



From the Margins to the Centre: Reimagining Ethical Research Partnerships through Nomadic Maternal Health Practices in Somalia

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Research Context

- Remote nomadic camps
- High maternal mortality, weak health infrastructure, and climate fragility.
- Traditional maternal health systems - herbal, kinship, and spiritual care.



Methodology

- Participatory ethnography
- 20 in-depth interviews
- Research unfolded in Hoori (Somali huts), beside fires, under acacia trees
- Trust-based, kinship-driven access and oral consent.



Ethical Dilemmas

Who defines ethics, and for whom?

- Global ethics frameworks assume literacy, forms & institutions
- Oral consent & spiritual authority remain unseen, unrecognised.
- Whose ethics count?
- Pastoralists are not *'hard to reach'*; *rather, they are hardly reached.*





Ethical Reimagining

- Nomadic maternal care reveals a relational ethics - oral, negotiated, contextually bound.
 - These practices are not ethical absences, but alternative moral architectures.
 - To partner ethically, we must reimagine ethics from within these worlds.
 - Not deviation, but epistemic difference.
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Relational Ethics

Ethical legitimacy via elders' blessings, communal norms - not institutional forms.



Ethical Terrain

- Oral consent, spiritual taboos, and collective approval govern participation.
- 'Field' shaped by gendered propriety, cosmological knowledge & spiritual order.



Epistemic Resilience

- Knowledge endurance through drought, death, and displacement.
- Sustained by ritual, metaphor, and kinship.



Power and Participation

- Empowering?
 - Research priorities, funding, and authorship remain institutionally centred.
- In fragile settings?
 - Extractive, not ethical.
- True partnership means recognising local moral authority, not bypassing it.
- Need to shift from compliance to co-creation.





Reversing the Gaze: Research as learning, not extraction. Co-authored ethics based on kinship, not IRB templates.

Storytelling as Ethics

- Stories are not secondary - but an ethical interface.
- Allow narrating pain through prayer, silence, or projected speech.
- Not evasions, but culturally sanctioned modes of disclosure.
- Listening becomes an act of ethical alignment, not just data collection.
- It is both a method and a moral contract.



Policy Implication

- Community-led ethics advisory groups.
- Elders, Traditional Birth Attendants, women's councils included.





Policy Implication

- Flexible funding for seasonal, oral, and spiritual research practices.
- Staggered timelines and iterative consent



Conclusion

- Need to Reimagine partnerships beyond compliance.
- Rooting these partnership in epistemic plurality, moral resonance, and lived ethics.



Thank you

