

Insider Outsider Issues in Research on Ethnic Conflict in Africa

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My involvement with research on conflict began as an insider, with my research on Northern Ireland (Smyth, 2004a; Smyth and Fay, 2000; Smyth et al., 1999; Smyth, Hamilton and Thomson, 2002; Smyth and Morrissey, 2002; Smyth, Morrissey and Fay, 1999; Smyth and Scott, 2000). The methods used were participatory action research alongside large survey methods and in-depth interviews, (Smyth 2004b). I relied on insider knowledge in the conduct of the research, of the culture and political sensitivities involved in the topic. I had to forgo my insider identity in that my political views and loyalties to my own group had to be set aside in the interests of more effectively studying a conflict in which my own community was partisan. I have also worked as a researcher in South Africa, Ghana, Macedonia, Israel and the Occupied Territories. In these contexts I am clearly an outsider, although as I can also be an outsider in my own country.

A chapter for a book entitled ‘Researching Ethnic Conflict in Africa,’ on the issue of insiders and outsiders cannot avoid one major issue. Describing any contemporary conflict as ‘ethnic’ conflict is an assertion that can, in itself, divided insiders and outsiders. It implies that at least some of the root cause of the conflict lies with the identity of those living inside it. The attribution of ‘ethnicity’ in certain contexts carries with it a cachet of backwardness, primitiveness, exoticism. Some African scholars have, with good reason, rejected the use of the term ‘ethnic conflict’ when applied to the problems of contemporary Africa, since its use has tended to side-step causal factors other than the ethnicity of participants.

In Northern Ireland, where I am an ‘insider’, it is not widespread practice to describe the conflict of the last three decades as ‘ethnic’ since such a description relies on the concept of ‘warring tribes’ which would be seen as an over-simplification, and a denial, for example, of the roles of the British and Irish governments. Yet some insiders would accept that there may well be an ethnic dimension to a conflict that is primarily about national identity. Others perceive the ‘ethnic’ description as an obfuscation of the true nature of the conflict.

In the introduction to this volume, Osaghe points out that old questions remain unaddressed, to a large extent, in the African context; questions such as social constructionist versus ‘natural’ views of the nature of ethnicity and identity. At both a political and academic level, debates continue between those who assert that ‘ethnic conflict’ masks the underlying nature of the conflict, which is ultimately based on class, religion and economic competition. In analytical terms, other issues have received scant attention, such as gender dimensions of conflict, and the roles of the state, civil society, the international community, the role played by global factors in the causation of conflicts and critical evaluations of the role of internationals – ‘outsiders’ – in the management of conflict, post conflict reconstruction, peace building and state-building.

In the context of Africa, the contemporary understanding of the role of ethnicity in African political life is considerably advanced by the analysis of Udogu (2001) and his contributors. Whereas earlier critiques of the use of the term ethnicity in the context of Africa tended to see ethnicity as the invention of outsiders, without substance, Udogu's book reassesses this view, and revisits the issue of ethnicity in case studies of Kenya, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. In the same volume, Soyinka-Airewele (2001) comments that:

‘for the African intellectual it would appear that the starting point in the study and negotiation of multi-ethnic politics must be the abandonment of rigid positions and counterproductive assumptions regarding ethnicity.’ (p179).

Soyinka-Airewele (2001) argues that the term ‘tribe’ still tends to be used as part of a negative stereotype. To caricature the worst aspects of the ‘ethnic’ thesis it is that ‘native’ people are ‘primitive’; racially or genetically predisposed to fight; and incapable of or unwilling to resolve conflicts themselves. Therefore the task of resolving such conflicts falls to (higher status) outsiders who often regard themselves as ‘expert’ or specialists. Such a scenario contains many risks: of victim blaming; of analysis and intervention being ahistorical and acontextual; of over-looking local knowledge and *savoir-faire*; of underestimating ‘outsider’ or expert ignorance or limitations in experience; of making interventions that are inappropriate or a poor cultural or political fit with the context; of seeing violence and conflict as the sole prerogative of developing or less wealthy nations. However, to entirely reject the notion of ethnicity, to refute its relevance entirely is to abandon a potential tool for deepening understanding of some of the dynamics – if not the always the root causes – of violent conflict. Violence is ubiquitous, and the study of conflicts in Africa must be placed in the context of that ubiquity. As Nordstrom and Robben (1995) point out:

‘violence is not somewhere else – in a third world country, on a distant battlefield, or in a secret interrogation center – but an inescapable fact of life for every country, nation, and person, whether or not they are personally touched by direct violence.’ (Nordstrom and Robben 1995: p2)

Violence, racial attacks, hate-crime, religious conflicts are features of everyday life in developed nations. The streets of New York and London are sites of violence, and life in the developed suburbia is lived in the shadow of the threat of violence, yet Africans do not turn up in the developed world offering themselves as experts in solving problems of violence in the developed world. Interest and intervention in conflict in Africa by outsiders, therefore is founded on and shaped by the world order, and by power relations between the nations-of-origin of the outsider and the nation they work in.

Merton's (1972) original article on ‘Insiders and Outsiders’ did not define ‘insiders’ solely in terms of nationality or country/continent of origin. Merton argued that within single societies, an insider – outsider dimension could be observed.

‘...I adopt a structural conception of Insiders and Outsiders. In this conception, Insiders are the members of specified groups and collectivities or occupants of certain social statuses; Outsiders are non-members.’ (Merton, 1972 p 21)

Merton cites Polanyi (1967) who pointed out that the growth of knowledge depends on complex sets of social relations based on a reciprocity of trust. Societies - and academic communities - are however, increasingly divided by what has come to be called identity politics. Merton, writing in the early 1970s, pointed to the polarization of society on the basis of "insiders" and "outsiders" and the consequent proliferation of movements based on class, race, sex, religion and sexual orientation. These movements expressed, according to Merton:

‘Public affirmation of pride in certain statuses and of the solidarity with groups that for a long time have been socially degraded, stigmatized or harassed in other ways by the social system.’ (Merton 1972, 11)

The result has been the (sometimes) rigid consolidation of insider and outsider positions. In Northern Ireland, even though I was working in my own country, I was an ‘outsider’ when I researched the experience of disabled police officers, or the lives of those who lived in enclaves. Not only was I an outsider in terms of not being part of the group that I studied, I was also separated from them by social class, education, and the position of power that being a researcher entails. Some of the groups I researched have a strong sense of internal solidarity and identity, and clear boundaries between insiders and outsiders. Violent conflict tends to consolidate and reinforce such boundaries, as the wider society polarizes in response to violent attack and counter-attack. Merton’s (1972) description of the development of what he refers to as ‘insider doctrine’ which was derived from his observations from racial politics in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s, is reminiscent of insider-outsider dynamics in (other) violently divided societies.

Many of Osaghe’s points in the introduction to this volume resonate with my own ‘insider’ experience as a native of Northern Ireland, and a researcher of the conflict within my own society, as well as an ‘outsider’ researcher in Africa and the Middle East. I well remember the first time I was able to visit South Africa after the fall of Apartheid. Having lived most of my life in a society – Northern Ireland - that is deeply divided, where segregation is a feature of education, housing and social life, South Africa felt, somehow familiar, like home, to me. Others have reported similar experiences. Perhaps it is that we recognise the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which the divisions are contained and the society is organised. In South Africa, I seemed to know intuitively many of the unspoken rules, because they were so similar to those at home. I was an outsider, but less of an outsider than I am in Sweden or Norway, and less of an outsider than the Swedish or Norwegian person in South Africa. My socialisation in a divided society, my years of experience of living with an armed conflict have rendered conflict and societal division familiar to me, a reminder of home.

The value of such experience is undeniable. Some of my most useful thinking about my own society has been stimulated by recognising, on visits to other divided societies, commonalities we in Northern Ireland share with the country I happen to be visiting. Conversely, in deciphering patterns and anticipating issues in other divided societies, the ‘algebra’ of conflict and division that I learned in my own country often assists with understanding other contexts. So perhaps I am an ‘insider’ in a group of those who have experience of living for protracted periods in divided societies. And perhaps ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ experience is multiple and layered, rather than singular and one dimensional. Perhaps there is a obverse side to this. My experience of conflict may also blind me to aspects of other societies that I take for granted because of my own immersion in the experience of conflict in my own country. This, in turn raises questions about the baseline from which comparative work is conducted. Do we operate from some notional benchmarked hypothetical ‘normal’ society or do we merely compare what is.

It is perhaps inevitable that such groups, composed of ‘insiders’ will produce their own insider perspective that departs from the ‘outsider’ views, particularly where the perspective of the group has been regarded as less legitimate. Such insider perspectives are often formed in the context of the marginalisation and stigmatisation of the group, and can be seen in some ways as a reaction against such marginalisation. Merton, however, describes how certain groups, some in the mainstream of society, have historically claimed monopolistic access to particular kinds of knowledge, or in less extreme cases some groups claim privileged access to certain knowledge. Merton cites Marx’s description of post-capitalist society ridding itself of false consciousness and the ideology of Nazism:

‘contrasting the access to authentic scientific knowledge by men of unimpeachable Aryan ancestry with the corrupt versions of knowledge accessible to non-Aryans...and... the new racial category of ‘white Jews’ to refer to those Aryans who had defiled their race by actual or symbolic contact with non-Aryans.’ (Merton 1972, 11)

Merton goes on to describe the *de facto* insiderism of American academia, which is composed of:

‘patterned expectations about the appropriate selection of specialities and of problems for investigation.’ (Merton, 1972, 11)

A more contemporary analysis might suggest however, that some of the patterning occurs along racial, gender or class lines, and are more systematic. Yet Merton contrasts this *de facto* insiderism with an explicitly *doctrinal* form of insiderism, such as the argument by some Black scholars in the United States of the 1960s and 70s that only Black historians can understand Black history, which he summarises as:

‘you have to be one to understand one... the doctrine holds that one has monopolistic or privileged access to knowledge, or is wholly excluded from it, by virtue of one’s group membership or social position.’ (Merton, 1972, 15).

He points to problems with this doctrinal form of insiderism by extending the argument – only young people can understand young people, only women can understand women, only Jews can understand Jews, and so on. Such extreme insiderism:

‘represents a new credentialism...of ascribed status,... it contrasts with the credentialism of achieved status of meritocratic systems...Extreme Insiderism moves towards a doctrine of group methodological solipsism.’ (Merton, 1972, 14.)

For Merton, then, ‘insider’ knowledge is inextricably linked with the solidarity of the insider with his or her group. Added to this is the additional knowledge and insight that the insider possesses, which leads to what he calls the Insider principle. Merton dismisses the trivial version of the argument (‘that the Outsiders may be incompetent, given to quick and superficial forays into the group or culture under study and even unschooled in its language.’) by pointing out that incompetence, foolishness and poor training is to be found in all groups, and is not the exclusively associated with Outsiders. The Insider Principle, he proposes, is:

‘the belief that no Outsider, no matter how careful and talented, is excluded in principle from gaining access to the social and cultural truth...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 a group can one become fully aware of its symbolisms and socially shared realities; only so can one understand the fine-grained meanings of behavior, feelings, and values; only so can one decipher the unwritten grammar of conduct and nuances of cultural idiom.’ (Merton, 1972, 15.)

Merton points to a ‘less stringent’ version of this position, which holds that insider and outsider scholars have different concerns and foci of interest, because Insiders:

‘sharing the deepest concerns of the group or at the least being thoroughly aware of them, will so direct their inquiries as to have them be relevant to those concerns... Unlike the stringent version of the doctrine, which maintains that Insiders and Outsiders must arrive at different (and presumably incompatible) findings and interpretations even when they do examine the same problems, this weaker version argues only that they will not deal with the same questions and so will simply talk past one another.’ (Merton, 1972, 15.)

Merton links this view with ethnocentrism:

‘the view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it.’ (Sumner, 1907, p13)

However, Merton’s analysis analyses the positions of insiders and outsiders simply as intellectual standpoints. If we take into account the impact of violence and war on ways

of thinking, and ways of knowing, and indeed on identity itself, then the Insider Principle, described above, becomes more understandable. Violence acts as a centrifugal social force, not only polarizing politics, but creating an intellectual climate in which polarized ‘black and white’ thinking is tolerated, as the intellectual life of a society reflects the political and ideological climate of that society. Consider, for example, the contemporary intellectual divisions in the Middle East, where Israeli ‘new historians’ are ostracized by their Zionist colleagues, where boycotts and threats punctuate academic debate and scholarship on the history and contemporary politics of the region.

In violently divided societies, it is not merely the population that are polarized and segregated, intellectuals, academics, researchers reflect the divisions in the society, and bring to the job of the production of ideas their various loyalties. Ideas, too, are separating into ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ making for a marked dualistic thinking which is associated with the earlier stages of intellectual development. All thinkers, when exposed to life-threatening violence, will tend to revert to this form of thinking. It is not the exclusive terrain of insiders. It is a rare researcher, whether insider or outsider, that will, when faced with a threat to his or her life, will entirely retain the ability to examine the situation in which the threat occurred with any kind of scientific rigor. The tendency for what Merton referred to as Insider Doctrine to develop can be interpreted in the light of this, and in the context of strong ingroup-outgroup boundaries that are associated with violent conflict. The impact of violence and threat on ways of thinking has implications for quality of data collection, but particularly for analysis.

It seems, then, that there are two dimensions to the debate about the role and relative capacities of insiders versus outsiders as researchers. The first, a debate about *context, history, colonialism and power relations* sketched out above. The second debate about *scientific method* concerns the relative merits and effectiveness of insiders versus outsiders as researchers, mediators or analysts.

Scientific method: insider - outsider comparisons

Table 1 attempts to summarise and tabulate some of the other comparative advantages and disadvantages faced indigenous ‘insider’ and external ‘outsider’ researchers, in five key areas:

- Identity management & risk
- Objectivity/subjectivity
- Depth of knowledge
- Cultural competence
- Impact of witnessing

Identity management & risk

Researchers operating in conflict zones must consider issues of their safety and that of their informants. Here the insider researcher can be at a distinct advantage, in that they may know the terrain intimately, and have a network of contacts through which they can collect information and monitor issues such as safety. However, this is not equally true of all insiders, and some outsiders are skilled at quickly establishing networks, and reliable

advisors on issues such as safety. Insiders, too, can accept unquestioningly local superstitions and assumptions about danger and risk, which may not be real. Furthermore insiders may be perceived as partial, as part of conflict, identified with one or other side, consequently the risk may be greater. However, insiders are more likely than outsiders to have at their disposal more local resources to mitigate such risk.

Outsider identity can be a mixed blessing. In impoverished areas, researchers who by their skin color or other external markers are clearly identified with the developed world may have to constantly manage the issue of economic inequality, and the perceptions of their personal wealth and access to resources or power. In embattled communities, outsiders can be regarded with a great deal of suspicion, and subjected to intense questioning about their intentions, making it a challenge to establish sufficient trust to carry out the research.

The perception of the outsider researcher as objective or neutral can be a distinct advantage in terms of safety and access to data. However, the researcher may find him or herself the target of attempted indoctrination into one or other perspective as a result. Whilst this can be fruitful in terms of data collection, it can be tiresome when it proves to be difficult to deflect more relentless attempts at proselytizing. The major disadvantage faced by outside researchers in relation to safety and risk management is that their relative lack of knowledge of the context and relative inability to interpret cues may leave them ignorant of that actual risks they are taking.

Objectivity and subjectivity

A comparison of the relative merits of *insider* versus *outsider* research on violently divided contexts tends to assume certain advantages in each position: greater objectivity on the part of the outsider, and greater in-depth knowledge and understanding of the dynamics on the part insiders. However, recent work on research in violently divided societies has reaffirmed the myth of objectivity (see Smyth and Robinson, 2001). All researchers in violent contexts, whether insider or outsider, bring to their work their own previous identifications and experiences. These inevitably affect the extent to which a researcher identifies with one or other competing interest in the field of study. However the influence that these factors exert is not straightforward. Over or under compensation for one's identity; the emotional impact of violence and the suffering it causes; over or under-identification with one cohort; and the failure to adopt a systemic analytic framework can render researchers intellectually and analytically disabled, burnt out and emotionally overwhelmed. These unfortunate fates can befall insider and outsider alike. Violently divided societies are often characterised by geographical and ideological segregation between conflict zones and safer territory, with researchers venturing into the conflict zones in order to do fieldwork, but usually living and working in safer territory. The conflict zone is often, therefore, foreign territory to insider and outsider alike. It is perhaps only in the depth of understanding and in ability to interpret nuance that the abiding difference between insider and outsider researchers lies. Notwithstanding, If outsiders are read locally, they may be perceived – sometimes to the surprise of the author – to be partial to one or other faction in the conflict, whereas some insiders can achieve the elusive prize of being regarded as even-handed if not neutral or objective.

Objectivity and outsiders

There has been a tendency to under-value indigenous or insider research on conflict because of assumptions of bias on the part of indigenous researchers. Some of this tendency is due to institutionalised racism or colonial attitudes. However, assumptions about the superior validity of outsider perspectives are deeply ingrained. This assumption of the superiority of the ‘outsider’ perspective is often couched in arguments about the scientific value in terms of the ‘objectivity’ of the work. Yet, as referred to earlier, the impossibility of objectivity in the field of conflict research is well known. However, the work of the insider as compared to that of the outsider, may be addressed to different audiences. The work of the insider may well be more valuable in terms of its local intelligibility, and its ability to impact directly on the dynamics of conflict, although elsewhere, we have questioned whether, in fact, research makes any difference to conflict (Darby and Smyth 2001). The ability of indigenous research to speak to the home audiences about conflict, and the ability to effect positive shifts as a result, is often overlooked, taken for granted or under-valued.

The other side of the objectivity coin is the ability of outsiders to remain objective in their research on conflict in a country other than their own. The experience of watching outsider researchers operate in my own country leads me to conclude that outside researchers, more often than not, very quickly identify with one side or other of the conflict, and their analysis is consequently predictable. Few can resist the pull of the centrifugal force of violence described earlier: they do not remain detached or immune from sympathies or loyalty to one side or another. Their living quarters are located in or close to a bomb, their car is stopped by armed men, their vehicle is hi-jacked or burnt, and they respond as most human beings in such circumstances react. Some are more disciplined and rigorous in processing their experiences and using them as research data, attempting to avoid adopting one or other side. Others barely trouble themselves with such considerations. Outsider researchers, therefore, may at face value seem more likely to be ‘objective’ than insiders, in that that the expectation is that they will be able to see the conflict as a whole, and this may well be the case. In practical terms, however, this expectation is not always met. However, in spite of this, outside researchers are more likely in some instances to be regarded as credible, ‘objective’ and ‘scientific’ in their work. Indeed, most analysis of conflict does not make explicit the identity of the researcher or analyst, resting on the assumption that such questions are irrelevant. Were an insider identity to be declared, there is a tendency to question the scientific value of the analysis and question the perspectives, based on the suspicion that insiders may not be able to see the whole picture.

Depth of knowledge

Another area of difference between insider and outsider researchers is the depth of their knowledge of the context. Insiders can bring a wealth of information and insights to the study of their own society. However, it would be dangerous to assume that outsiders cannot surpass certain insiders in terms of their knowledge and understanding of a particular context. Whilst insiders have been socialized into the context, outsiders must work hard at acquisition of contextual and historical knowledge, but that does not mean that outsiders are always the least knowledgeable in this regard. Insiders can be parochial,

blind to certain aspects of their society as a result of their proximity and they may lack interest or curiosity about their environment and context. On the other hand outsiders can be passionately interested, avid readers, ardent scholars, frequent visitors or long-term residents. A possible disadvantage however, is that such scholarship pursued at a distance from the site of study may be over-reliant on secondary sources which maybe skewed due to, for example, censorship or propagandizing. Furthermore, knowledge acquired through reading rather than through experience can lack freshness and may not be fully integrated, a problem faced by the studious outsider researcher. The insider, however, may take much of his or her knowledge for granted. Outsiders have the potential advantage of being able to adopt fresh perspective on a situation, and may also bring useful comparative material, which can greatly assist in analysis and indeed in conflict resolution.

Cultural competence

Where there are distinct cultural or linguistic features to a society being studied, the insider is likely to be more competent than the outsider, although again this cannot be taken for granted. In multi-lingual societies, insiders, too, may be at a linguistic disadvantage, and some outsiders make strenuous efforts to learn or improve their linguistic abilities. The major disadvantage faced by the insider is that certain cultural aspects - perhaps relevant to the conflict being studied - may be 'invisible' to indigenous researcher, who may be so enculturated that he or she take these aspects for granted. To the outsider, on the other hand, the insider culture is likely to be highly visible, due to its lack of familiarity, although the outsider may be unable to access data through a lack of skill in negotiating the specific cultural context. Outsiders, too may be liable to misinterpret or unable to interpret data due to lack of knowledge or cultural competence.

Impact of witnessing

One of the challenges in conflict research is the impact of such research on the researcher themselves. In my own research in my own society, which involved auditing the human impact of political violence on victims and witnesses, my team and I experienced some psychological symptoms (see Smyth 2004b for a lengthier discussion of this). Whilst the perception may be that insiders have the advantage of habituation to levels of violence, in reality, the likelihood is that insider researchers live and work in relatively safe and secure environments at some distance from the conflict. Therefore, they can be as much at risk from psychological traumatising and other emotional impacts as outsiders. Inexperienced outsider researchers from peaceful societies may be particularly at risk, although there are also personality factors differences involved in levels of vulnerability. There may be differences between insiders and outsiders in terms of their access to support networks, which may offer some protection. However, insiders living and researching an active conflict may have no such access, since psychological impact is often ignored, either totally, until the post-conflict period, and support services are rarely in place until the conflict is well on its way to resolution. Insiders also face the potential disadvantage of increased emotional proximity to subject, which may increase their risk of traumatising. However, it is not safe to assume that outsiders (such as me, working in the Middle East) do not have previous traumatic experiences in relation to conflict that make them similarly vulnerable, or indeed 'hardened' or burnt out. These points

notwithstanding, outsiders may well enjoy the advantage of some emotional distance from the subject and their comparative experience may have some prophylactic effect.

Table 1: Insider and outsider effectiveness in researching violently divided societies

Factor	Insider		Outsider	
	Advantage	Disadvantage	Advantage	Disadvantage
Identity management & risk	May know the terrain intimately	Perceived as partial/ part of conflict so risk/danger may be greater	Perceived objectivity can improve safety	Lack of detailed knowledge can lead to ignorance of risk
Objectivity/subjectivity	Can be easily located within the society, and his/her analysis read accordingly	May be totally identified with one side and unable to make paradigm shift to studying conflict as a whole	Comparative analysis maybe facilitated by researcher’s position & knowledge of other societies	Chimera of ‘objectivity’: - outsider researchers are often caught in dynamic of conflict and ‘take sides’
Depth of knowledge	Greater potential for in-depth knowledge of terrain	Blind spots (both geographically and disciplinarily) may be considerable due to proximity to subject	Potentially able to adopt fresh perspective on the society	Potentially over-reliant on a. secondary sources which may be from one predominant perspective due to censorship etc and b. acquired knowledge/ ‘book learning’ rather than experiential learning
Cultural competence	Competence level is likely to be high	Cultural aspects of society that pertain to conflict may be taken for granted and ‘invisible’ to	Culture may be highly visible due to lack of over-familiarity	May be liable to misinterpret or be unable to interpret data due to lack of cultural competence

		the insider due to over-familiarity		
Impact of witnessing	Habituation and existing family/peer networks may offer some protection	Emotional proximity to subject may increase negative effects	Emotional distance and comparative experience have prophylactic effect	Inexperienced researchers from ‘peaceful’ societies may be traumatised; experienced researchers may be ‘hardened’ or burnt out

Conclusions

The work of external or outsider researchers is often not accessible to insiders, particularly in the developing world. There is a definition of poverty which posits poverty as the experience of someone publishing about you, where you have no access to or control over what they write. Research can create and reproduce such poverty. Outsiders' research, however, can sometimes look facile to insiders' eyes and their work may not be useful locally because it fails to contribute anything new or lacks in depth. Some outsider researchers have been guilty of writing for outside audiences at an international level, without attempting to make their work accessible to local people about whom they write. Such material is unlikely to have a positive impact of any kind on the ground. There are notable exceptions to this, of course, and some outsiders make useful and thoughtful contributions to local thinking about some conflicts.

Other strategies can be used by both insiders and outsiders to improve the coverage of their data and the robustness of their analysis. Use of comprehensive quantitative data, such as censuses of deaths or injuries, collected according to transparent and pre-agreed frameworks and analysed by region, perpetrator, victim identity and so on, can provide useful overviews of a conflict. This is work that can be undertaken by either insiders or outsiders. Alongside this, qualitative data can provide depth of coverage, and analysis can address multiple 'realities' explaining conflict in all its complexity and contradictions. This is an argument for the development of methodological approaches to conflict research that assist the researcher to get closer to the subject of study, and a plea for methodological forums in which outsiders and insiders can learn from one another.

In the end, much of the difficulty and advantage faced by researchers, outsiders and insiders depends on their personality, level and depth of previous experience, age, cultural background, research competence and level of sensitivity to local contexts. There are, however, some distinct disadvantages to both outsider and insider status. However, some of the disadvantages can be overcome by working in partnership with the 'other', with research partnerships of insiders and outsiders working collaboratively. This is an approach advocated by Hermann (2001) and Merton, who advises:

'It is necessary that you unite the 'insiders' with the 'outsiders.' You will all have nothing to lose except your own pretensions. In exchange you will have a world of understanding to gain.' (Merton 1977, 201)

In the context of Africa, such insider-outsider partnerships must be based on mutual respect for each others' scholarship, knowledge and expertise. It must also be based on an open acknowledgement of the very different resources brought to the research task by insiders and outsiders: differentials of economic support for conflict research, and the equally huge differentials in the distribution of different forms of knowledge. Such partnerships are potentially mutually beneficial to both insiders and outsiders, and could contribute to greater understanding of conflict and prospects for conflict resolution.

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