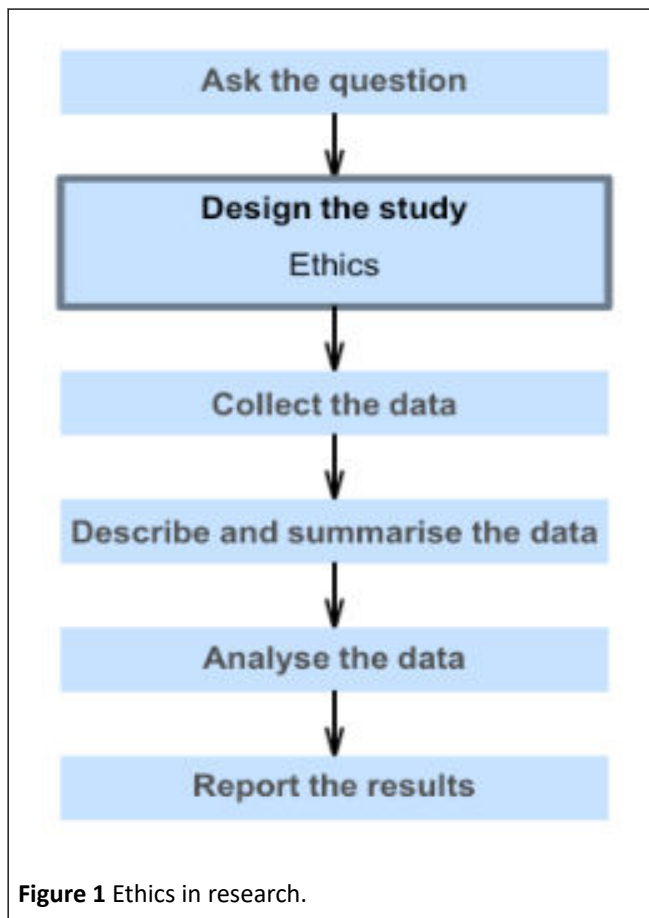


apply the prevailing theory to it. Particularly problematic is the application of micro theories of conflict (Figure 1).



Micro theories

One such micro theory is the behaviorist theory wherein it is held that the root causes of conflict lie in human nature and human behavior and that an important relationship exists between intrapersonal conflict and conflict that pervades the external social order. Micro theorists extrapolate, by way of inductive reasoning, specific variables regarding intrapersonal conflict and generalizations regarding interpersonal and international conflict. Other microtheories of conflict include frustration-aggression theory, social learning theory and social identity theory. Now, because of the essential psychological nature of these theories, a fruitful use of them must be presuppose an in depth biographical knowledge of the principal actors of a conflict and where such detailed autobiographical sketches are not available the researcher is handicapped in using these theories as the basis of his research. So much then for microtheories, what about macrotheories of conflict?

Macrotheories

Macrotheories focus on the interaction of groups, specifically on the conscious level. The use and exercise of power is a central concept of macrotheories of conflict. Such power comes in many forms; economic, political, military, even cultural. The common

assumptions of macro theories are that the roots of conflict stem from group competition and the pursuit of power and resources. These assumptions operate on conscious motivational factors in a material oriented environment. In ethnic conflicts in particular, the central goals are control of the state and exemption from control by others and all that in a myriad of issues such as development plans, educational controversies, trade union affairs, land policy, business policy and tax policy. In ethnic conflicts, depth of emotions is crucial and behaviours are explained in terms of pressure groups, elite ambitions, ethnic seniority and religious groupings [3].

A cursory survey of the above macro theories will reveal that in spite of their obvious limitations, they are more amenable than microtheories for formulation into operational hypotheses for purposes of formulating research hypotheses in so far as it is borne in mind that so far we are talking of research built on the deductive theory construction model. But what is readily open however to the researcher given the difficulties identified earlier in our discussion is the application of inductive theory construction. And so the researcher was constrained into wading into the field and canvassing his data without being encumbered by any theory. Thus, at the end of the day he/she would be able to use his data as a source of grounded theory.

The problems I have discussed in the foregoing pages were exactly what confronted the research into the ezeship conflicts in Ehime-Mbano local government council area. The researcher opted for grounded theory and was able to discover that much of the Ezeship conflicts were being masterminded by agents of the governments of Imo state. Most of the principal officers in the state ministry of local government and chieftaincy affairs relished in these disputes as it gave them opportunity to make more and more money from the various simulated contestants to the Ezeship stools.

Methodological problems

At this juncture, the first decision the researcher has to make is to decide which research tradition to engage: The quantitative or the qualitative. The quantitative research is built on transforming items of reality into ensembles to which numbers can be attached. In so doing, reality becomes amenable to countability, measurability and use of statistical and mathematical formulations. This approach is deterministic and responds to the perceived need for universal probability statements. Following after Durkheim, quantitative researchers consider social facts or social phenomena as things that exercise an external and coercive influence on human behavior. By their positivist posture, such researchers are more inclined to seek the facts or causes of social phenomena than finding out more of the subjective states of individuals.

The qualitative research tradition on the other hand seeks to examine the constitution of meaning in everyday social phenomena. The researcher attempts to preserve the form, content and context of social phenomena and analyses their qualities rather than separate them from historical and institutional surroundings. The qualitative researcher is concerned with people's own written or spoken words and observable behavior. The subject of the study, be it an

organization or an individual, is not reduced to an isolated variable or to an hypothesis [4].

Given the above exposition of the nature of the two most common research traditions, it would seem that in as far as conflict research is concerned, the qualitative research tradition would be preferred in the research endeavour under review. For one thing, no two conflicts can be exactly of the same nature. The conflict in the Niger Delta of Nigeria cannot be exactly of the same nature as that of the Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) or that of the Bakassi boys. Hence, to seek to find universal laws to interpret all of them could turn out to be a futile exercise. The very fact that every conflict is unique, peculiar and has its own special characteristics makes the case for employing qualitative methodologies even stronger and these were the considerations that were uppermost in the researcher's mind when qualitative strategies were chosen for the works referred to earlier.

Having voted for the qualitative research tradition, the next thing to decide would be which of the many research methodologies in that tradition the inquirer would employ. Qualitative research methodologies include ethnography, ethnomethodology, reception study, ecological psychology, symbolic interactionism, cultural studies, textual analysis and the choosing of a methodology serves to move the researcher out of a condition of having an abstract interest in doing a study and onto a more concrete path of decision making about evidence, analysis and writing. In the research on the Ezeship tussle, the researcher opted for ethnomethodology. It was surmised that besides devising and using an interview schedule, in such a conflict environment much research information would be gained by discussing fully and freely with members of the community-giving opportunity to express their feelings fully while at the same time watching their facial expressions and their overall behavior.

The next thing to do before actually going into the field was to device an interview schedule and then to erect a research question. The researcher chose a research question such as: How do we account for the upsurge and persistence of Ezeship tussles in Ehime-Mbano local government area of Imo state? Of course, the researcher could have chosen other research questions such as: What is the role of community elites in the upsurge and prolongation of Ezeship tussles? To what extent are the current Ezes responsible for the Ezeship tussle? The importance of a research question lies in the fact that it serves as a guide to the type of data the researcher would be interested in during his/her fieldwork. Having gone through all these stages, the researcher is then set for the fieldwork proper [5].

Results and Discussion

Fieldwork and data collection

So far as conflict research is concerned two huge problems confront the investigator. They are access and bias/objectivity. It is convenient to discuss these problems from two categories the insider and the outsider. The insider/outsider dichotomy was elaborated upon by Robert Merton when he argued that within

single societies, an insider-outsider dimension could be observed. He wrote, I adopt a structural conception of insiders and outsiders. In this conception, insiders are the members of specified groups and collectives or occupants of certain social statuses; outsiders are non-members. Now, besides mere categorization, quite often groups composed of insiders produce their own perspectives which may depart essentially from the view of outsiders. Such insider perspectives are often reactions to perceived marginalization and victimization of the group. But that is not all, epistemological doctrines of insiderism emerge such as: Only black historians can understand black history; only young people can understand young people; only Jews can understand Jews and so on (Figure 2) [6].

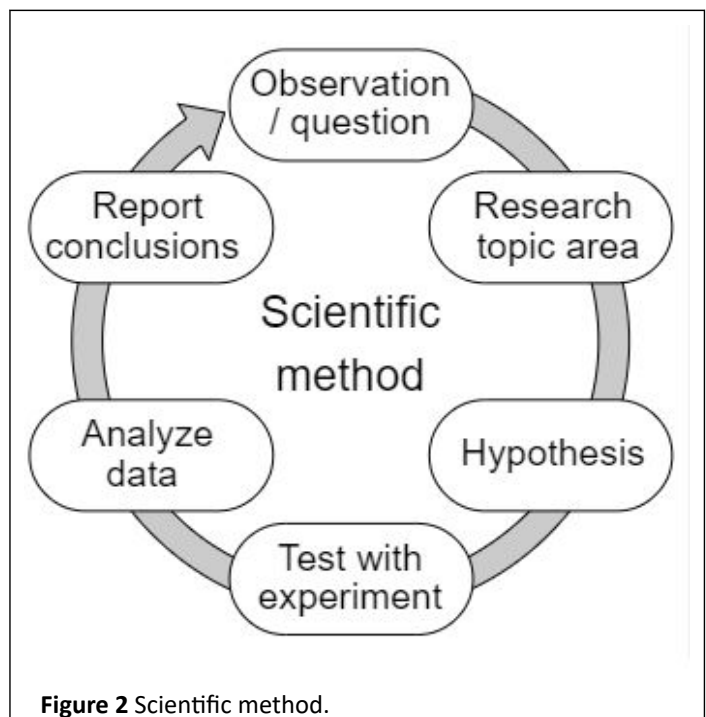


Figure 2 Scientific method.

For Merton, the insider knowledge is linked with the solidarity of the insiders with his/her group. Merton rejects the argument that the outsiders are usually incompetent, given to quick and superficial excursions into the group or culture under study and even unschooled in its language, pointing out that incompetence, foolishness and poor training is to be found in all groups and is not exclusively associated with outsiders. He then proposes what he called the insider principle and claimed thus: The outsider has a structurally imposed incapacity to comprehend alien groups, statuses, cultures and societies and cannot have the direct, intuitive sensitivity that alone makes empathic understanding possible. Only through continued socialization in the life of the group can one become fully aware of its symbolism and socially shared realities; only so can understand the five grained meanings of behavior, feelings and value.

Merton also points out to a less stringent version of the insider principle. Rather than take the position that insiders and outsiders must arrive at different findings and interpretations even when they examine the same problems, this weaker version argues that they will not attempt to answer the same question-the insider shares the deepest concerns of the group

and so will direct his inquiry so that it will be relevant to those concerns, not so for the outsider. With this background discussion in mind, we are now in a position to delve into the problems of access and bias/objectivity.

Access: There are two aspects to this namely: Access to the principal actors in a conflict and/or with their accredited representatives; access to the truth about the conflict. Let us consider the case of the insider.

Insider and access: Theoretically one is tempted to think that an insider could have easy access both to the principal actors and to the truth. This is the case only when the insider is perceived by all the principal actors as being neutral in the conflict. Once he/she has been perceived as partisan either as a result of some careless utterances or some acts of commission or omission, the chances of winning the confidence of all the parties in the research process is compromised. But even when none of the parties has anything against the researcher, the principal actors and their representatives are always wary about disclosing their in depth positions to a researcher who does not occupy any lawful position of authority over them. Invariably therefore, they are always curious to know what the information which the researcher wishes to get from them would be used for [7].

This is the first hurdle the researcher has to cross. In the case of the researches in which the researcher was involved, it happened that the researcher was to present the findings at a conference in the USA and was to address a meeting of our local government indigenes living in the diaspora. As soon as the researched subjects were told that the purpose of my research was to render a presentation of the true state of affairs to their brothers and sisters in the diaspora, their enthusiasm was unusually awakened. Besides, the researcher was accompanied by an outsider from another part of the local government area and who resided in the diaspora. These were the circumstances that made it possible for the principal actors to cooperate with the researcher. It was observed, however, that the researched subjects never approved of the research team meeting them as single individuals. All discussions, they insisted, had to be engaged with them as a group. So much then for physical access in the autonomous community of which the researcher was an insider. What about access to the truth?

Access to truth

It was difficult to ascertain the claims made by research subjects about their communications with government officials. What was notable was that they would not allow members of the research team to read by themselves the documents which they purportedly received from government officials. They brought such documents out to the full view of the researchers but read extracts from them. Given this situation then, to what extent can the researchers claim that their findings could be unbiased and objective? To be candid, for the researcher as an individual it was difficult not to have some inclination, no matter how marginal, in favour of one of the parties. After all, one of the three contestants in this case was a close friend to the researcher and one kept hoping to get concrete facts from the other two sides in support of the friend of the researcher. This

was however never to be as the outsider who accompanied the research effort became a medium for distilling off any biases that the researcher might have inadvertently injected into the system. The outsider kept his own records while the researcher kept his. At the end of the day all sat together to sieve off all items of bias that might have found their way into the researcher's account. So much then for the investigation in which the researcher functioned as an insider, what about those in which he functioned as an outsider?

Outsider and access: The researcher was an outsider in all the other autonomous communities outside his even although all the communities belonged to the same local government area. The problem of access was highly difficult in all of these cases. The first step towards obtaining physical access was arranging to get permission from the presidents of the town unions (or rival presidents, where two such presidents were operating) to interview and discuss with members of the community. In all cases these permissions were granted but there were good reasons to believe that the research team was under surveillance as one incident was to demonstrate amply. On one occasion the research team moved from one Ezeship candidate to his rival who was not living very far away. Before the team could come back to their car, having being told that this rival was not at home, two tyres of their car had been deflated by irate youths. How could one account for such hostility-they were suspicious of the research mission. The researcher will not dwell on the details of this unfortunate event since the main aim of this write-up is to bring the attention of conflict researchers to some of the problems to be encountered in the field [8]. One strategy which has been found to be useful when one is an outsider in a conflict area in which one is researching is to request the head of the community to provide the researcher with a guide who is an insider. This was exactly the strategy applied after the tyre deflation incident. If we turn attention now to access to truth under the outsider situation, we discover that as soon as those interviewed were told that their responses would be presented to their kith and kin in the diaspora, they opened up gleefully. But then what about bias and objectivity on the part of the investigator [9].

Bias and objectivity: Here the problem was not so much about bias and objectivity but about the veracity of what the researchers were being told. As the researchers were fast to notice, the presence of the guide did not make things better. He was a member of that segment of the community. He could quite easily collude with the principal actor from his own side of the community. The researcher's method for counterbalancing this possibility of bias was to locate some other outsiders who had been sufficiently socialized within the community and was sufficiently informed about the life history of the principal actor. The research team used such anchormen (mostly primary school teachers) to filter the data collected. Having now discussed the problems encountered in theoretical and methodological issues, what remains is to explore the problems that inherent in the ethical plane [10].

The special case of Boko Haram conflict: The Boko Haram conflict has existed for well over a decade, having started in Maiduguri, North East Nigeria between 2002 and 2008. Its

original name. However, its more conventional name Boko Haram can be translated to western education is a sin, is forbidden; westernization is sacrilege. This war-like, militant, Islamic group has aggressively pursued a Jihadist agenda of installing Shariah/Islamic law by force of arms, by rampaging the entire North-east Nigeria, the lake Chad Basin area, Cameroon, Niger Republic and Chad Republic. It illegally declared what is called Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP). The group relishes in killing, kidnapping and raping; overrunning villages and towns; setting police stations and places of worship ablaze; raiding market places for grains and livestock. To counter this deadly onslaught, a multinational joint taskforce aided by civilian volunteers has been operating ferociously in the lake chad region across the nations concerned [11].

Given therefore the explosive and unpredictable nature of the war torn zone in which the Boko Haram conflict manifests itself, data collection research can hardly be direct. Necessarily, four strategies are open to the researcher for data collection viz:

- Accompanying pressmen and journalists at the rear line of advancing multinational task force
- Gathering narratives from people rescued from the Boko Haram enclaves and who are likely to be in Internal Displaced People's camps (IDP's)
- Gathering narratives from community members at village markets around/within the Boko Haram operation areas
- Interviewing captured Boko Haram warriors/jihadists

Ethical problems: Here, we do not need to elaborate the usual ethical problems of voluntary participation, no harm to participants, anonymity and confidentiality, researcher's identity, informed consent and right of privacy. We need rather to dwell somewhat with the more important issues of safety for the researcher and his/her partners; safety for the respondents; remuneration of respondents; getting respondents to understand the purpose of the research; making research findings available to members of the community; making research findings available to local, state, national and international policy makers. We shall now take these one by one.

Need for respondents to understand the purpose of the research: This borders on full respect for the persons of the participants. We cannot claim that they have given informed consent or have volunteered freely to participate if they are not given an opportunity to understand the purpose of the research. However, it should be clear that conflict research is an area of special importance for lives and property and so one wonders why minor misrepresentations are allowable if the lives and property of a vast number of people are at stake. In particular, one wonders if such misrepresentation as telling respondents that the findings will be made available to their compatriots in diaspora so that they could intervene meaningfully could not be disallowed. Much will depend, of course, on whether or not we subscribe to a absolutist ethical theory or some situation ethics. More importantly, ones position might also depend on whether or not he/she subscribes to a motivist ethical theory wherein a good motive accounts for the ethical valuability of an action. The important thing seems to be that the researcher does his/her best within some ethical guideline to ensure that the

respondents are adequately informed about the purpose of the research. Next then, let us consider the safety of researchers, partners and respondents [12].

Safety of researcher and respondents

If the mission of the researcher is not well spelt out and understood by members of the community, the researcher risks being hemmed in and injured by the members of the community. The lives of those who collaborate with him by volunteering to be respondents could equally be in danger. Even if danger is averted at this point, tension could also mount when the result of the findings becomes public and the members of the community get to know that the rival community was portrayed in better light vis-a-vis the issues that caused the conflict between them. Researchers must therefore take the greatest care to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents. Any documents that could expose the identity of who said that during the interviews should be carefully kept in a place where the researcher alone can lay hands on them. It is an important ethical issue that respondents are not considered to be objects that can be used and dumped. Having arrived at this point, might we not consider the often talked about issue of respondent remuneration?

Remuneration of respondents

The case for remunerating respondents is often based on the fact that these days most researchers who receive grants have their own honoraria weaved into the grant. Given that situation, it is argued, would it not be a simple case of fairness to pay something to the respondents as they are indeed part of the research team and are the ones who actually provide the research data [13]. It is the view of the writer that they deserve such remuneration for exactly the same reasons why the principal researchers themselves deserve honoraria. The only problem here is whether the payment of remuneration will not colour the entire project such that all manner of people would volunteer information that may turn out to be unreliable and spurious? Surely, if respondents see the research project solely as another form of paid employment, members of the community will jostle among themselves to be respondents and this by itself will generate a new form of crises. In the researcher's field work, he confined himself to the provision of biscuits, snacks and soft drinks during sessions lasting more than three hours. It is suggested that each researcher should master the situation on the ground, pursue this matter discretely and ensure that nothing is done to give the impression that respondents are volunteering because they are likely to be paid some honoraria at the end. So much for ethical issues which are linked to the processes of the research. Are there ethical issues linked to the outcome of the research?

Availability of research findings to respondents

One thing that is easily noticeable about communities involved in conflict is their reluctance to let out information concerning their true positions. In the case of some of the communities investigated, the contesting parties were already in court and expectedly must have withheld some of the facts they

intended to use to prosecute their court cases. As a corollary to this, it was also noticed that whatever information that was forthcoming from the respondents was volunteered because they believed that such information would be employed to promote the case of their community [14]. Ordinarily then, it would be recommended that research outcomes be made available to respondents and their community. But consider a situation where the issues that gave rise to the conflict are being canvassed in the court of law. Suppose the research findings provided evidence that one party was pursuing an ill-conceived cause, would it be prudent to make such findings public and available to members of both parties? To do so would amount to risking a new conflict and confrontation. The conclusion here is that if the situation is very volatile, the researcher owes it as a moral duty to make available or public only those aspects of the findings that are likely to promote peace. It would seem that the promotion of peace ought to override any theoretical right the respondents may have over access to the entirety of the research report. Finally, then, ought the report be available to policy makers?

Availability of research report to policy makers

The overall benefit of the community involved in the conflict demands that research findings are made available to policy makers at the local government level, at the state level and at the national level. Whether the report should be presented to those concerned face-to-face or merely mailed to them will depend on the level of sensitivity of the items contained in the report [15]. If the report contains a heavy dose of sensitive findings *i.e.*, sensitive in so far as security of the state (or part thereof), of persons or of property are concerned, it is recommended that the presentation be done at the level of the chief executive of the various arms of government or at the very highest level of law enforcement or security agency of the state and national levels. It is important that the researcher sees his role not solely in terms of gathering data, compiling a report for publication in a learned journal, perhaps for the purpose of professional upward movement. Conflict research is in a genre of its own and those who get engaged in it ought to be clear in their minds that they have a moral responsibility to utilize their findings to promote peace and concord within the communities they conduct their research. We have now touched somewhat briefly on the theoretical, methodological and ethical problems that are likely to confront someone conducting research in a conflict environment. It is now time to tie loose ends together [16].

Conclusion

The primary aim of this paper is to draw the attention of researchers in conflict environments to what to expect and to provide some suggestions on how to overcome some of the difficulties. Time and space have not been auspicious enough to enable the researcher to explore deeper in this most important area of social research even from his own limited experience. As a matter of fact, the original paper had to be sliced into two—the other part dwelt with discussions on field work related to conflict resolution wherein a different set of theories and

methodologies came into play. The researcher's suggestion at this stage to the teeming number of scholars who are now emerging in conflict studies is that they should invest in field work. Conflict resolution is a practical enterprise. It is not a mere theoretical exercise; it concerns the lives and property of concrete men and women. It is only in the field that we can perfect the tools for meaningful intervention in the most auspicious aspect of the human experiment.

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