

**RESEARCHING ETHNIC CONFLICT IN AFRICA  
ETHICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN RESEARCHING VIOLENT SOCIETIES**

**WORKSHOP REPORT**

**University of Ibadan, Conference Centre, 26-28 February 2002**

This workshop was organised by UNU/INCORE (International Conflict Research), the United Nations University Peace and Governance Programme and CEPACS (the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria). The workshop was convened with financial support from the United Nations University, The Ford Foundation and the British Council and we are grateful for their support of and interest in this very important area of study – how to conduct research in societies where there is ethnic conflict and violence.

Despite the high level of research activity in conflict areas around the world, there has been little attention paid to the actual processes and methods of conducting research in violently divided societies. Within a substantial literature on research methods, there is little that directly addresses the ethical and methodological challenges of researching in societies experiencing ethnic conflict and other violent upheavals. Often, researchers working in such circumstances have struggled to connect with the mainstream research community, yet are left to grapple in isolation with the special demands made on them in terms of research design, ethics and analysis.

This workshop brought together an experienced group of researchers from within Africa with practical experience of solving the problems associated with conducting research in violent and politically unstable contexts and a few international researchers with particular interests in methodologies. The 24 main participants were joined by other interested parties, including students from the new Master's in Humanitarian and Refugee Studies. We were also delighted to be joined by a delegation from the British Council in West Africa for part of the proceedings. By using some of the expertise developed in earlier meetings (Northern Ireland 1997, 1999) as a starting point, the objective was to consolidate and compare experiences of research in Africa, with a view to documenting the approaches, insights and dilemmas shared by researchers who operate in violent contexts. Such documentation, we think, will be invaluable in supporting existing researchers in their work, and in providing relevant and useful training materials for a new generation of researchers who may wish to work for aid agencies conducting relief work, or who have an interest in ethnic conflict.

The [programme](#) gives full details on the papers and sessions. The workshop was structured to ensure adequate time for discussion and debate and most participants contributed enthusiastically.

The workshop concluded with an evaluation session where the majority of participants were enthusiastic about the workshop and keen to develop a network to continue work in this area. INCORE will set up an email list. It was also agreed that an edited book would be prepared and **those participants who wished to be considered for inclusion in the**

**book should send on their drafts by end of March 2002.** The possibility of a special edition of a journal was also discussed. **Professor Eghosa Osaghae is to investigate the possibility of a special edition of the Journal of African Studies. Dr. Gillian Robinson and Dr. Marie Smyth are to investigate the possibility of a special edition of the International Journal of Social Research Methodology: Theory and Practice.**

The principle points highlighted by respondents were:

1. Is Africa different?  
Question arose at the first workshop. In this one, we conclude that it is, and it isn't.
2. Issue of passion/partiality in conflict research.
  - Is it possible to be objective?
  - Who are we reporting to, and what difference does it make?
3. Responsibility of funders - commissioners of research have ethical responsibility
4. Researching paramilitary groups and non-/anti-state militias raises ethical issues and issues of safety and responsibility.
5. Arrogance of researchers: need for connectedness to both informants and informant communities, and policy makers and practitioners.
6. Physical access versus social access and issues of silence.
7. Collaboration, partnership with researched communities, methods involving respondent communities as fieldworkers, research co-ordinators etc.
8. Ownership of results is an issue: do informants ever stop owning results?
9. Dissemination of research – academically, to policy community, and to researched population
10. Language translation and conceptual transfer in comparative research.
11. Ethics: review of what exists, the need for a review to take account of violence and North/South issues.
12. How to achieve policy impact: time scales, commissioners of research are looking for quick results.

Professor Eghosa Osaghae, CEPACS, University of Ibadan  
Dr. Gillian Robinson, UNU/INCORE, University of Ulster  
Dr. Marie Smyth, Institute for Conflict Research and University of Ulster  
Dr. Albrecht Schnabel, United Nations University, Peace and Governance Programme

