

## Challenges of Research Objectivity in a Plural Society: The Case of Nigeria

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### Abstract

*This article based on descriptive analytical desk information examines the challenges of objectivity in social science research in a plural society with special reference to Nigeria. It reveals that although objectivity is a cherished ideal of social science research, it is challenging to attain in a society like Nigeria characterized by multiple identities such as ethnicity, regionalism, religion and language. These segmental cleavages hugely reflect in concept formation, choice of language, ethical considerations, instruments adopted in data collection and analysis among others by researchers and scholars in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Research, Objectivity, Plural Society, Identity, concept formation, ethical consideration

### Introduction

Objectivity is one of the cherished ideals of the social research. It is so important that if any research is accused of being subjective, its status as a source of knowledge sinks slowly into the horizon like a setting sun. However, the attainment of objectivity in social science research is quite challenging. One major factor that can undermine attempts at attaining objectivity in social research is the nature of the society. The role or implication of the nature of society in the attainment of research objectivity in social research process is particularly critical in a plural society such as Nigeria. A number of fascinating theoretical and analytical discourses have been targeted at deepening understanding of the nature of cultural pluralism in Nigeria. To be sure, the inputs from works of these dedicated scholars and literature have to a large extent deepened understanding of the nature of cultural pluralism in Nigeria, yet only a little attention has been vested in exploring the challenges of this cultural pluralism to scholars and researchers in the attainment of research objectivity. This is the research gap that this seminar paper attempts to fill.

As this article argues, the Nigerian researchers and scholars alike are themselves faced with enormous challenges which adversely undermine the objectivity of their research and so reduce the import and impact of their work. Their research objectivity is fraught with enormous challenges arising principally from the plurality of the Nigerian society which makes researchers to be caught up in the sticky web of ethnicity, regionalism, religion, and language, thus undermining the researchers' quest for objectivity.

For the purpose of analytical convenience, this paper is structured into five sections. Following the introduction is the section on conceptual clarification, then the plurality in Nigeria, subsequently the research objectivity and plurality in Nigeria and lastly the conclusion.

### Research objectivity and plural society

At this stage, the two major concepts need to be defined for the appreciation of this discourse. These are research objectivity and a plural society. As a concept, objectivity in the literature on research methods is variously defined. According to Smith (1990:171 quoted in Eisner (1992) "objectivity is the regulative ideal that guides all inquiry (which is) largely a measure directed at how researchers undertake and carry out their research in that it requires them to be precise, unbiased, open, honest, receptive to criticism, and so on". In a similar vein, Lather (1990: 319 quoted in Eisner (1992) states that "objectivity means being aware and honest about how one's own beliefs, values, and biases affect the research process." To Kirk and Miller (1986) objectivity is defined as "the simultaneous realization of as much reliability and validity as possible." Reliability is "the extent to which a measurement procedure yields the same answer however and whenever it is carried out" or "the degree to which the finding is independent of accidental circumstances of the research." Validity is "the extent to which it

(research and analysis) gives the correct answer”. Put differently, validity is “the degree to which the finding is interpreted in a correct way.”

In social research, the principle of objectivity presupposes that research finding or result (knowledge claim, falsification or validation) is based on scientific fact and proof rather than on the personality, beliefs and values of the researcher. In effect, the notion of objectivity assumes that a truth or independent reality exists outside of any investigation or observation. The researcher's task in this model is to uncover this reality without contaminating it in any way. Thus, a realistic aim of the principle of objectivity in research is for the researcher to remain impartial; that is, to be impartial to the outcome of the research, to acknowledge their own preconceptions and to operate in as unbiased and value-free way as possible (Weber 1948, Kirk and Miller 1986).

Discernibly, objectivity means the facts speak for themselves even if they turn out to be different from what the investigators hoped. It is an ideal principle that leads to agreement among expert judges on what is observed. It does not refer to qualities or characteristics of a person doing research but that the person should try to remain totally unbiased in the investigation. An objective test does not mean that the test itself is unbiased, but that nearly anyone could arrive at the same score using the test as a measuring device. The outcome is purely based on facts, and is unbiased, to remove subjective evaluations by relying on verifiable data. Specifically, the results should not be influenced by personal feelings, prejudices or experiences. Objectivity also refers to the controlled experimental situation which produces replicable findings. This means it requires that all sources of personal or subjective bias are minimized or eliminated.

Instructively, researchers or subjectivists have argued that in social research in contrast to natural science the principle of objectivity is difficult to follow. Several ethical and methodological dilemmas and challenges are associated with social research objectivity. Scholars have argued strongly for an overhaul of ethical considerations in human sciences to include the wider picture of political and social interests which are not peripheral but often central to research (Valentine 2005; Hoggart et al 2002; Katz 1994). Such social science research ethics and political considerations could relate to the researcher's value orientation, procedures, and practices in conducting research. First, investigating the external agents' project impact and commitment as well as how actors exert power and influence over others can be a sensitive issue affecting data accessibility and ethical considerations. The generation of data will thus require access to documents, institutions and people who are directly or indirectly related to the topic, requiring that clear and proper procedures be followed (de Vaus 2001).

Indeed, one major ethical issue is in gaining access to participants via ‘gatekeepers’ – those people who control enquiries and who may be concerned about the researcher's motives, what organizations may stand to gain or lose, as well as losses in terms of staff time (Cloke et al 2004; Bryman 2004). Organizations are wary of potential risks to image, and thus may dictate who may or may not participate in the research. The researcher is nonetheless aware that gaining access is by continuous negotiations and bargaining.

The expectations of gatekeepers are also linked to the expectations of rural community participants, albeit in a different way. Conducting field research in rural poor communities relating to welfare is bound to raise expectations which the researcher may not be in a position to fulfill (Dey, 1993). Such communities may also be ‘interview-fatigued’ due to a series of prior broken promises of tangible benefits that are yet to be delivered to them in a region rife with resentment over social marginalization. Managing their perceptions is important in ‘setting the record straight’ as a researcher and making clear too that one is not working for either government or other organizations or people whose interests are under study. The task of managing their expectations includes providing information on the research focus as an academic inquiry which aims to contribute to knowledge. By participating in the research, poor people may even lose materially due to the amount of time invested in the research process which they could have devoted to the challenge of everyday living (Valentine, 2005).

Another ethical problem scholars have raised is the researchers' positionality which relates to claims of research as value-free versus the researcher's own values, which may reflect a bias and subjectivity that permeates the research (Valentine 2005; Bryman 2004; Kitchin and Tate 2000; Katz 1994; Dey 1993). Scholars argue that in order to minimize bias the researcher's personal biases and assumptions should be declared to the reader as well as how this may have influenced the findings

(Bryman 2004; Kitchin and Tate 2000). It is increasingly being recognised that research cannot be entirely value free in any event; the researcher should thus exhibit reflexivity about his/her role in the research suggesting that the researcher's positionality, reflections, ideas, and feelings form part of the interpretation process (Bryman 2004; Cloke *et al* 2004).

Still another ethical consideration relates to the researcher's discharge of responsibility for protecting participants from negative effects that might occur as a result of their participation in the research. Scholars have argued for the professional approach which requires the researcher to focus on issues such as privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Bryman 2004; Kitchin and Tate 2000). In practice, anonymity requires the protection of the identity of the research participants, and by contrast, confidentiality requires avoiding the public attribution of comments to identified participants (Bryman 2004).

Finally, ethical issues are concerned with the extent to which the researcher is morally responsible to aim at achieving objectivity which relates to validity and reliability in research (Kitchin and Tate 2000; Kirk and Miller 1986). Validity concerns the soundness, legitimacy and relevance of research and it includes telling a convincing story that is rigorous in nature so that its conclusions can be accepted more definitely ((Bryman 2004; Laws *et al* 2003; Kitchin and Tate 2000; Dey 1993). It also relates, in theory, to the integrity of the theoretical constructs and ideas that support and provide the foundations for empirical research. Specifically, reliability has to do with the extent to which a research procedure yields the same answer under the same context (Kirk and Miller 1986). Analyzing qualitative data is an important aspect of research procedures and it requires skills to describe and analyze data relating to the interactive processes involving emotions, perceptions, and power relations.

In spite, of these dilemmas associated with social research, some other researchers have contended that objective procedures increase the probability of obtaining more valid and more reliable knowledge. While people are not objective, research can be made more objective by following the rules of objectivity. These include:

- an open atmosphere of critical inquiry; the good researcher is a self-critic
- only testable statements are relevant; findings must be replicable
- faith in the scientific method, tempered by skepticism
- belief that most natural phenomena can be understood (even if only in a limited and probabilistic manner);
- complete honesty in the research process; what evidence is there against your hypothesis?

Like the research objectivity, the concept of a plural society is highly contentious. According to Lijphart a plural society is a society divided by 'segmental cleavages'. Segmental cleavages may be of religious, ideological, linguistic, regional and cultural, racial or ethnic nature. A further characteristic is that political parties, interest group media communication, schools, and voluntary association tend to be organized along lines of segmental cleavages. Such societies Young (1976) noted tend to be characterized by politics of cultural pluralism reinforced by class conflicts. In the Nigerian case, ethnic religious, regional, linguistic, gender, and class conflicts constitute the basis of the politics of cultural pluralism. These are the very ingredients of her social cleavages. On account of this cultural pluralism, the attainment of research objectivity in Nigeria has become very challenging

### **The Plurality of the Nigerian society**

Nigeria is an exemplar of a plural society that is a deeply divided state, in which issues are vociferously contested along lines of complex regional, religious, ethnic, linguistic divisions in the country. There are few points of agreement and concordance among the constituent groups (Cox 1970). Scholars put these ethnic groups at different figures. According to Kirk-Green (see Mustapha 2009), Nigeria has well over 400 ethnic groups. For Suberu (2000), Nigeria has over 250 ethno-linguistic groups, some of which are bigger than many independent states of contemporary Africa. Otite (1990) specifically identified 374 ethnic groups in the country. The population of these ethnic groups varies greatly; the three dominant ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Ibo) constitute about 68% of Nigeria's entire population. The population differential added to the disparities in political influence of the ethnic groups broadly divides the group into two – majority and minority ethnic groups. Among the majority ethnic groups, the Hausa-Fulani make up 29%, Yoruba in the South West 21% and Igbo in the South East 18

% (Forest, 2012). Implicitly, the remaining 32% represents proportion of the over 200 minority ethnic groups ranging in size from several thousands to a few million functionally related to their political stature.

Allied to the diverse ethnic groups, Nigeria is polyglot society. This means that several languages are spoken in the country. Like the researches on number of ethnic groups, scholars have different figures on the languages spoken in Nigeria (Idahosa 2010). Coleman (1958) opines that there are about 248 different languages spoken in Nigeria. There is also the view that there are 395 distinct languages in Nigeria (Idahosa 2010). To Geddes (2010) there are over 400 different languages and dialects spoken in Nigeria. The dominant ethnic group in the north speaks Hausa, in the southwest Yoruba is spoken by the dominant ethnic group while in the southeast Igbo is the main language of the major ethnic group. About 65 per cent of the population is made up of the Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the west and the Ibo of the east (Geddes 2010). Notably, some of these languages are intelligible and some are not.

Many Nigerians are very much endeared to their primordial identities than the civic public (Ekeh 1975). Those who attempt to separate or forgo their identities in a subject involving their ethnic and linguistic groups risk being stigmatized with opprobrium. The average Nigerian will hardly see any reason to forgo his identity for reason such as promoting collective interest. They believe that every other person will defend their primordial groups. Thus, they do not see any wrong being attached to their identities. In addition, to ethnic and linguistic lines of division in the country, there are different religions and traditions. While there varied views about religious affinities of the Nigerian population, most analysts are of the opinion that the Muslim population constitute about half of the estimated 140 million. About 70 million constitute the Muslim population, with 60 million and 10 million constituting Christian and adherents of traditional religion population. The religious division in the country also falls in line with the geographical and ethnic divides (Alao 2009). The population of the Hausa-Fulani is dominated by Muslims, the Yoruba population is religiously an even mixture of Muslims and Christians, while the Igbo population is predominantly Christians. Like the Igbo population, the Middle-belt population comprising the Tivs, Idomas, and Igbira is mainly Christians. It is this unique religious divide that prompted Archbishop Onaiyeka (2008) to describe Nigeria as the greatest Islamo-Christian nation in the world. By this, he implied that Nigeria is the biggest country in the world with evenly split population of Muslims and Christians and really a test case of civilizations.

Instructively, these two principal religious groups are not monolithic. Within the Christian community there is a spectrum of denominations straddling the gamut of the mainstream Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian to the numerous protestants churches or Pentecostal denominations. These latter churches by no little measure constitute the fundamentalist arm of the Christian community in the country and more hard-line in their proselytizing.

This multiplicity is not peculiar to the Christian community. The Muslim community also incarnates multiplicity. According to Paden (2006) the diversity within the practice of Islam is the least underappreciated due to theological divisions within Islam and regional difference. Although, a number of Muslims in northern Nigeria follow orthodox Sunni Islam and Maliki school of Sharia's jurisprudence, in its Iranian variant has attracted some adepts. These include the Shiite leader, Abubakar Mujahid who promoted a thorough Islamic revolution to reclaim society for the Muslim faith (Osaghae and Suberu 2005). The Sunni, group comprises a many sects including Qaddiyya, Tarika, Tijani, Shia and Izala. Some of these groups have political programme that focus heavily on Sharia at the moment. The Izala attract bright, young educated persons who are fanatical about Islam and deep understanding of the Sharia law. As members of Shia sect follow the doctrines of Shiite, indigenous political leaders view them as radicals and believe they are committed to overthrow existing government. These religious identities underline the North-South dichotomy terms of the North being largely Muslim and the South mainly Christians and sharpens the ethnic lines in the country especially in the North where Paden (2007) observed the all-consuming nature of Islamic identity does overshadow other identities and religious differences play a major part in ethnic differentiation.

Religion has often been a chief factor in Nigeria and its politics. The potency of religious identity in Nigeria is regarded as one of the highest in the world. According to the Pew Forum Survey on Religion and Public Life 76% of Christians and 91% of Muslims hold that religion is more important to them

than their identity as Africans, Nigerians or members of an ethnic group. An earlier survey by Lewis and Bratton (2000) on Attitudes on Democracy and Market in Nigeria in 2000 revealed that about 80% of Nigerians belong to a religious institution. In effect, Christian and Muslim activities have been the mainstay of religion differentiation and conflict; with Nigerian Muslim more likely to evince or articulate religious identity than Christians. Underlying this deep identity is the deep distrust each group feels toward the other. Pew and Forum Survey (2007 cited in Ruby and Shah 2007) reveals that about 62% of Christians in Nigeria held that they have a little or no trust for people from other religions while 61% of Muslims share similar view.

The ethnic and religious cleavages constitute most important factors that are fed into Nigerian citizenship which lead, to many of the observed distortions. Awolowo one of the famous Nigerian nationalists wrote thus:

*Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no Nigerians in the sense as there are English, Welsh, or French. The word Nigerian is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not* (quoted in Osumah 2012).

Similarly, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa a leader of the Northern People's Congress in 1948 was quoted to have said that

*Since 1914 the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country but the Nigerian people are historically different in their backgrounds, as in their religious beliefs and customs and do not show themselves any signs of unwillingness to unite... Nigerian unite is only British intention for the country* (quoted in Osumah 2012).

Taiwo (quoted in Ilufoye 2009:285) strikingly captured the citizenship conception in Nigeria thus,

*Beyond phrase-mongering, there are no citizens in Nigeria, only citizens of Nigeria... That is, Nigerian citizenship is merely geographical, it is without moral-ideological content... part of what typifies citizenship, especially in the modern state, is the de-emphasizing of geography and other natural facts in its composition... the freedom to locate anywhere within the boundaries of the relevant geo-polity is nonexistent in Nigeria.*

In the post-independence Nigeria, the political socialization of the elite into a political culture along these identities did not change. These identities have serious implications on the behaviour of the political elites. In a profound sense, many of the post-independence socio-political and economic developments and malformations are a corollary of the state-building and poor sense of nationalism. There are number of anecdotes underlining the ethnic, regional and religious identities. For example the descendants of Usman Dan Fodio's caliphate arrogate to themselves superiority over outsiders. Outsiders are regarded only as junior partners used in the quest for political ambition. They place on the outsiders such as the non-Hausa-Fulani Muslims and non-Muslims an expiration label. As Mrs. Ladi Shehu (cited in Kukah 1993), a political activist lamentably noted "people from the upper North were okay, they were proper northerners and if you are, a Muslim, well, that improves your position, but if you were from the Middle belt, you are another class of northerner". In relation to the southerners, there is the self-arrogated superiority over northerners in terms of western education. However, in the area of culture there is the superiority arrogance among the traditional rulers. An anecdote, is the tale that the Sultan of Sokoto who went to welcome visiting Oba of Benin at the Airport, disdaining their outfit as less royal of the Oba (Kukah 1993).

In addition, in the ethnic, linguistic, regional and religious identities in Nigeria are underlined by horizontal inequalities that correspond to the identities. While the north is educationally, economically and socially disadvantaged; it is more populous and a major net beneficiary of prolonged hegemonic rule of post-independence history. According to Ibrahim and Kazah-Toure (2003) precisely because of this political background, the story of nationalism has been expressed in the discursive language of ethno-religious contestation. Fears of domination of one region or ethnic group or religion over the others have played a central role in defining the contour and dynamics of politics. To Kirk-Greene (cf. Mustapha 2009) "fear has been constant in every tension and confrontation in Nigeria. Not the physical fear of violence, not the spiritual fear of attribution, but the psychological fear of discrimination, domination. It is the fear of not getting one's share, one's desert"

The constant fear of not being short-changed is made more problematic by the logic of political mobilization which has been developed along the lines of a zero sum game. These mean that groups are obliged to block the access of the others or displace those who already have access if they are to eat from the national cake. Added to this, the federal system that has been developed to resolve the 'national question' in Nigeria is poorly implemented. And this results in hegemonic struggles amongst Nigeria's various groups and social forces. A process of a permanent strategy of blockage has amplified the expression of fissiparous tendencies because all those who are not inside are outside. The live-story is one of a widespread perception, real or imagined, of ethno-religious domination

The elite have always sought to manipulate the multifaceted identities in seeking political office and public resources. In the elite contestation for political office and resources, patterns of domination are constantly transformed. It is this constantly changing pattern of domination that is producing the fears and anxieties that underlie increasing conflict and intolerance (Ibrahim and Kazah-Toure 2003)

As these lines of identity are central to politics, it is creating an intellectual atmosphere, which constitutes challenge to research objectivity. As this seminar paper argues, the Nigerian researchers and scholars alike are themselves faced with enormous challenges which adversely undermine the objectivity of their research and so reduce the import and impact of their work. Their research objectivity is fraught with enormous challenges arising principally from the multiple plurality of the Nigerian society which makes researchers to be caught up in the sticky web of ethnicity, regionalism, religion, and language, thus undermining the researchers' quest for objectivity.

### **Research Objectivity and Plurality in Nigeria**

It is obvious from the foregoing that research objectivity is fraught with several challenges. However, there are peculiar challenges of research objectivity in the multiple plurality of Nigeria. Some of these challenges range from data gathering stage through analysis to the dissemination of research findings. Indeed, one major ethical issue is in gaining access to participants via 'gatekeepers' – those people who control enquiries and who may be concerned about the researcher's motives, what organizations may stand to gain or lose, as well as losses in terms of staff time (Cloke et al 2004; Bryman 2004). Organizations are wary of potential risks to image, and thus may dictate who may or may not participate in the research.

Gaining access into many of Nigeria's conflict zones has been challenging for many because of their identity. Africanists as well as Nigerians researching groups other than their own have often faced the challenge of gaining access to research areas (Katz 1994; Dey 1993). Such challenges may be engendered by language barrier; difference in religious orientation (for example, a Christian researching a predominantly Muslim community or area), or ethno-cultural differences. Indeed, one of the challenges of researching incessant conflicts in the core North of Nigeria has been the Islamic practice of keeping some Muslim women under *Purdah* and therefore making such homes 'a-no-go-area' for outsiders. Also, against the backdrop of the Boko Haram terrorism in northern Nigeria, many Muslims have become labeled and stigmatized as terrorists in everyday social discourse.

Beyond the Muslim North, Ukoha (2008) noted that researching the Niger Delta insurgency was difficult for many scholars because their identity made them to be associated with those who were seen as marginalizing and oppressing the oil producing region. Consequently, even if such researchers are eventually granted access, their initial manhandling and denial of admission to valuable research information could undermine their objectivity. The challenge engendered by the researcher's identity is, however, not peculiar to Nigeria. As Hermann (2001) noted, many researchers who had similar identity with Palestinians were hardly granted access to information in Israel; and those who were linked with either side in the Northern Ireland conflict had access problem in researching the other.

Yet, the generation of data requires access to documents, institutions and people who are directly or indirectly related to the topic, requiring that clear and proper procedures be followed (de Vaus 2001). To gain access, a researcher has to rely on continuous negotiations and bargaining which could result in undermining objectivity. However, managing their perceptions is important in 'setting the record straight' as a researcher and making clear too that one is not working for either government or other organizations or people whose interests are under study. The task of managing their expectations includes providing information on the research focus as an academic inquiry which aims

to contribute to knowledge. By participating in the research, poor people may even lose materially due to the amount of time invested in the research process which they could have devoted to the challenge of everyday living (Valentine, 2005).

Relatedly, researcher's identity also poses a crucial challenge to the issue of neutrality. Scholars have raised the ethical problem of researchers' positionality which relates to claims of research as value-free versus the researcher's own values, which may reflect a bias and subjectivity that permeates the research (Valentine 2005; Bryman 2004; Kitchin and Tate 2000). Scholars argue that in order to minimize bias the researcher's personal biases and assumptions should be declared as well as how this may have influenced the findings (Bryman 2004; Kitchin and Tate 2000). The issue of neutrality remains crucial in divided societies even though it is increasingly being recognised that research cannot be entirely value free in any event; the researcher should thus exhibit reflexivity about his/her role in the research suggesting that the researcher's positionality, reflections, ideas, and feelings form part of the interpretation process (Bryman 2004).

Also, challenges arising from collecting data from settings characterized by multiple identities have adversely affected the objectivity of researches (Cloke et al 2004). This can take various forms: on the one hand, members of the in-group might be reluctant in giving information to a researcher who is an outsider. Sometimes, those studied might even mislead the outsider-researcher by giving him or her wrong information thereby leading to research validity problems. Aside challenges emanating from those studied, some problems could also emanate from the researcher as he/she could be biased in research questions construction and the type of data he/she collects from those studied because they are considered as outsiders to him/her.

Such biases either from those studied or the researcher often colour the way research findings are interpreted. This has a huge implication for research objectivity. Since the research analysis and interpretation are based on flawed data, the conclusion and general research outcome cannot be objective. A good example of this was the bias displayed by Ife researchers who studied Modakeke community (Akanji, 2008). Similarly, many researchers from the Niger Delta region displayed some bias in studying members of their in-group because of their cultural and emotional affiliations to their subjects (those studied) (see, Osumah, 2009). This kind of bias is common in many studies conducted on conflict settings in Nigeria by non-indigenes (Onwuzuruigbo, 2010). Be that as it may, ethical issues are concerned with the extent to which the researcher is morally responsible to aim at achieving objectivity which relates to validity and reliability in research (Kitchin and Tate 2000; Kirk and Miller 1986).

Validity concerns the soundness, legitimacy and relevance of research and it includes telling a convincing story that is rigorous in nature so that its conclusions can be accepted more definitely (Bryman 2004; Laws et al 2003; Kitchin and Tate 2000; Dey 1993). It also relates, in theory, to the integrity of the theoretical constructs and ideas that support and provide the foundations for empirical research including how research questions are constructed. Specifically, reliability has to do with the extent to which a research procedure yields the same answer under the same context (Kirk and Miller 1986).

Research analysis in a plural setting could be jeopardized by sidelining and rendering as insignificant the responses of those not from the researcher's socio-cultural and political groups. Studies have shown that many Nigerian researchers who study other ethno-religious groups other than their own often sometimes deliberately do not give voice to their subjects (e.g., see Ukoha, 2008; Onwuzuruigbo, 2010). Yet, such analysis requires skills to describe and analyze data relating to the interactive processes involving emotions, perceptions, and power relations in a genuine and unbiased manner.

In a divided society, strong attachment to primordial constituencies renders research objectivity in knowledge production a myth. This is because the average man does not see anything wrong being attached or loyal to their identities. They condemn a practice where the individuals forgo their identities. In fact, there is a general preference in Nigeria for the "we" feeling to the "they" feeling. Government policy or decision is given the "we" and the "they" coloration. We have been marginalized or unjustly treated and they have been favoured with more privileges (Gouglas and Ola 2003). Thus, in this setting individuals and researchers are likely to be pre-occupied with the invention and development of

mechanisms for projecting and protecting their identities. Indeed, in a society of amoral familists, research objectivity could further be discouraged by ostracism, opprobrium and hostility towards individuals and researchers who testify against their own. In Nigeria, there is a general notion that only an outcast can enter the witness box to testify against his or her own community. Thus, the claim of any person or institution to be inspired by objectivity rather than private advantage will be regarded as dishonesty and sinful. Rather they are expected to celebrate and defend their own even if it requires being partial. According to Osumah (2012:44) in Nigeria people are quick to come to the defense of their own on the basis of ethnic sentiment and eulogize them as illustrious sons of their community. In the same vein, Adebayo (1999) also portrayed ethnic relations in Nigeria as cohabitation without marriage. Thus, while a Nigerian nationality is non-existent properly speaking citizenship is operative at the homeland level (quoted in Osumah 2012).

These cultural values and expectations manifest in the works, ideas and thoughts of individuals and scholars. As the lines of divisions apart from being critical in politics, they are also reflective in the production of knowledge by research participants and researchers. The attachment to various identities is reflected in the intellectual products of individuals and researchers. This is particularly reflective in the volunteering of information and interpretation of data. A clear case of this can be discerned from the literature on the origin of Warri crisis. A number of knowledge produced by researchers from the three principal ethnic groups in the crisis, Itsekiri, Ijaw and Urhobo exposed the myth of objectivity. The works of Ekeh (2003), Ayomike (2003) and Olode (2003) reflect the claims and counter-claims on the origin of Warri city. Ekeh (2003) opined that the Warri District founded by the British was without the Itsekiri. Ayomike (2003) posited that Warri city belongs to the Itsekiri and the Ijaws and the Urhobos are only tenants. To Olode (2003) the Itsekiris are only attempting to attach themselves as one of the principal tribes. The various ethnic groups also erected website to build up information to support their perspectives (Osumah 2009).

Furthermore, the lack of research objectivity in a divided society is sometimes revealed by the language in which the research report is presented. As noted by Keen (2008), the language of the research says a lot about research objectivity. The language of the research is supposed to be neutral and devoid of stereotypes and labels. In a plural, setting such as Nigeria, Boko Haram terrorists are often labeled as “Islamic” terrorists yet not all Muslims are terrorists. Similarly, some Niger Delta researchers often referred to the region’s militants as freedom fighters while some researchers outside the area labeled the same militants as rebels (Osumah, 2009). Thus, the use of ‘freedom fighter’ or ‘rebel’ is evocative. As the saying goes, one man’s freedom fighter could be another man’s terrorist.

## **Conclusion**

Objectivity is one of the cherished ideals of the research community. It is so important that if any research is accused of being subjective, its status as a source of knowledge sinks slowly into the horizon like a setting sun. In this article, we have established that research objectivity is difficult to realize in the research process despite its relevance. Though the difficulty of realizing research objectivity is a general problem, the challenge is more daring in divided societies such as the Gaza Strip, Northern Ireland, South Africa and Nigeria. The case of Nigeria is particularly challenging because of the multiple identities which characterize the Nigerian society such as ethnicity, regionalism, religion, and language. These segmental cleavages as shown in the preceding pages are imposed in the research process by researchers and scholars. The segmental cleavages reflected in the concept formation, choice of language, ethical consideration, instruments adopted in data collection and analysis among others by researchers and scholars in Nigeria.

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