK, 2017). One recent update read “presidential elections took place on 26 October 2017; political tensions are high and demonstrations and clashes are possible throughout the country, particularly in the western region; you should exercise caution and, where possible, avoid travelling around areas where demonstrations may take place” (GOV.UK, 2017). Such updates note major events, urge caution and nominate certain geographic areas (or spaces such as ‘crowds’) as carrying higher risks.

Most larger and international organisations have in place designated security professionals. These are often the coordinators of the other means of transmission, as well as being sources of advice and leading responses to crises. To take one typical example, the Norwegian Refugee Council has advertised for a ‘Security Manager - Iraq’, whose wide-ranging responsibilities include “Advise the Area Manager and other staff about security developments....Develop,

review and test communication procedures and protocols....Develop and supervise briefings, seminars, drills and trainings for staff” (Impactpool.org, 2017).

There are also a number of international organisations specializing in NGO security. These include the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO, 2017), the 2,500-member International NGO Safety and Security Association (INSSA, 2017) and the European Interagency Security Forum (EISF, 2017). These provide information about safety and security, convene members and advocate for better security in the industry.

These are all formal or intentional methods of communicating about security. There are a range of other possible channels of communication, including informal conversations and observation, through which people may learn about security. For instance, the CARE handbook encourages readers to “Ask colleagues and contacts about the situation, and specific risks you and your colleagues may face” and “Build and maintain positive relationships with neighbours, members of the community, authorities, other aid agency staff, and your colleagues. Listening to people is the best way to develop an awareness of the situation and appreciate local perceptions” (Bickley, 2014). Moreover, people may develop perceptions of security, and consequently adopt practices, through environmental signaling and observing the physical security measures around them – what has been described as ‘bunkerization’ (Duffield, 2012).

## **The security context**

Crime and other incident databases can tell only part of the story of experiences of security. However, the scale of the threat in Nairobi can be adjudged in part by the number of security incidents recorded. In the period 1997-2016, there were 49 security incidents affecting aid workers in Kenya, according to the Aid Worker Security Database (which focuses on serious incidents resulting in death, kidnap or wounding) (Humanitarian Outcomes, 2017). That places it below Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria. It is on a similar level to Iraq and Sri Lanka. (Humanitarian Outcomes, 2017). Statistics specific to development workers, or to development researchers, are not available. 2015 police statistics recorded 4,383 crimes in Nairobi County, and 4,768 in adjacent Kiambu County (National Police Service, 2015).

Some hints about the type of threat may also be derived from these statistics. The 49 security incidents affected 44 Kenyan staff, and 25 non-Kenyan staff (Humanitarian Outcomes, 2017).

35 of the victims were men, and 6 were women (in 26 cases the gender was not reported). Of these, 18 involved shooting, and 12 involved a bodily assault, beating or stabbing with non-firing or no weapons (Humanitarian Outcomes, 2017). National Crime Research Centre crime perception statistics suggest that the most prevalent forms of crime in Kenya are stealing (experienced by 15.6% of participants), possession of illicit brew (9.7%), assault causing actual bodily harm (8.8%), murder (7.6%) and burglary and house break in (7.6%) (NCRC, 2016). In Nairobi specifically, 58% listed robbery as among the most prevalent crimes in their area and 55% stealing (NCRC, 2016). Those statistics note that crime is 8.6 times as common at night, and almost twice as common at weekends (NCRC, 2016).

It is also useful to note that during the conduct of this project, elections were held in Kenya. The elections held on 8 August were marked by allegations of electoral fraud. Large protests were held by the opposition coalition. A supreme court decision ruled that the results of the presidential contest were void, and a second election was held on 17 October. This was eventually boycotted by the opposition. For much of the second half of 2017, campaigning, crowds, protests and memories of the 2007-8 violence were routine parts of Nairobi life (Wadekar, 2017).

## **Theory and methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study primarily used an ethnographic interviewing approach. The main method of data collection was semi-structured in-depth interviews with other researchers at the organisation. Where useful, informal documents such as emails have also been quoted to support and develop points from the interviews.

The author is an employee of the organisation under study (see the section below on reflexivity). Since in approaching this topic, the researcher is also an employee of Busara, he therefore had a tentative conceptual model of the phenomenon that underlies the research (Ayres, 2008). The research is consequently intended to be exploratory, but within certain parameters. A semi-structured approach was consequently adopted: topics of interest were identified in advance, and possible questions were drafted – but new topics were explored as they arose in interviews.

Participants were recruited from the Busara Center for Behavioral Economics. The Busara Center is a development research organisation. It is registered as a non-profit in the United States, and is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya. It has approximately 145 full time employees, of whom 23 are 'expatriates' (they have mainly lived in countries other than the one in which they now work). Its website explains that "Busara works with researchers and organisations to advance and apply behavioral science in pursuit of poverty alleviation" (Busara, 2016). Naturally the Busara Center has a number of specific characteristics, but it may reasonably be considered a central part of (if not necessarily perfectly representative of) the development research community of practice.

For this project, the 8 interviewees were drawn from among the associates, research specialists and directors of the Busara Center. These staff design, manage and oversee research projects – and, we might tentatively suppose, set the culture for the rest of the organisation. Research was conducted until theoretical saturation has been reached (Morse, 2008). Interviews varied widely in their length as conversations continued: the shortest was 29 minutes and the longest 1 hour and 46 minutes.

It is important in all qualitative research to be clear about what we may expect to find: we should be aware of the 'foreshadowed problems' and sensitizing concepts that are guiding the conduct of the research (Simons, 2014). That is especially true in this case, where the researcher already has considerable familiarity with the topic at hand. The researcher expected to find a 'security narrative' which holds that security is important, and that the environments in which research is conducted carry some exceptional dangers which can and should be prepared for. However, it was expected that this was likely to be placed in opposition to a much stronger desire to 'get things done' and a belief that the pressure of budgets, timelines and ambitious research objectives should supersede security practices. This narrative was likely to translate into a relatively short list of simple heuristics guiding security practices, such as 'don't walk around after dark' and 'don't ride motorcycles', but only a limited experience in more explicitly reasoning through security challenges.

In preparation for this work, an interview guide was prepared (see appendix). The fully informed consent of participants was secured (see appendix). Consent forms are kept on file by the researcher. Interviews were then conducted. These interviews were transcribed by the



researcher. During the analysis phase, a coding frame was prepared to classify, organize, and summarize the raw data (Benaquisto, 2008).

## Reflexivity

When conducting any research, but especially when conducting qualitative research, it is vital to reflect upon that biases and predispositions that the researcher may have, and to make those explicit wherever possible (Jootun et al, 2009). One technique is to provide a statement outlining the demographic and social background of the researcher:

*The researcher identifies as male. He is 28 years old. He identifies as Christian, though he has Jewish heritage. He was born in, and has spent most of his life in, the UK, but he has lived in Nairobi since June 2016. By profession, he conducts research about the psychology of human behavior as it intersects with development as a Research Associate at the Busara Center for Behavioral Economics; he should consequently be considered a member of the development research group which is here being studied. As an associate, he is on the same level in the organisational hierarchy as many of the interviewees. He has often discussed security within the organisation in public fora, and helped found the now-defunct Security Committee.*

Each of these variables in some way affects the collection and analysis of data; as with all qualitative research, these impressions were constructed at a particular moment in a particular context from a particular perspective.

## Research conduct

Interviews were conducted in August and September 2017. The characteristics of the eventual sample are outlined in the table below.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Population of directors, associates and research specialists</b>
Gender	7 Male, 1 Female	14 Male, 17 Female
Position	3 Directors, 3 Associates, 2 Research Specialists <sup>2</sup>	7 Directors, 20 Associates, 4 Research Specialists

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<sup>2</sup> Directors help run the overall organisation, reporting to the two Vice Presidents, and oversee a portfolio of 10-15 research projects. Associates directly manage the day to day activities of 2-3 of those projects. Research Specialists do the same for projects associated with the Center's founder, Professor Johannes Haushofer. Underneath them, Analysts provide conceptual support, and Project Leads run logistics and

Kenyan vs Expatriate	2 Kenyan, 6 Expatriate	12 Kenyan, 19 Expatriate
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Most interviews were conducted in the office during the working week, though some were held at cafes or private homes outside working hours, as requested by the participant.

Interviews were conducted in English, the main working language of the organisation, and were recorded on a digital voice recording device.

Participants appeared happy to discuss the topics in general, and offered fluent and confident answers. In some cases, participants specifically requested that particular details of an incident not be publicized. Their wishes have been respected, and this has not altered the overall conclusions of the study.

## Possible conclusions and generalizability

The selection of this research approach allowed the researcher to explore the research questions in depth with a smaller group. A qualitative approach that also draws on the researcher's personal experience is better suited for exploring the subtle range of experiences and narratives that might emerge.

Only 8 of Busara's employees were interviewed. They may have particular perspectives; other interviewees might have offered other answers. In particular, this project has not focused on the views of Field Officers and Project Leads, who may face many of the security challenges discussed, but who are more rarely in a position to make decisions and set cultures of security. Similarly, it has not focused on the views of those in the Operations department who are responsible for overall organisational security, preferring instead to focus on the everyday practices of non-security professionals; more may go on in the background that these interviewees are not aware of.

Qualitative research does not aim for perfect representativeness. The sample of participants varies in two important ways from the population. The first is that expatriates are overrepresented in the sample. The second is that women are underrepresented in the sample. The first of these was a deliberate sampling choice: the literature strongly suggests that it is the practices of expatriates which set the culture (Auteserre, 2014). The second variation, the

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field activities. Field Officers, who actually conduct surveys, report to Project Leads. Other specialist roles exist within Busara, such as data analysts and programmers, but they are not discussed in this project.

underrepresentation of women, is an accident of the availability of busy individuals during the research period. Though it has been possible to draw conclusions on the ways in which gender interrelates with security (discussed in the 'Variation' section), further examination of gender dynamics would be a fruitful area of further research.

We may also imagine that the selected case study, Busara, is unusual in certain ways, compared to the rest of the sector. Likewise, Nairobi may be unusual; much of the literature focuses on research in active conflict zones, and Nairobi is certainly not that.

This project describes the mechanisms of transmission and replication of security practices and narratives. Implicit in the project is a suggestion that these practices sometimes warp or derail research, and that some are unjustified. However, this project does not attempt to adjudicate this; it is enough to identify the practices, supporting narratives and means of transmission and replication.

## **Analysis**

Analysis of the empirical data reveals a range of practices in which the participants engage, and several supporting narratives that guides those practices. Some of these differ from what the literature has previously suggested about narratives and practices of security in development. These narratives are generated and replicated through a range of means of transmission. These different channels affect the narratives that are thereby generated. Analysing the means of communication therefore directly helps us understand the everyday of development research. Practices, narratives and means of transmission are all intertwined and mutually supporting.

## **Practices**

Participants differentiated between personal security and security at work, and this section follows that divide. In matters of personal security, transport choices was the most prominent topic, though there was also discussion of security practices around them (e.g. mall security). At work, the dominant practices described by participants were seeking expertise, community engagement, and special measures taken during the elections. Fourth was a wider category of actions that might be termed improvisation in the field.

## Personal security practices

The most commonly discussed personal security topic was transport choices around Nairobi. Much of this debate centered on when it is sufficiently safe to walk, though decisions about when it is okay to ride a bicycle, or take a 'boda boda' (a motorcycle taxi) were also common. One participant said that transport choices was the only piece of advice he remembered receiving from the organisation when he joined: "The one thing I know Busara stressed was do not use a boda boda." In all cases, participants said that the alternative, 'safe' choice was to "take an Uber". One Kenyan participant summarized the general view taken by the majority of participants: "The part of Nairobi we live in, yeah you can't necessarily walk at night, there's certain places you shouldn't be, but for the most part you'll be OK." Another non-Kenyan participant echoed the point: "My behaviour with respect to what I do after dark hasn't changed, I still don't walk after dark. I still take cabs, even if I'm going close. But during the day I walk to work, I've been walking every day for like 3 months."

In making those decisions, the key consideration among participants was whether it was dark; very few felt it was acceptable to walk after dark, even short distances, and those who did walk after dark were conscious that they are outliers. Participants also noted some other rules of thumb, including the part of town, what valuables they were carrying (especially, whether they had their work laptop or passport), and how well-lit or busy the route would be. When walking, several said they adopted specific styles of observation, such as walking facing oncoming traffic so as not to be surprised, or holding bags tightly – one put it as "I would hustle".

These transport practices certainly varied over time. Non-Kenyan participants universally said they had become less cautious over time, and more willing to walk. Some laughed at what they viewed as their previous over-caution. For example, one respondent described how he used to take cars even a very short distance: "for a long time, yeah [I took a colleague's advice and did not walk]. I remember...we were staying...directly behind Yaya [a popular mall], essentially, and we would take cars from there to Yaya at night, which is hilarious." The ways in which these practices evolved is discussed in the 'transmission and replication' section.

There were a number of participants who were outliers, who were willing to walk after dark, to use bicycles and boda bodas. One participant explained that "my practices have become extremely relaxed. I'll approach people, I'll give people motorbike rides at night. Almost actively seeking interaction with people, because they all seem so nice." Another was similarly aware

that they are unusual: "I'd say I'm slightly more reckless in that I cycle all over Nairobi, which probably isn't advisable, and probably increases the probability of me getting killed horrendously." Others explicitly said that they occasionally break rules they set themselves (for instance, walking at night, especially after drinking alcohol). These were not the practices described by the majority of participants, but they are evidence of greater variation within a community of practice than is generally described in the literature.

Participants also discussed security provision that happens around them (outside of work), but which may not be their choice. These included searches when entering malls, and living in gated, guarded compounds. As one expatriate participant explained: "The other things are almost assumed - that you'll have an askari [a guard], [live in a] gated compound. The first thing that's sort of elective is that you walk around." At malls, participants described lining up for bag checks by guards and passing through metal detectors. One gave, as an extreme example, a description of the security measures surrounding the new railway terminal: "we went through two security scans, two scan machines, two passport and ticket number checks. Where if the number on your identity document didn't match the number on your ticket, you had to buy a new ticket - for a train! We also had drug sniffers." In discussing security provision around them, but that is not their choice, there was no discussion of police, though uniformed and armed members of state security forces are commonly seen around Nairobi.

Several participants expressed surprise and dismay at these measures around them, which they viewed as unnecessary, ineffective and signaling sharp class divisions. One participant said "The first thing that struck me, struck me very vividly, is that - just look around - everything is barbed wire, every place has security...I was like 'holy shit, what is happening.'" The same participant continued "the amount of expenditure on physical security - so all the gates, all the barbed wire. I didn't realize you could have a city...where all the functions of the upper class are so completely separated from the street." Another participant was pithier: "It's stupid."

Participants felt that these had a signaling effect that reinforced and communicated certain narratives, in the way they perpetuated feelings of threat, and in the ways in which they sought to reassure those inside that they were safe. In doing so, they echoed discussions in the literature of 'security theatre' – measures designed to communicate, rather than to tackle an actual threat (Schneier, 2008). This begins to show how practices, narratives and the means of transmission can all co-exist – observed practices have their own communicative value, which reinforce or challenge certain narratives.

## Work security practices

When it came to discussing security in the context of their job, participants focused first of all on the need to seek advice. Several said they lacked information and experience in running field projects. Several participants expressed some uneasiness about their lack of knowledge; one went on to say that he needed to consult “people who actually know”, and “In Kenya I feel the PLs [Project Leads – staff working on field logistics] have way more understanding of what's in the field than I do.” This led to a reliance on particular members of staff to deal with security issues, with the person in charge of the project (the associate or research specialist) often feeling that they acted primarily as a conduit and coordinator. One participant recalled being told in his early days at Busara: “When things go wrong, there's this guy called Joseph you can call and he'll get you out of trouble.”

Most participants referred to Project Leads, as being the members of staff that one would consult in assuring security in one's projects, with additional specific members of staff providing support on more serious or unfamiliar issues. One participant explained that “Usually what happens in the field is you're under the Project Lead's guidance. They know the respondents, they know what's going on.” One participant summed it up as “I find it easier to go straight to the PL, discuss it for a bit. And if he or she doesn't know it, we go to Ken.” Though a few participants mentioned written policies and best practices, none said they would consult these, preferring instead to talk to individuals.

Three specific members of staff were particularly named as being regularly consulted, beyond the general pool of Project Leads: Kenneth Okumu, Joseph Njoroge (who has now left the organisation) and Charles Edema. Okumu in particular was described as “the steward” of the organisation, and “a regular security person”. His particular role, Field Operations Coordinator, was less important to participants than his long experience; one described him as “this old veteran man”. Similar reasons of experience were given for seeking the advice of Charles Edema. The same is true of Project Leads; they are considered experts because of their experience, even though their job description does not necessarily focus on security (Muange, 2017). Individual personal experience and perceived local expertise is prioritized over formal structures or written advice.

One additional group was nominated by some participants as being a source of expertise about security, and this was Kenyan associates. These were described as having particular

knowledge of the context. One participant immediately said “you should talk to Lornah [Wahome, a Kenyan associate].” He went on to explain “Ken is more balanced, Lornah is slightly more cautious, but I still weigh their advice or their recommendations even over say Jonna [Davis, the Director of Operations].” However, as with Project Leads not focusing as much on security as other participants believe, Kenyan participants did not describe themselves as having greater expertise. In fact, they said they defer to the Project Leads and the experts discussed above. The idea that expatriates rely on Kenyans hints at a narrative of ‘localness’ in understanding security, discussed in the section below; when describing their practices for projects outside of Kenya, Kenyan associates still suggested the same tactic of relying on ‘local’ knowledge.

Beyond seeking expertise, the most often discussed security practice at work was community engagement. By this, participants meant the process of gaining buy-in and acceptance from communities that are being studied. This is often done through a combination of meetings with governmental and informal leaders to explain the purpose of research, and seeking letters of permission. However, for particular projects more extensive or creative measures may be needed. For instance, one participant recalled a project in which Kenneth Okumu led an effort to speak with church leaders and contribute to local funeral cost fundraisers (‘harambes’) to demonstrate that Busara was an active member of the communities it was studying. He explained that on that project “We thought a lot about security for field teams. One of the main strategies was to hire locally as much as possible. Community entry was already a challenge.” From that project (one of the most complex Busara has ever run), several lessons were codified into a program of work known as ‘Field Systems’. That same participant explained that codified community entry practices was one of the most important elements of the Field Systems work: “Here's where we did a huge push on community entry, really starting a lot of those discussions that has now eventually led to a much better community entry strategy.” As described in a recent Slack post summarizing that work, Busara now has a “detailed guideline/manual highlighting the proper procedures of conducting Community Entry/Exit exercises in the field...[a] community entry database –which [sic] includes information on all the places Busara has worked in and all the contact details of local authorities in the areas...[and] Templates of permits and authorization letters from different departments of government and local administration documented” (Fulton, 2017). Now, one participant explained, “Community entry is really strong, I imagine that in most places our attrition rates [the number of respondents

refusing a second survey] would be ridiculously low.” Community engagement was discussed as a security practice by nearly all participants.

The third category of security practices that was salient to participants was the special measures taken around the two elections held in Kenya in August and October 2017. As described in the ‘security context’ section above, the history and circumstances of these elections meant that they were felt to present security considerations. One participant explained that “Security for me cropped up for the first time when we came close to the elections...My field teams were telling me that when they would go to the field, it wouldn't be violent, but there would be threats of violence....it was the first time I'd seen my field teams scared.” Another felt that it marked a new phase in how Busara approached security, saying that “That was the first time we prepared.”

Measures taken prior to the elections, as recalled by participants, included the sending of updates through various channels (discussed in the ‘transmission and replication’ section), a suspension of field work, a suspension of sessions in the Busara Nairobi laboratory, and a closure of the office, with all staff working from home (or taking leave) during that period. For the first election, the following closures were announced: “July 23 - August 13: Given that election season may affect community trust, buy-in, and safety, no field activities should be happening during these dates. Please also consider winding down prior to July 23, based on the location and type of project. July 29 - August 13: No lab activities should take place during these dates. August 8 - 9: Our Nairobi office will be closed. During this time, staff members on contract will be expected to work from home. However, staff who are voting on the 8th will also be provided with the time to do this” (Davis, 2017a). The office closure was later extended for a full week, reopening on 14 August, and staff did not work at all on 8 August, once it had been declared a public holiday. Similar measures were put in place (though for shorter amounts of time) around the second election in October. The amount of time that the office was closed, and how this compared to other organisations, was for several participants the main way of understanding Busara’s level of caution and risk appetite.

During this period of office closure, some staff took leave, but most expatriates and virtually all Kenyan staff remained in Kenya (this was in contrast to some other organisations; for instance, one participant said that World Bank staff had left the country around the election). Most participants’ main security practice was to not leave the house at all during this period. They



explained that they bought supplies, as well as extra items such as a torch, extra cash and water. One expatriate participant recalled the experience, and it is worth quoting their experience in detail: "I was like everybody else sitting at home...during those days I did think about yeah, what if worst comes to worst?...Where am I? Where are my go to people? What do I do if something happens? What can happen?...I did start to think about which would be the quickest way to get out of the building, for example...I actually also kept a good record of where anything could be in the house that I could defend myself with - so I had an idea of where the bigger knives in the kitchen would be, to be quickly accessible, or anything heavy." This participant then explained that not all of this thinking was necessarily justified by the actual security threat, and that some of this might have been undue fear or even paranoia.

The final category of security practice might loosely be termed improvisation in the field. Participants who had undertaken more field projects repeatedly described developing ad hoc measures in response to particular situations. One participant, asked about preparations for fieldwork, said "I also think that I would just go. Bring an oversupply of medication, and maybe like a torch or something, and just go." Asked if Busara thinks a lot about security, one participant said "We're more reactive" and "It's a case by case basis. It's more based on the project." Another director-level participant said "I just think internally we don't have systems", while one associate said "All our conversations about security have come out of something happening." One participant recalled having to deal with a local official who wanted to prevent research from continuing in her area, and in doing so noted that the approach was improvised: "When you're in that space, with now this person who you're conflicting with, it's not about due diligence, it's about wit and charm." It was in these circumstances that participants were most likely to turn to internal experts for advice. One participant, describing the procedure for a large field project, said "So Joseph would also give us advice, and when it got really escalated he would handle the matter. And otherwise he would tell us not to worry about it."

This improvisation, and a constant seeking of expert advice, may be linked to a relative lack of awareness of security practices and policies within the organisation. There was a long list of security measures that were mentioned by director-level participants, but which were not mentioned by any other participant. These included insurance, air evacuation, employee identity cards, codes to get into the office door, fire evacuation practices, the engagement of the private company KK Security to provide written updates, and an incident report form. Of that final measure, one participant explained "Chaning sent me a form to fill, that apparently exists. It's

called the employee grievance form. That's never actually been – [it was the] first time I'd seen it.” Indeed, this suggests that Busara has in place a much wider set of existing practices and policies relating to security that are not visible to the participants. Some of those (such as insurance) may not be relevant to individual participants, while others (such as the incident report form) may be relevant but uncommunicated – a topic discussed in the ‘narratives’ section below.

## **Narratives**

A number of narratives underlie and shape the practices described above. One is a strong narrative of Kenyanness and local rootedness, fueled by the relationship of expatriates to the place and to the organisation. One is a narrative of the need to balance effectiveness with duty of care. All this exists in a context of a perceived lack of information. However, just as there is wide variation in practices, there is also wide variation in thinking about security.

### **Kenyanness and effectiveness**

“We've highlighted time and again that we are a Kenyan organisation” said one participant. This narrative of local rootedness and steadiness was repeated often. Participants contrasted Busara with other international and development organisations, such as the World Bank, who they viewed as not having deep roots in the society in which they are based. One participant, praising the security actions taken during the election, noted that there was no separate evacuation provision for expatriate staff.

Several participants argued that this narrative is deliberately employed by management to reassure staff. One participant cast doubt on the ‘Kenyanness’ of the organisation (in which seven of nine directors are expatriates), and explicitly argued that this made the organisation still more likely to promote this narrative, defensively “overcompensating” by staying open for longer around the election period. A similar narrative was expressed in personal discourse by another expatriate participant, who recalled working hard to convince his family that he was safe, pushing back zealously at what he viewed as alarmist reporting by international media. Many participants suggested that this sort of deliberate reassurance from the organisation can be valuable, since fear has a damaging effect in itself, and people are likely to overweigh threats. Two director-level participants agreed that Busara may avoid talking too much about security, for fear of signaling its foreignness and an unfamiliarity with the everyday experiences

of Kenyan staff. One said “there's a philosophical debate here around maybe we shouldn't make too big a deal of it, this is the context in which many...of our employees live daily...when you live and work at the edge of Kibera, and a bunch of this becomes implicit, do we signpost and flag some of the smaller things?” This narrative of the need to signal Kenyanness was particularly present among more senior participants, and the same participant, a director, confirmed that this debate was uppermost in the minds of those making decisions around election-related precautions: “So around the elections for example. There was actually a move quite late, after I booked my travel, for most of the directors to be here in Nairobi, and to show that this is it, we're going to be here, we're here for the long run...So there's this interesting balance where we're just trying to make everything seem that this is normal, this good, this is OK.” The narrative of Kenyanness and local rootedness, deliberately used to signal steadiness and reliability to the wider staff, was felt by several participants to inform organisational and personal security practices and decisions. It may be linked to a focus on local expertise and community engagement as central security practices. Closely related to this is the narrative espoused by all participants about expatriates, discussed below in a section on variation.

A second narrative, discussed just as often, is the need to balance effectiveness with duty of care. Participants repeatedly spoke of the need to get a project done. Recalling a particularly difficult field project, one participant said “We had so much pressure” from the academic principal investigators to meet extremely onerous productivity targets. Their reaction to security incidents, he said, was “Oh what, so that survey was not completed?” He noted that as a result “[The field staff] also broke protocol a bunch of times to meet targets.” He went on to say “The problem for security is that the productivity targets didn't change.” This level of pressure from clients and management appears to be unusual, and other participants felt comfortable saying that the first step in reacting to a security incident is to halt work, deal with the situation, re-evaluate and perhaps suspend or move operations entirely. One participant recalled doing exactly that, moving an entire field team to a new location after a security threat emerged, at considerable cost in time and money to the project.

The need to hit targets and get a project done, participants explained, needs to be balanced against a duty of care to staff. One participant, who felt that Busara was sometimes overcautious in its security protocols, said that he did not fault the organisation for being so: “For two reasons: just purely organisational liability-wise, it makes sense legally to not put people at risk...And then additionally, the probability weigh ups need to be different when you're talking

about other people, and especially when you have a bunch of people under your purview, the risks are simply higher, and your responsibility of being more cautious is higher as well.” One director drew a comparison between Busara and competitor organisations with what he viewed as an excessive risk appetite: “They take everything everywhere, they don't care.” Duty of care was not viewed merely as a formal obligation to avoid liability; one participant explicitly described the tone of security communication as “pretty caring. People were generally looking out for one another and the team's best interests.” One participant said of election-related precautions: “I think that the signal that Busara cared was good, and the signal that we are as an organisation not going to put people at risk is also good.” One participant explained that he felt greatly reassured, having a sense that “Busara will take care of you in the field. Anything that happens to you, you're the responsibility of Busara.”

This narrative of balance principally affects organisational security practices, but participants described a similar balancing act in their personal security practices. Several spoke of being conscious of the balance between mental health, motivation, freedom and safety. One said of coming to Kenya “My entire life pattern has changed. I'm someone who loves walking, and I used to do a lot of walking, to keep fit. So if this was any other country, I would walk the three kilometers from home to work and work to home, every day, no problem. That would have been a fun thing for me, to get pumped for work...I've tried that now twice, and the stress from the eyes looking at me, the laptop bag....All of those things considerably affect [me].” Another said “I really resent being restricted in my movements.” Speaking of two expatriate colleagues, one participant said they “hated Nairobi just because they couldn't run at night. And for them it's a big deal.” Participants were acutely aware of the tradeoffs security imposes on personal wellbeing, as well as on effectiveness in the workplace.

The need to balance the two priorities was, one participant said, a major part of how Busara views fieldwork: “The focus was never security [in the Field Systems work that codified best practices for field research]. The focus was security with efficiency. What are best practices to improve efficiency that also ensure that nothing bad happens to you, nothing happens to your tablets, nothing bad happens to the project?” One participant argued that the two may be resolved to some extent; a major security incident could have such a heavy impact on Busara's ability to continue work, that protecting staff was not just right in itself, but a necessary part of effectiveness. This narrative of balancing security and effectiveness is also typical of the sector as a whole (see for instance Bickley, 2017).

These frames and narratives may have particular power, because they exist in an environment of perceived lack of information. There is a strong narrative of lack of access to reliable information. One participant said “There's an information void, and people fill that with their worst fears, about the true nature of security in the country.” He went on to say “really good information about what's actually going on is so hard to get sometimes....I'm sitting in Kenya in the middle of...a political crisis....and I have so little idea about what particular places look like.” This was seconded by another participant, who said “The political environment is uncertain and the election timing is uncertain. So I think it's difficult to navigate and you don't know what anything means.” The same sentiment was expressed by another participant: “In terms of my own personal security, I was sort of split, and I don't think I found good enough information anywhere.” Many participants expressed distrust of both local and international media. Despite a general desire to seek expert advice from within the organisation, there were nonetheless doubts and concerns expressed about the reliability of that information. One director said “A lot of the information we receive ends up being incorrect in terms of security advice.” One participant, a Kenyan associate discussing a project outside Kenya, said that this lack of knowledge makes him anxious: “It's mostly just for me the unknowns that are driving a little bit of anxiety.” This lack of information may partly explain the variation described below, and may enhance the power of narratives as rules of thumb for guiding practices.

## Variation

These shared narratives should not obscure strong variation among the participants. Similar narratives were expressed across the pool of participants, and the participants all belong to both a community of practice and a particular organisation. Yet despite this, there was strong variation between individuals in their definitions of security, in evaluations of the threat, and in risk preferences and security practices. One participant said “I would say there's a huge variation”. A director-level participant split those associates who work for him into three categories: risk junkies, willing workers, and hesitant travelers. Other participants offered similar observations and typologies. Participants suggested that this variation correlates with the backgrounds and demographics of those individuals; one summed it up as “I think on the associate team, people are coming from different places, and there are massively different assessments.”

In explaining the variation between people, perhaps the most important divide for participants was whether a member of staff is from Kenya or is an expatriate. There were two strains of thought here: expatriates were felt to display initial overcaution, but then with some individuals relaxing into recklessness. Many argued that expatriates are, at least initially, more cautious than is necessary; one director said “I think [overcaution] is true of lots of expats initially. I think a lot of people end up becoming comfortable”. One Kenyan associate said “There's always this thing where expats are always afraid before they come here.” Another Kenyan associate, echoing a point made by many participants, said that “I also don't think that I'm usually a target. That's also one big reason. I think that an expat is obviously a very different experience.”

Though the dominant narrative is of expatriate overcaution, several participants suggested that expatriates are more reckless about security than Kenyans. One expatriate agreed, saying “I'd say [I'm] probably slightly more reckless.” A Kenyan associate argued that some individual expatriates are too relaxed about security:

“If anything sometimes they're a little bit too chill....Sometimes I'm a bit more vigilant than maybe they would be...But not all of them, just some. I haven't met someone who has been more afraid than I have been....I've never met someone who I'm just like 'relax, it's not that big a deal'.”

This was echoed by an expatriate participant, who said that “my immediate sense is that Kenyans are slightly more cautious about threats to their person in Nairobi than expats are. And that's probably because we've got this sense of being in the Wild West out here, and people...just do stupid things...[We accept a level of risk] just because we're away from home.” Some participants felt that there was further variation within the group of expatriates, with those who had come from richer, more secure countries displaying more caution, compared to those whose background lay in other less developed countries, such as India. These narratives are closely related to the wider discussion of variation in risk preferences below. Moreover, they feed directly into the discussion of Kenyanness, rootedness and security practices. For instance, one director said “If this was an entirely expat organisation I think we would be much more cautious, because we wouldn't feel comfortable without knowing that someone had that social and community knowledge.”

Another important way in which security practices vary, participants said, is by gender. Both male and female participants explicitly said that women face different threats and engage in different practices. One female participant said that core to her definition of security was

“everyday [life] as a female living in Nairobi”, and said threats to her person might be less important than threats to her identity. Several participants reported observing gendered threats and incidents of sexual harassment, both within and beyond the workplace. For instance, one recalled that his girlfriend had been told by a stranger “Mzungu [white person], you’re naked on the street.” Participants observed that women take different security precautions, and described them as being more cautious. One male participant, advising a new female colleague on security, recalled specifically encouraging her to seek out the advice of other women.

The third source of variation described by participants was variation over time. Individual expatriates were said to relax as they spent more time in Kenya, while the organisation was also said to have evolved over time in its treatment of security. One expatriate participant described a typical evolution, saying “I was very, very concerned the first few weeks, and eventually due to various types of circumstances...I was getting lazier...Eventually my life just defaulted to even less safety concerned behaviour than it had been before I moved here.” Many participants said they had learned over the course of their time in Kenya, coming to evaluate security differently as they gained more experience – one described this as “I was learning, but it was a very unconscious process of taking in information”. Meanwhile, several participants argued that Busara has also evolved over time, noting that a new director of operations, an accumulation of experiences, and the arrival of an election year had all led to Busara taking a more proactive approach to providing and discussing security.

## **Transmission and replication**

These narratives, and the practices they inform, are transmitted to people within the organisation, who then replicate those practices and narratives. Studying the channels of transmission can help us understand how the narratives and practices come about. We may divide the means of transmission into official and unofficial. Official channels have evolved over time, and now include update emails and WhatsApp. Formal briefings are rarer. Unofficial sources include conversations with peers, personal experiences, and media.

### **Official channels**

Participants made clear that Busara’s approach to and communication about security has evolved over time. New channels have been added, such as a WhatsApp group, while the use of channels such as emails had shifted significantly. For some participants, this was due to it

being an election year, but more argued that this was due to a change in the person communicating: in January 2016, Jonna Davis replaced Michael Beilman as Director of Operations. Alongside that (and during a period of considerable revenue and headcount growth for Busara), the organisation was felt to have approached security in a more formal and deliberate manner. “When I joined Busara” said one participant, things were more informal: “security was like 'oh, we hope this doesn't happen in the field', these small trouble shooting processes.” Another said “All of these things just like trickled up through the grape vine. And so we never had any details, there was never strong organisational communication.” One participant asserted that “I think it became more sort of structural and more sort of directed, once Jonna came in.” One felt that “the conversations have improved quite a bit...I think that's it's become something a lot more deliberate. We now have people who are responsible for this.” Some director-level participants still felt there is further to go in this evolution, characterizing Busara as having a lack of systems; one suggested “we might be missing out on a security team that thinks about security deliberately”.

The most commonly mentioned official channel was the WhatsApp group. Called ‘Security updates’, it was created on 25 April 2017, and contains 138 participants. One participant described it as a “good reporting mechanism” while another called it “pretty effective”, and a third said that several times he had received useful information that had helped him organize his life. Individual staff share alerts. They employ considerable variety in styles and types of messages. Some messages are comparatively formal, offering details and advice; for instance, one message from 31 July 2017 reads “<All Staff SMS ALERT> Unruly crowd around Ngong/Ole Dume and Riara Rds, Nairobi, forcing traffic to divert [sic]. Police on the scene. Avoid the area.” Another, from 11 August, shows a less formal approach: “Kisumu is now very dangerous zone, people are rioting, Nyalenda is worse...One policeman has been burned to death.” Some members share images or short video clips of incidents – often that they have been sent by others. One participant worried that this group can lead to the reporting of “hearsay”. One participant was struck by the seriousness of the tone of communication, contrasting it with Busara’s usual lighthearted style. This had informed his understanding of security around the election:

“having gotten to know this group before the election, and knowing what kind of a not super-serious bunch we are, it struck me how incredibly disciplined this channel was being used. And that made me think OK, people are taking this election stuff very serious. They aren't like making jokes or using this for fun



stuff. And surely the people who work here would have the potential to do that, looking at the Slack channels that we have and the conversations there. So yeah, that was definitely a lasting impression.”

The administrators of the group repeatedly request “please do not reply”, but thank you messages and expressions of concern are frequent. One participant suggested that more formal reporting formats might be useful, while still describing it as a valuable tool. The use of the WhatsApp group helps illustrate and may help form several of the narratives: that of a lack of information, that of variation and individuality trumping group culture, and that of duty of care. Narratives of Kenyanness, rootedness and effectiveness do not feature strongly in these WhatsApp messages.

As well as the WhatsApp channel, participants made reference to all-staff emails sent by the Director of Operations. These were longstanding, but were described as having become more structured and deliberate in the past year. One email in this category, with the subject line ‘[IMPORTANT] Kenya Elections Security and Work Schedule’ contains five headings, highlighted in red, bold and underlined: “Work schedule”, “Modes of communication”, “Director contacts for this week”, “Possible roadblocks outside Nairobi”, and “Personal prep for this week”. This contains lines such as “We care about your security and want to be sure that everyone takes precautions this week to ensure your safety” and “please do not take risks” (Davis, 2017b). One participant reflected on how helpful these have been: “the email conversation from the Operations department was really good, and it helped...It's been really uncertain, they've been really clear on what's happening when, and it's been good.” Others felt that the information emailed by Busara was not that useful, and several could not recall examples when they had changed their behaviour as a result of receiving it, though they felt that the organisation had a duty to pass it on anyway. These emails were considered far more useful than embassy security updates, which were only mentioned in order to highlight their inaccuracy. The Busara update emails, with their encouragements of contact and their reassurance that information will be shared, may be designed to address narratives of lack of information, and reinforce narratives around duty of care. Narratives of Kenyanness, rootedness and effectiveness do not feature strongly in these emails.

Meanwhile, participants made little reference to the formal briefings that are generally a staple of security provision of this kind (see for instance Bickley, 2017). One research specialist explained that “Because in general the Princeton unit doesn't have much onboarding,

everything I've been told is sort of word of mouth and informal...I've been told a lot about my personal security from coworkers." One participant said that in his first weeks, an onboarding process had included a session on project management, which had touched on some of the things that can go wrong in running projects. One longer tenured participant said that security sessions had actually been included in onboarding processes in the past: "When we came, in our onboarding, we had like a living in Kenya section, where they actually told us you will get mugged, give everything. It was a much more detailed security briefing that we've since removed from our onboarding." This contrasts with the general narrative of Busara adopting a more deliberate approach to security, and may be an example of the narrative of Kenyanness, illustrating that management believes (or wishes to signal to staff that) special security measures should not be required and that staff should not worry unduly about their safety.

## Unofficial channels

For both personal and work security, unofficial channels of transmission were discussed more often than official channels. The main unofficial channels, according to participants, were conversations with peers, personal experiences, and message boards and media. These unofficial channels helped replicate the practices and reinforce the narratives discussed above.

All participants were able to recall informal conversations about security. One participant described this as "the first set of exposures I got to conversations around security." For most, these were informal conversations with colleagues, but participants also recalled conversations with friends, with contacts before they moved to Kenya, and with taxi drivers.

Before they moved to Kenya, expatriate participants often recalled alarmist conversations with friends and contacts about moving to "Nairobbery", which was characterized as highly dangerous. One said "I think that was my expectation, to have to watch myself being robbed all the time." That began to change for some expatriate participants almost immediately on their arrival, when they had reassuring conversations with drivers who collected them from the airport. For instance, one recalled the following:

"We had a long conversation in the car. Actually again it was about security, which I didn't bring up, but he was talking about how things have gotten better since the...Westgate Mall attacks, and Al Shabab, and how the government was retaking control...I don't know why he told me...I guess they do a lot of airport

pickups, and I guess they have a lot of people who have never been here and who bring their own perceptions.”

These two categories of conversation – one with those outside Nairobi and one with strangers in Nairobi – seemed to be sharply different. Alarmism at home was contrasted with reassurance immediately on arrival. This may contribute to narratives of Kenyanness that assert that the security threat is minimal and does not merit disruption to lives.

The next group of conversations were with peers within the organisation. All participants recalled having gauged security through conversations with colleagues. This differs from the deliberate practice of talking to experts within the organisation; these are informal conversations with colleagues in similar roles. Many recalled friends and colleagues sharing hearsay stories about particular incidents; for instance, one had been told of a murder on the street where he lives. One participant, a research specialist, said “Most important for me was the other research specialists...that was extremely useful for me.” Some participants noted that they paid particular attention to conversations with Kenyan peers, or to longer serving or more “level headed” expatriate colleagues. Many participants gave answers that linked their security perceptions to what they were told by colleagues. Participants were thus exploring variation and benchmarking risk appetites against one another, evolving their own security practices in their first weeks, seeking to address a perceived lack of reliable information, and learning about the category of practices earlier described as improvisation in the field. All this happens through informal conversations beyond those deliberately fostered by the organisation.

Discussed just as regularly by participants was personal experience. Many had learned from particular personal experiences, that they shared as anecdotes. For instance, some participants shared experiences of mugging or sexual harassment. However, more common was learning from an absence of specific experiences; many participants said they felt safe because nothing of note had happened to them. One said “Almost all of the incidents I've seen have been in a 'oh this is fine' direction.” Some participants contrasted their experiences in Nairobi with those in other places that they lived (often suggesting that Nairobi is less dangerous than is commonly perceived). For instance, one participant said “I have hardly seen any real violent crimes. I've seen fewer things than I saw in one week of riding public transportation in Chicago.”

This accumulation of personal experience was said to be essential by several participants in how they had evolved their own understanding of security and practices. One participant argued

that the fact that he is newer in town meant that he had not accrued a bank of highly negative personal experiences, and consequently felt safe: “if I think back to my [home], I have a lot of associations, just because I have lots of very scary anecdotes, that are going to fuel my weighting of risk, which is probably the same as a lot of Kenyans here.” A similar process seemed to be followed by the organisation; Busara was described as reactive in developing security protocols, with some longer-serving participants offering anecdotes of specific security incidents, which had led Busara to develop specific practices in response.

That said, the relative weights given to personal experience versus conversations varied. One participant said “I don't trust very much that's *not* word of mouth in Kenya” [emphasis added], while another disagreed, saying “I'm not relying any more on word of mouth at all.” These differing reactions to different means of transmission are part of a narrative of variation in individual security responses.

The third source of security information was other media. These included English-language national newspapers such as The Daily Nation and The Standard, non-Kenyan written media, television news, and online discussion forums. However, only the last of these were considered useful. Participants said that they read and watched the media, but they expressed considerable concerns about bias, lack of context and accuracy. One Kenyan participant said “You learn from talking to people, not from reading the news.” Online message boards were considered somewhat more useful. Several participants felt they had gained fairly useful information from them, when they were able to contextualize it. For instance, one long-serving expatriate participant said “On weekends I know Karura is really safe, just my experience there and what I've read online, but Ngong Forest isn't. There are online groups that warn you against going alone. So you identify these areas, and that comes with experience.” Media consumption is considered a source of security information, but not a useful one. It thus feeds into narratives of a lack of information and into practices of seeking the advice of experts.

## Conclusion

This project sought to answer two research questions:

- How are the everyday practices and supporting narratives surrounding personal security for development researchers in Nairobi, Kenya, communicated, transmitted and replicated among the community of practice?
- Supporting question: what are the everyday practices and supporting narratives surrounding personal security for development researchers?

In this concluding section, we reflect on what we found, examine our findings in the context of Communication for Development and the literature, and reflect on how this may inform future research.

## **What we found**

This project has offered a description of the security practices of development researchers at the Busara Center for Behavioral Economics. These included personal security practices around transport and observed practices around participants. At work, the main security practices are seeking expertise, community engagement, election-related closures and improvisation in the field. These practices are informed by a number of narratives, of which the most important are Kenyanness and local rootedness, the need to balance effectiveness against duty of care, and a lack of information. There is strong variation in security practices, evaluations and narratives. That variation is evident between Kenyans and expatriates, by gender, and over time.

The means of transmission through which these narratives and practices are generated and replicated have evolved over time in Busara. They presently include formal methods such as update emails and a WhatsApp group, while formal briefings are rarer. Unofficial means of transmission include conversations with colleagues, friends and taxi drivers, personal experiences (especially an absence of incidents), and the media.

## **Findings in context**

This project contributes to our understanding of the everyday in international development. Where most of the literature has previously focused on aid workers, this study adds specifically to our knowledge of development researchers, as a subcategory of development workers. It also contributes to our understanding of the everyday beyond conflict zones; the previous

literature offers little discussion on when it is safe to walk in public, because the assumption is that all transportation will be by motorized vehicle.

By taking a Communication for Development perspective, we have been able to add another perspective that is new to the literature: a detailed study of how such everyday practices and narratives are transmitted and replicated. This project has begun to show how practices, narratives and means of transmission are intertwined and mutually supporting, especially in the context of a lack of information.

A number of particular findings reinforce the existing literature. The difficulty of balancing effectiveness and duty of care is widely discussed in the literature (Bickley, 2017), and was evident here also. That recommended security practices are often not followed is a common lament (Felbab-Brown, 2014), and seemed to be true of Busara also; Busara does not perform many of the activities suggested in the EISF or other handbooks (Bickley, 2017). Busara fits well within Roth's typology of three main security strategies (2009); of setting organisational policy; integrating with the community; and trusting to faith and fate, Busara relies almost exclusively on the second.

In integrating with the community, a novel narrative arose, which is not apparent in the existing literature. This is the narrative of Kenyanness. That Busara is locally rooted, in contrast to other development organisations, was important to participants. This narrative appeared to be deliberately deployed by Busara's management in order to counter the strong narratives of insecurity frequently described in the literature (Autesserre, 2014). Narratives of insecurity and of a technical best practice approach to security were not observed among the Busara participants.

Also novel, compared to the bulk of the existing literature, is the degree of variation observed among participants. Though the community of practice literature has always admitted that variation exists (Wenger, 1998), it would not generally predict such a large degree of variation within a few participants doing similar jobs within a single organisation. The directions of this variation also differed from the literature. The idea that security is gendered and women face particular threats is already common in the literature (Felbab-Brown, 2014) and was found among the Busara participants also. However, the literature also strongly predicts that expatriates are unduly cautious (Autesserre, 2014). In fact, this study revealed many examples

of expatriates being less cautious than Kenyans. This study also suggested that security practices and narratives are less static than is implied in the literature; the Busara participants reported personal practices and understandings of security that evolve week by week, and an organisation that had changed very greatly over the space of a year.

Finally, informal means of transmission seem to be much more important than is generally discussed in the literature. Busara makes use of security update messages and in-organisation experts, but little use of the training courses, handbooks, and external security professionals that other organisations apparently use. Instead, security theatre and conversations with peers were crucial ways in which security practices and narratives were transmitted and replicated.

## **This research and future research**

There are certain limitations to this study, discussed above, which further research could address – and this study opens up a range of promising avenues for future research. The everyday, security, and the ways in which communication affects cultures and practices should all be fruitful areas of future study in advancing our understanding of communication and development. This is only one case study of one organisation, and case study approaches of this kind could certainly be employed at other development research organisations, and in other locations. Much of the literature focuses on the humanitarian aid and peacebuilding fields, and we should continue to extend this to other sectors of the development enterprise. Larger scale studies could usefully look more precisely at demographic criteria, such as the role length of time in country or in the sector plays in determining practices. The ways in which practices and narratives are gendered is a vital area of future study. Alternative research methods could be employed; one promising study might be the use of conjoint analysis experimental designs, in which scenarios are presented, varying by just one element each time, and evaluated by participants – a laboratory study of that kind would help identify the exact features that participants use to judge levels of security.

In doing so, it may be hoped that the novel findings of this project will be integrated: security practices and narratives are more varied, and the means of transmission more informal, than is commonly understood. Dominant narratives of insecurity and technical best practice are certainly important – but organisations are aware of the critiques of these, and may react to them through the deliberate deployment of other counter-narratives. Above all, the means of

transmission matter, and practices, narratives and means of transmission are all intertwined and mutually supporting.



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# Appendices

## Question Guide

The question guide used for these interviews is appended below. It should be noted that these were semi-structured interviews, which often deviated from the guide in order to pursue additional lines of inquiry or to follow the preferences of interviewees.

### Interview Details

<b>Researcher name:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Location:</b>	
<b>Participant gender:</b>	
<b>Informed consent obtained?</b>	
<b>Time interview begins:</b>	
<b>Time interview ends:</b>	

### Interview Guide

[REMEMBER THESE QUESTIONS ARE ONLY A GUIDE. YOU SHOULD TRY TO COVER ALL THE TOPICS, BUT YOU MAY ASK THEM IN DIFFERENT ORDERS OR ASK YOUR OWN FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS TO CREATE A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW].

	<b>Topic &amp; Purpose</b>	<b>Main Question</b>	<b>Supporting questions</b>
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1	<b>Introduction:</b> introduce topic, get participant comfortable	Where did you mainly grow up?  Where else have you lived?  How long have you been in Nairobi?  What is your role within Busara?	[CONTINUE THIS DISCUSSION UNTIL YOU ARE CONFIDENT THAT THE PARTICIPANT IS COMFORTABLE]
		[RESEARCHER TO READ:] <i>“Today we are talking about security. When I say security, what ideas or words come to mind?”</i>	[CONTINUE DISCUSSION UNTIL YOU ARRIVE AT A SUFFICIENTLY SHARED FRAME OF SECURITY]
2	<b>Habits and Practices</b>	Do you personally give much thought to security?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In your personal life?</li> <li>- At work in Nairobi?</li> <li>- On work travel or fieldwork?</li> </ul>
		Are there particular times or places where you feel unsafe?	Are there particular times or places where you feel safe?

		<p>Given this, how do ideas about security influence your decisions or behavior?</p> <p>Are there things you do automatically, without usually giving much thought to it? What do you do?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In your personal life?</li> <li>- At work in Nairobi?</li> <li>- On work travel or fieldwork?</li> </ul> <p>Have you ever changed your research because of security considerations? How?</p>
		<p>Does the organisation give much thought to security?</p>	<p>How would you say your own thoughts and actions differ from those of others the organisation?</p> <p>How would you say your own thoughts and actions differ from those the organisation would want you to take?</p>
		<p>Do you think there are written or unwritten 'rules' about security?</p>	<p>What are those rules?</p> <p>Do you ever break those rules? In what circumstances?</p>
3	<b>Transmission , Replication and Supporting Narratives</b>	<p>Before you arrived, what did you think about security in this new situation?</p>	<p>How did you learn that?</p> <p>What did you read or watch?</p> <p>Who did you speak to about it?</p>

		When you first arrived, what did you learn about security in this new situation?	What advice did you receive from the organisation? Who else gave you advice? What did they say?
		Compared to when you first arrived, how has your thinking about security evolved?	What prompted this? Are there specific people or specific events that have influenced your thinking about security?
		What are the main channels of communication that you receive information about security from?	Are there specific types of information that each of those channels are good for?
4	<b>Conclusion</b>	What else would you like to add? What else should I have asked you?	
		[THANK THE PARTICIPANT]	

## Consent form

All interviewees were asked to complete the below consent form. Completed copies of the consent form for each interviewee have been securely stored by the researcher.

## Interview Details

<b>Researcher name:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Location:</b>	

**Title of research: The transmission and replication of security practices in development research.**

You have been invited to take part in a research study.

Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

**Purpose of Research:**

I am studying for a Master's Degree in Communication for Development at the University of Malmo in Sweden. This research project is for my thesis.

This study aims to understand the habits, practices and supporting narratives of development researchers regarding security.

**Procedures:**

You are asked to participate in a discussion that will take about 1 hour.

**Benefit and Risk:**

You may benefit by reflecting and gaining a deeper understanding of your own behaviors and thinking about security.

There are no special risks to you or your family if you participate in this study.

You may find some questions personal or difficult to discuss for another reason. One question asks you to recall particular events that may have impacted your understanding or practices around security, and this may prompt you to recall difficult or emotional experiences.

### **Recording:**

I will use an audio recorder, from which transcripts will be prepared. I will also take detailed notes from this interview.

### **Confidentiality and dissemination:**

Everything you say in the discussion will remain completely confidential. The write up of the thesis will not contain any information like your name that could be used to identify you.

However, I would like to use anonymous quotes from the interview in some of our reporting. Those quotes will be short and will be chosen so as to minimize the chance that you can be identified from them.

That thesis will principally be read by my supervisor, and by other examiners. It will not be published. If all interviewees consent to it, it will be shared with Busara employees.

A short report on the main findings, without quotes, will be provided to Busara directors. I may also plan to discuss the main findings with Busara in a lunch and learn.

Audio files will be deleted from the recording device at the end of the study, and will be saved in an encrypted format. Consent forms will be scanned and saved in an encrypted format. Transcripts will be anonymized and stored in an encrypted format. Written notes will be destroyed at the end of the study.

### **Ending the interview and withdrawing from the study:**

You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable, and you may end the interview at any time.

Refusing to participate or discontinuing participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you have any concerns, you can stop talking to me at any time.

You can also choose to withdraw from the study at any point up until 31 December 2017. If you choose to withdraw, the audio recording and transcript will be deleted and you will not be quoted in the thesis.

**Questions:**

You can ask me now or at any point in the future if you have any questions.

Do you have any questions for me now?

**Participant's section:**

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the discussion at any time.

<b>Participant Name:</b>	
<b>Do you consent to participate?</b> (please circle)	Yes      No
<b>Do you consent to the eventual thesis write-up being shared with Busara employees?</b> (please circle)	Yes      No
<b>Participant Signature:</b>	
<b>Researcher Signature:</b>	