

# Liberal Democratisation and Ethnic Conflict in Africa: Methodological Reflections

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## Abstract

This article offers methodological reflections of the relationships between liberal democratisation and ethnic politics in Africa, based on a critique of an ‘empirical’ research work carried out on the subject matter by Smith (2000: 21-39). In this work, Smith uses a sophisticated variety of quantitative techniques to engage the debate on the causal association between three key variables: political liberalisation, democratisation and ethnic conflict in Africa. A seeming innovation of Smith is the use of a less familiar method (regression analysis) amongst scholars of African politics to advance a positivistic argument for an intellectual subject matter that has so far been subjected to constructivist explanations. This article argues that (a) Smith’s quantitative work can and do complement existing qualitative work, particularly amongst African and Africanist scholars. Yet, it argues that (b) Smith’s technique and arguments are so riven with sophisticated statistical formulae and abstract analysis that they do not lend themselves to easy comprehension. The article therefore (c) questions the exclusive utility of a positivist approach in studying African politics – a terrain awash with subjective realities and (d) recommends the importance of mixing methods, as a means of ensuring methodological synergy.

## Keywords

*Liberalisation, Democratisation, Ethnic Conflict, Africa, Methodology, Positivism, Interpretivism*

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## 1.0 Introduction

There is an on-going debate on the relationship between state, liberalisation, democracy and conflict in Africa. This debate commenced in the 1990s, but largely linked to much earlier discourses of politics in post-colonial Africa (see, e.g. Mazrui, 1980). To prove their arguments, scholars of African Politics have employed a plethora of methods to conduct research and offer intellectually persuasive explanations. There is a clear division, for

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instance, between those who employ *qualitative approaches* on the one hand, and those who employ *quantitative approaches* on the other.<sup>1</sup> The former is favoured mainly by an ‘old-brigade’ of African(ist) scholars – those inclined towards subjectivity as opposed to objectivity – while the latter enjoys a *Eureka* status with new-generation of scholars, particularly Political Scientists and behaviouralists, who are fascinated by the so-called “magic of numbers” to solve human mysteries. A key methodological flagship of the latter category, albeit by no means exhaustive, is *methodological individualism* which argues that subjecting the individual to a rigorous scientific study is capable of yielding an aggregate data that could lend itself to objective generalisation.

The foregoing methodological orientations define the positionality of scholars and researchers in higher education institutions (HEIs) and research centres throughout the world. The author of this article is tempted to recall two contrasting lived experiences encountered in the 1990s whilst studying for an undergraduate degree in Political Science at a Nigerian University – the aim here is to reveal the reality of scholarship in Africa, and to show that this reality contrasts sharply with advanced Western democracies where research culture is more developed, freer and robust. First, a British-trained Professor and an enthusiast of constructionism and interpretivism who taught *Methods of Social and Political Enquiry* once posed an essay question to our class of 45 students: ‘Quantitative method is a useless tool in studying African Politics. Discuss.’ The following year his colleague, a positivist-inclined lecturer who taught *Comparative Politics* asked: ‘objectifying subjectivity is a celebration of impossibility – discuss in the context of African Politics’. Given the known methodological biases of each lecturer and given the bizarre authoritarian orientation of many African university lecturers<sup>2</sup>, it was impossible to opt for a response that was not acceptable to the respective teachers. On each occasion, we ‘strategically’ decided to write essays that pleased each teacher – rather than one that pleased us or allowed us the privilege to demonstrate our intellectual opinion-making and/or make methodological choice. The point is, in many African HEIs, methodological-intellectual divisions (e.g. between objectivists and subjectivists) not only influence institutional culture and approach to the transfer of knowledge, but also determine the quality and quantity of research and knowledge. Too often, the spaces of research and knowledge transfer (classroom sessions, tutorials, group presentations, seminars etc) are besieged by narrow ideological preferences: many of the so-called “intellectual rights”, which scholars are expected to advocate, uphold and guarantee were/are carelessly compromised through accentuation of personal preference and inclinations. In most African higher education institutions – and this is largely the case in many parts of the global South – intellectual tolerance is in short supply with implications for both transmutation and transmission of methods and ideas amongst researchers, teachers and students<sup>3</sup>.

In contrast with African reality, in Western societies of Europe and North America, there exist freer and more robust traditions of teaching/research which benefits from a relatively functional and stable system. Nevertheless, even in the developed world, there are difference and disagreement amongst scholars in terms, for instance, of methodology of research and pedagogy of teaching and transfer of knowledge. However, such difference does not assume as dangerous proportions as they do in the developing world. It is thus reasonable to argue across the globe disagreement constitutes either an asset or liability to intellectual tradition. This difference is largely responsible for intellectual favour for specific ideologies, discourses and methodologies by specific scholars and institutions. For instance, in spite of the clear methodological division amongst African scholars, between those in favour of positivism and those in favour of interpretivism, the latter constitutes

the dominant mode of research, analysis and commentaries: there is a overwhelming familiarity with, and commonality of, constructivist-interpretivist interpretations which combines an array of subjective endeavours such as ethnography, reflexivity, discourse analysis, historiography and so on. This is not surprising because, by its nature, the discipline of African Politics (including other Area Studies) is not easily amenable to the so-called objective enquiry. By and large, African Politics deals with subjective issues (e.g. governance, conflict, ethnicity etc.) that are determined by human behaviour and can hardly be objectified. Conversely, and as a result of the foregoing reasons, there is an obvious paucity of analyses that are inspired by positivism-objectivism, which includes a plethora of quantitative techniques such as frequency count, regression analysis, chi-square testing etc. This is not to suggest that quantitative research and interpretations are absent. Indeed, Zeric Smith's work (Smith, 2000), which provides the basis of the present discussion, falls into the later category.

This article is divided into five parts. Part two overviews the intellectual backdrop to Zeric Smith's work (2000), in particular his research methods and arguments. It examines the nature of debate amongst African(ist) scholars on the causal relations between liberalisation, democratisation and conflict in Africa. Part three critically explores Smith's work in terms of (a) data and hypothesis testing; (b) findings and interpretation; (c) methodological bias and (d) validity and judgement. Part four raises some key methodological issues and offers alternative solutions. The final part offers conclusive remarks on the limits of a single method as well as the potential usefulness of a mixed method.

## **2.0 Background: The Debate on Democratisation, Liberalisation and Conflict in Africa – Theory vs. Methodology**

As noted at the beginning of this essay, there has been an on-going discussion amongst African and Africanist scholars on the relationship between democratisation, liberalisation and ethnic conflict in Africa. This debate provided the context for Smith's article (2000), a product of a research conducted to examine the validity of a set of assumptions emerging from the debate. In 1995, Harvey Glickman, an established scholar of African politics, and his colleagues published a book titled *Ethnic Conflict and Democratisation in Africa*. Glickman and his colleagues argued that the persistence of ethnic conflict in African politics does not significantly constrain the prospects of democratisation and liberalisation in the continent, and that institutions of democratic governments have the inherent capacity to tame ethnic conflict if it finds expression as a group interest among other interests (Glickman, 1995). Four years later, the findings of Glickman *et al* were reinforced in another edited volume *State, Conflict and Democracy in Africa* – a product of an international conference (Joseph, 1999). The volume, which includes contributions from some of the most reputable authorities on African politics, argues that in spite of the prevalence of intra- and inter-state conflict in Africa, and amidst clamours for a roll-back of Africa's 'developmental', single-party and authoritarian states, the continent is well set for a steady progression towards transition and consolidation of multiparty liberal democracy: conflict and state failure, important as they were, have not retarded the seemingly inevitable realisation of the 'third wave' of democratisation in Africa.

The foregoing optimistic argument about Africa's march towards liberal democracy and the continent's prospect for 'democratic dividends' has been reinforced by a flurry of

recent intellectual events and publications, particularly after the publication of Smith's work (2000). These recent work paint a picture of hope for the continent: they show that in the 'third wave' of democracy (1990s to date), African countries and communities are impressively learning to 'bury their machetes' and embrace a culture of liberal peace which encourage and promote tolerance, dialogue and consensus-building. For instance, in *Democratic Reform in Africa: the Quality of Progress*, Gyimah-Boadi (2004) and his colleagues argue that many African countries – from South Africa to Nigeria – are gradually shedding its violent past and building the institutions and values necessary for the consolidation liberal democratic order. Many countries, they argue, are trading the tight rope democratic consolidation, with relative success: many have held second term elections in which incumbent leaders were either re-elected or deposed. The point is, there is overwhelming intellectual consensus about the prospects of liberal democracy and peacebuilding in Africa. This consensus was what Smith (2000) sought engage.

To further investigate the claims of Glickman (1995), Joseph (1999), and others, Smith (2000) set out to empirically study the relationship between the three key variables (democratisation, liberalisation and ethnic conflict) using a quantitative approach. Smith was not convinced with the prevailing explanation. He was of the conviction that by using a different methodology, it would be possible to build a more robust and convincing explanation. Relying on what he describes as 'cross-national and time sensitive data sets' to test a set of hypotheses (see Section 3.1) conjured in the context of contemporary Africa, Smith employed regression analysis which involves the examination of the degree of influence between three sets of variables – democratisation, liberalisation and ethnic conflict – respectively configured into independent and dependent variables. Smith (2000) suggests that the relationship between political liberalisation and ethnic conflict is the reverse of what is commonly assumed. That is, liberalisation does not contain ethnic conflict. Thus, Smith found that democratisation (the second independent variable) does not have the hypothesised effect. Against this background, he concludes that democratisation and liberalisation, as political formulae for African countries, should not neglect the need for an adequate machinery to deal creatively with the material question of ethnic conflict in the continent. Smith operationally defined liberalisation as expansion of the political space amongst African countries (defined as the end of authoritarian rule and absolutism, and the construction of democratic institutions). Democratisation, on the other hand, is seen as the open participation of the citizenry in and their control over matters of governance (that is, the inclusion of citizens in the political process, protection of civil liberties, and the introduction of a multi-party system). Finally, ethnic conflict is defined as hostilities between different ethnic group caused by both socio-cultural and related factors – such as access to land.

### **3.0 A Critical Assessment of Smith's (2000) Methodology in 'Political Liberalisation, Democratisation and Ethnic Conflict in Africa'**

In his article, Smith (2001), like most positivist scholars, was influenced heavily, if not unreservedly, by a flair for quantitative methods, which involve the use of statistical technique in data collection, presentation, and analysis. It is worthy to critically diagnose the methodological choice and analyse the findings of the article with emphasis on the goals, ethical considerations, appropriateness of methods, as well as data collection and interpretations.

### **3.1 Collection and Analysis of data; Hypothesis Testing**

Smith identified two hypotheses which he sought to test using regression equation. The first hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>) states that in situations of transition from authoritarian rule, an increase in civil liberties (liberalisation) will often result in an increase in ethnic conflict. The second hypothesis (H<sub>2</sub>) states that as a gain in political rights (democratisation) becomes evident, then we should see a gradual decrease in ethnic conflict. To verify these hypotheses, Smith identified the assumed causal nexus between the three key variables: democratisation, liberalisation and ethnic conflict. The first two were identified independent variables while the third is the dependent variable. 'A handful of control [or intervening] variables were also included that represent other theoretical contributors to variance in African ethnic conflict' (Smith, 2000, p. 28)

The independent variables (democratisation and liberalisation) were operationalised and coded using the Freedom House/Gastil annual scores (New York) for each nation in the sample. The dependent variable (ethnic conflict) was operationalised using the current affairs account of *Africa South of the Sahara*, a Report published by Europa publishing house containing the annual record of ethnic conflict and other related issues. The control variables employed by Smith measure the degree of influence or *intervening effects* of the independent variables on the dependent one. The first control variable is gross domestic product (GDP), a development indicator that measures the quality of life in any given nation. Another control variable used is the infant mortality rate (IMR) applied to measure certain structural characteristics of sample nations in relation to other related factors like "maternal health care, access to hospitalisation, proper nutrition, access to potable drinking water, as well as a host of other education and health measures" (Smith, p. 28). Other control variables include: differences in colonial experience as a determinant of the degree of ethnic conflict, as well as measurement of ethnic heterogeneity that indicates the effective number of ethnic groups in a country and accounts for both ethnic diversity and the relative sizes of ethnic groups in comparison with national population. The measurement of ethnic heterogeneity, according to the researcher 'is of interest because it provides an opportunity to evaluate the degree to which ethnic heterogeneity contributes to ethnic conflict.' (Smith, p.29)

According to Smith, the method used for the collection of data 'reflects both the strength and limitations of the data.' (Smith p. 30) The use of 'pooled time series' provides means of explaining variation in ethnic conflict both across nations and over time, which is accomplished by using yearly observations of variables and accounting for changes from year to year. Smith further posits: 'the time series is pooled because it not only tracks change over time but simultaneously allows comparison across all of the nations included in the sample' (Smith, 2001:30). The rationale for these claims can perhaps be justified by examining the findings and interpretation of data by the researcher.

### **3.2 Findings and Interpretation of Data**

Smith emerged with two substantive findings. The first finding leads to the rejection of the first hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>), namely that a gain of ethnic civil liberties through political liberalisation will lead to an increase in ethnic tensions in sub-Saharan Africa. Smith found

that there is an inverse relationship between the two variables liberalisation and ethnic conflict; the study therefore revealed that a strong case exists against the common assumption that liberalisation leads to greater ethnic conflict. This, according to Smith, is in direct contradiction to the assumption that increased liberties will lead to an initial upsurge in ethnic conflict. In other words, there is a systematic pattern of decreasing ethnic conflict when civil liberties increase and 'liberalisation is associated with decrease in ethnic conflict when the influences of all other variables are held constant' (Smith, 2001: 32).

The second finding of the research leads to neither rejection nor acceptance of the second hypothesis (H<sub>2</sub>) that democratisation leads to lower incidence of ethnic conflict. The study revealed that 'democratised political institutions seem to have no statistically demonstrable influence on lowering (or raising) ethnic conflict scores' (Smith, 2001: 34). This means that the influence of democratisation on ethnic conflict in sub-Saharan Africa is insignificant. This finding squarely rejects the position of the literature that democratisation has a positive effect on ethnic conflict.

It is worthy to comment on the implications of the findings. The results are based on what Bryman (1993) calls 'hard data', meaning figures are the most important tools for data analysis. To understand the findings of this study, one has to face the rigours of complex statistical language in deciphering the meaning out of data presented and analysed. The regression equation expectedly is fraught with loads of complex mathematical formulae trying to capture social and political phenomena. Politics in Africa is studied as if is a laboratory setting. While Smith did not carry out a controlled experiment – as is often the case in laboratory-settings – he nevertheless uses existing institutional data which he 'manipulates' to 'culture' out some supposedly meaningful validation or invalidation of a set of hypotheses. Thus, while reading the findings, one is tempted to think that the researcher is perhaps playing with numbers to arrive at a premeditated result – a concern raised by Robert Edward Mitchell in a study of developing countries (Mitchell, 1993).

Smith's every statement is presented in statistical terms – consider the following example: 'democratised political institutions seem to have no statistically demonstrable influence on lowering (or raising) ethnic conflict scores' (Smith, 2001: 34). The question here is what categories of scores did Smith use in arriving at the conclusion that there is no statistically demonstrable positive correlation between democratised political institution and the lowering of ethnic conflict? Given the subjective nature of politics, ethnicity and conflict, are these categories really amenable to statistical examination?

### **3.3 Methodological Orientation, Quality of Data and Goals of the Research**

In fairness, Smith (2000) has effectively demonstrated, with this research, the potential use of the quantitative method as opposed to more established qualitative and other methods used by most scholars of African politics in examining the validity of the assumed positive influence of democratisation and liberalisation on ethnic conflict in Africa. Smith seeks to advance knowledge in at least two ways. First, he uses empirical evidence to engage the claim that democratisation and liberalisation have the capacity to contain ethnic conflict in Africa. However, it is arguable if Smith's finding significantly deviate from most of the theoretic positions which sparked-off the research. The study only revealed that the

influence of democratisation and liberalisation on ethnic conflict is not totally positive: by extension, it is not totally negative. .

Secondly, and by implication, Smith has displayed the epistemological and ontological efficacy of the quantitative approach as an alternative to what he calls 'descriptive studies' (Smith, 2000, p. 35) – that later is a common method amongst scholars of African politics (see e.g. Joseph, 1999; Sandbrook, 2000; Ake, 2000; and Olowu et al, 1999). The key question is: given the value-laden nature of such phenomena as democratisation and ethnic conflict in Africa, how productive, or even desirable, is it to use the quantitative method? Some methodologists (Bulmer 1993; Mitchell, 1993) have argued that in some cases an unreserved dependence on quantitative method and/or positivism is not likely to produce the so-called objective results, particularly in carrying out studies that have bearing with human relations.

### **3.4 Objectivity and Subjectivity in Social Research**

There are questions of validity, reliability and replicability that emerge from the work of Smith. First is his use of large-scale unit of analysis or 'cross-national data' in the examination of a very complex topic, and in as diverse a continent of Africa.<sup>4</sup> As Smith admits, forty-seven sub-Saharan African states make up the sample of the study. A rather disturbing question is how feasible and reliable is it to generate a data on this huge number of African countries. Even Smith himself notes the limitations of incorporating 47 countries in his sample (p. 24). It is obvious that these countries are extremely diverse in terms of historical experience, level of development, ethnic structure (a key variable) and political culture (another latent variable). The data set on ethnic conflict and democratisation/liberalisation obtained from documented sources should have provided the picture of individual countries to ginger up further research using primary sources as alternative and or complementary means of data collection.

Related to the above point, further questions emerge on (a) how far Smith's data and result are data understandable to a majority of audiences outside intellectuals, particularly lay-people who are not familiar with, or even enthusiastic about, statistical fascinations but are nevertheless relatively enlightened and active in politics. (b) how much the data speaks of the African people out there. To be sure, both democracy and ethnic conflict are driven and perpetuated by political being. Given that Smith's data were obtained from institutional sources and annual records, it is arguable if it represents stark realities of African politics. In fairness he has provided justification for his data: 'ethnic conflict was identified and coded through systematic reading of the country report in the annual year book *Africa South of the Sahara*' (p.27), while 'both liberalisation and democratisation are operationalised [from]...the Freedom House/Gastil annual Scores for each nation in the sample...' (p.27). The questions remains, how far is institutional and codified data exclusively useful in examining human phenomena – particularly if the research question involves such concepts as ethnic conflict?

As Lawrence argues, in a critique of quantitative analysis in studying African conflict,

Once only quantitative analyses are regarded as the only rigorous way to analyse problems and find solutions, then issues arise as to the quality of the data. Data quality in Africa is known to be relatively poor [and this poses a

major limitation to institutional data]. This is especially so when it comes to making judgement about governance, corruption and inequality, let alone output and growth (2007: 173).

#### **4.0 Why the Use of Only Quantitative Method? Methodological Issues & Alternatives**

The quantitative methodology used for Smith's research work is heavily influenced by natural sciences (naturalism, positivism) and emphasises the use of "hard data" to study phenomena. Bryman (1993:94) is of the view that the method is based on a distant relationship between the researcher and the researched where the former takes a stance as an outsider and conjures the image of social reality as static and external to the actor and where findings are usually presented in statistical language.

It is worthy to examine the substance of Smith's methodology before making any critical comment. Smith employed two variants of quantitative analysis. The first is what he calls 'region-specific cross-national' approach, which he used to proffer comparative explanations. This involves the identification and analysis of data across regional sampling to capture the 'idiosyncrasies of politics in a particular region' (Smith, 2001:25). The virtue of this approach according to him is that it provides a means of cross-national comparison and allows for the use of statistical analysis. More importantly, Smith admits that the approach '...makes sense to concentrate on the continent of Africa and evaluate...results at the level of middle-range theory and generalisation' (Smith, *ibid*). Perhaps, Smith's, choice of the method is influenced more by the room it provides for statistical analysis; other motives such as than comparing the dynamics of political phenomenon in a diverse region which is by no means easy are not configured. In addition, the sample size of 47 African countries is large: paradoxically, in quantitative approach, the maxim seems to be 'the larger the sample size, the more robust the result'

The second approach is the regression analysis which involves the examination of the degree of correlation between a complex set of variables to make informed predictions. There are two types of regression correlations namely multiple and partial. The former involves more than two variables while the latter involves two variables (Bailey, 1978:347-48). In the context of this study, Smith is interested in multiple correlations to enable him to test the causal relationship between three variables, namely democratisation, liberalisation and ethnic conflict. The bottom line of the method is that some assumed relationships between these three variables need to be verified. The heavy reliance on figures and statistical formulae stand in the way of simple explanation. Indeed Smith's literature review seems to speak more of his proposed research problem and offers more explanation than the section on data presentation and findings.

Furthermore, one just sees a complete detachment of the author/researcher from the population under study. Of course, in a sense he was studying people. There is no display of data obtained through direct personal contact between the research and subjects – this could be through questionnaire administration, participant observation or interviews). Smith did not set out to collect data in the field; he sets out to exploit existing data sources. Some methodologists have argued that such disconnect undermines the validity of the



research findings (Bailey, 1978). This is the basic debate between the ‘scientific approach’ and the ethnographic approach, or other human centred field based qualitative approaches.

Some issues emerge on the question of the appropriateness of Smith’s method. The first is the import of the quantitative method and, specifically the regression analysis and cross-cultural comparison. The literature on research method suggests that both instruments are no doubt useful for the conduct of the research involving large-scale cross-national data (Mitchell 1993, Bailey 1978). But as we have observed in the foregoing sections, the researcher obtained his data from institutional sources and analysed them as ‘objectively’ Also, the sample size of the countries chosen for the study is simply too large to warrant persuasive generalisation.

A second issue is the limits of the single method Smith employed on a study of this nature. Some scholars admonish the overriding significance of an admixture of qualitative and quantitative methods (e.g. Bryman, 1993). An mixed-methods approach could have yielded a more comprehensive output – particularly for studies that depend to a large extent on cross-cultural data of less Developed Countries (LDCs) (see Bulmer 1993, Mitchell 1993). Smith could have perhaps done more justice to his research and achieved a better result by combining quantitative and qualitative methods as well as both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ data (Bryman,1993).

## **5.0 Conclusive Remarks**

This paper critically examines the methodological expediency or otherwise of a research work that uses quantitative methods to examine the impact of political liberalisation and democratisation on ethnic politics in Africa (Smith, 2001). It is argued that the work under review clearly and creatively demonstrates how to conduct social research using regression analysis and, by extension, quantitative methods. Quantitative methods are preferred mostly by positivists/empiricists – mainly economists and psychologists – who see the possibility of objective judgment in studying social phenomena. Yet, as argued elsewhere,

While many social scientists acknowledge its usefulness, positivism’s emphasis on neutrality leads to a ‘distance’ between the researcher and his/her subjects. A complex scientific and statistical analysis, which places the researcher in a position of superior knowledge, further expands the researcher–subject gap and adversely affects the quality of research (Tar, forthcoming, 2008).

There are those who are beholden to the so-called ‘old-fashioned’ qualitative methods, and for obvious reasons (see e.g. Filstead, 1979): (a) it allows for democratisation of research through direct participation of the researcher and research subjects; (b) the researcher works in a trustworthy liaison with the research subjects in (re)producing knowledge; (c) it discourages ‘laboratory mentality’, ‘guinea-pig culture’ and grand standing in research; (d) the researcher becomes more passionate about, and enthusiastic with, the dynamic realities of the field and, therefore, develops a more ambient proactivism, as opposed to merciless judgementalism (see e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Seale, 1998).

Qualitative method allows the researcher to identify his/her subject position and those of the research subjects in a more participatory manner. Because the researcher and subject each contribute to data collected mainly through personal

interaction – conversation, interview, focus group discussion and so on – the researcher cannot place her/himself in a distanced position of superior knowingness (Tar, *ibid*).

In fairness, Smith has to be praised for rescuing a relatively endangered methodological tradition amongst African(ist) scholars: positivism/quantitative methods. Though his adopted methodology contrasts sharply with so many works examining a similar theme (e.g. Olowu et al 1999, Joseph 1999, Ake 1999, Sandbrook 2000; Tar, forthcoming, 2008 etc), his finding nevertheless engages those work in a determined and corroborative manner.

In contrast with a single method, it may be interesting for researchers of African politics to carry out research using a range of mainstream methods with a view to achieving a more robust result. Indeed, a number of methodologists have proposed a mixture of methods – as an alternative to single method. This approach, it is argued, potentially provides a useful strategy for putting quantitative and qualitative methods into a more synergistic use (Mitchell 1993, Bulmer 1993, Bryman 1993, Blaikey 1993). While social science research is dynamic and evolving, the continent of Africa offers a rich terrain for trying out the potential synergy, as opposed to conflict, between different research methods.

## End Notes

1. Apart from methodological divisions, there are discursive/ideological fragmentations amongst scholars. This include, among others: (a) state-centric versus society-centred analysis; (b) external versus internal explanations (c) liberal/functionalist versus Marxist/conflict explanations etc. Apart from the methodological divisions cited above, none of the foregoing varying positionings are intended to be taken further in this article.
2. From hindsight, one notes that in Africa, University lecturers were/are victims-turned-perpetrators of societal anarchy: they were/are incrementally nurtured into a culture of ‘intellectual authoritarianism’ by the corresponding embeddedness of ‘political authoritarianism’ as a pervading structural norm in most states (Kasfir, 1976). The earliest victims of this norm were, of course, universities and other higher education institutions (see e.g. Diouf and Mamdani, 1994; Jega, 1997; Mama, 2000).
3. This is particularly the case in Nigeria where academics operate with impunity in imposing their whims and caprices on students.
4. Africa is aptly described as ‘a world in miniature’ - The African continent has a landmass of 30,244,050 square kilometres (11,677,240square miles) and stretches from the Mediterranean in the North to the meeting point of Atlantic and Indian Oceans in the South. There are about 500 million peoples in the continent which represent 10% of the world population. There are blacks and Arabs together with small concentration of Asians and whites who speak more than 800languages (belonging to hundreds of ethnic groups) (see, e.g. Chazan *et al*, 1992).

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