THE SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EZILLO AND EZZA-EZILLO LAND CONFLICT IN EZILLO COMMUNITY, EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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CERTIFICATION

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to GOD ALMIGHTY, my conquerors children and loving mother Mary Ogo Nwukpa Igwe (Ikete Ogbuebo Igwe), posthumously to my best and loving fathers I never saw Ogbuebo Igwe Nwokorie (Daddy, wherever you are, be comforted for I have come seen and conquered the academic space you could not venture into like your brother late uncle Nwani Okorie (Oduenyi, ihee` Okammuta n`Onyicha), a foremost pioneer intellectual giant of colonial repute whose antecedents galvanised motivation later for my late step brother Sir God Mercy Igwe, my humble self and subsequent academic exploits so far recorded in our family, and the entire youths of Onyicha and Ebonyi State who are faced with more challenges than I had with unfailing commitment to weather the storm and their marks (If God did it for me , He can do it for you). I love you all.

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ABSTRACT

Globally, land conflict occasioned by inequitable land distribution and use has occurred with differing social contexts and impacts on community development. In Nigeria, land conflict is a common occurrence within and among communities. One of such is the Ezza-Ezillo land conflict, which has been recurrent since 1930. Existing literature shows the debilitating impact of Ezza-Ezillo conflict on human and social development, with little attention paid to its sociocultural context. This study was, therefore, designed to examine the sociohistorical processes of the conflict, their implications on identity supremacy construction, the networks that sustain the conflict and their consequences on development in Ezillo community, Ebonyi State.

Berger and Luckman`s Social Constructionist Theory provided the framework while the design was exploratory. Qualitative data were purposively collected from Ezillo and Ezza clans. Historical data were obtained from the National Archives, Enugu, while physical developments were observed through non-participant observation and interaction. Eighteen Key informant interviews were conducted with youth leaders, opinion leaders, politicians, clergy-Christian and shrine priest, and two police officers. Also, 32 In-depth interviews were held with male town union members of the executive committee-committee, female town union executive committee members, community members, Ezillo and Ezza representatives in link communities of Abakaliki and Enugu. Sixteen Focus group discussions were held with elderly male citizens, elderly female citizens, male youth and female youth. Data were content analysed.

The Ezillo clan migrated first into Ezillo community about the 15th Century.In 1928, due to incessant Mgbo attacks without reprieve from the colonial administration, the Ezillo invited Ezza mercenaries(their kindred) to ward off attacks. The Ezza subsequently settled at the borderline surrounding Ezillo community as compensation for successful service rendered and for future protection. As the Ezza population expanded through in-migration of kin farmers, they acquired and encroached Ezillo land, leading to the first violent conflict in 1930. Subsequent contentions were on Ezillo's indigeneity-overlordship authority over the land, while the Ezza asserted their ownership based on the rights granted as payment for protective service. Despite sharing ancestral affinity, inter-generational socialisation dichotomised Ezza and Ezillo identities as conflictual, while a new group of Ezza and Ezillo inter-marriage known as Ezza-Ezillo has emerged with loyalty to the Ezza, as the stronger group, even when paternal lineage is Ezillo. The Ezza increasingly gained superiority because of population, violence and through the support received from their kins in neighbouring states and in strategic government positions. The conflict has caused infrastructure underdevelopment, insecurity, armed robbery, prolonged family dislocation and poverty.

Ezza-Ezillo conflict has persisted due to authority contentions over land and the utilisation of identity values to determine access and denial. Land tenure reform is needed to clarify indigene/settler`s rights and entitlements for inclusive land access and use.

Keywords: Land Conflict,Ezza and Ezillo communities, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Word count: 449

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RCD: Rural Community Development

ICT: Information Communication Technology

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

Land is a valuable means of livelihood and development resource.It is also, a source of culture, history, identity and wealth (Alubo, 2006; Genyi, 2007; El Hadary, 2010). Land is also a source of conflict (Adeghe, 2009; Albert, 2011; Brosché and Rothbart, 2013). These conclusions suggest that not having access to land results to not only a major livelihood deprivation, but also a serious threat to social existence and production. From another perspective, statesovereignty is a function of the land area it occupies (Wallestein, 2002; Abegunde, 2010; Johanson, 2011). This point seemingly underlies territorial defense for the purpose of securing or retaining a certain geographical space. Land is also a limited resource to which people and groups attach diverse interests, hence complimentary and/or divergent interests evolve into land concentration, land dispossession, displacement and land conflict (Jens, 1999; Raleigh and Urdal, 2009). These interests and social processes underlined, demonstrate the value placed on land within and across groups, classes, races and nations. Furthermore, Ogban-Iyam, (2005), Berenschot, (2011) and Albert, (2012) in their separate works agree to the centrality of land tothe existence of social being, essential in physical development and crucial in social relations of economic production, social and political spaces.

Vested interests on land, quests to secure territories, access and/or conserve land as economic resources for physical development activities and also practice customs and traditions, have resulted in land conflicts across ages and groups (Ninalowo, 1999; Otite and Albert, 1999; Egwu, 2004; Abegunde, 2010). These have affected populations and resulted in internal displacement, refugee challenges, social disorder, economic depression and destruction of lives and property (Angaye, 2003; Justino, 2004; Adeghe, 2009; Kahl, 2006; Meier et al., 2007; Barnett and Adger, 2007; Fjelde, 2009; Adeghe, 2009). Nigeria, in particular, has indeed experienced many land conflicts, which have been extensively captured, researched, and discussed in scholarly literature. Top on the list are the Tiv-Jukun, the Zango-Kataf,the Aguleri-Umuleri and the Ife-Modakeke conflicts (Nwanegbo, 2005; Onwuzuruigbo, 2009; Abegunde, 2010; Albert, 2011). These conflicts among others are indicative of the persistent land contests in Nigeria. While media and academic writings have extensively engaged many of these conflicts, some others have received little attention. One of such conflicts, which have not attracted popular scholarly discourse, is the Ezillo land conflict. Although, the Ezillo conflict has largely remained transient in scholarly and national discourse, it has lasted for

about a century, with deep historical trajectories and contemporaneous events. Preliminary investigations show that, the land conflict was a contest between two parties, the Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo groups in the Ezillo community. The Ezillos were the supposed landowners, while the Ezza-Ezillos were regarded as settlers, thus, the complexities of the conflict have deep contexts, with sociological underpinnings. Therefore, the study aim is to examine the social context of Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo land conflict in Ezillo community, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Literature on conflict globally, is replete with land related conflicts which experts observe, are either inter or intra-communal in scope, and devastating to development (Vogt and Aminu, 1996; Riley, 1998; Nwanegbo, 2005b, 2006; Onwuzuruigbo, 2011). The increasing literature on the protracted nature of land conflict demonstratesphenomenalcomplication andintractability (see Lewicki, Gray, & Elliot, 2003; Crocker, Hampson, & Aall, 2004&2005). The complexity of these conflicts is illuminated as thehostile parties are located at multiple interactive levels (individuals, groups, communal, etc.) which serve to sustain such conflicts (Sandole, 1999; Coleman, 2003). To this end, new patterns of conflicts have emerged globally. This is evident in places like: the Asian Island states, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Papua New Guinea, which have been vulnerable to conflicts over land possession and dispossession, dating back to the 1980s and 1990s (Riley, 1998; Rabasa and Hasseman, 2002; Frederico, *et al*., 2007). The previously tranquil region of the South Pacific has also been beset by land conflicts, which overthrew democratically elected regimes in Fiji and the Solomon Islands (Berenschot, 2011; Johansson, 2011). Similarly, in Ecuador, land invasions and counter offensives to reclaim them escalated into conflicts over land rights, and led to the assassination of some indigenous leaders (Barnett and Adger, 2007; Smith, 2012). In the United States of America, also, Butler and Scott (2010), posit that,the abuse of authority over land is escalating conflicts among the Andean community of San Francisco.

Social, environmental, economic, legal and political changes and developments can create either new interests or demands on land (Genyi, 2007; Awanyo, 2009). When these interests and needs are incompatible, there is a likelihood of conflict. In the context of limited land against developmental needs, conflicts occur frequently in varying scopes and intensities (Riley, 1998; Nnoli, 1998; Otite and Albert, 1999; Ibeanu and Onu, 2001; Omotola, 2007; Omobowale, Oni, and Ugbem, 2012). However, with the evolving global, national and local

landscapes of development and its challenges, there is an urgent need to understand the social relation dynamics of land conflict. This will reveal how land conflict shapes social identity, and affects community development. This understanding, will unveil the taken-for-granted social contextual issues, which sustain land conflicts in spite of policy interventions particularly in Africa.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, land concerns haveled to continual conflict over expropriation and conquest (Otite and Albert, 1999; Ibeanu and Onu, 2001; Egwu, 2004; Omotola, 2007; Reuveny, 2007). Consequently, the socio-economic and political experiences of diverse people in Africa suffer setback (Coleman, 2003; Sandole, 1999). Furthermore, social issues ranging from ethnicity, religion, gender and class influence land access and ownership processes in Africa (Ibeanu and Mbah, 2011; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2011; Ibeanu and Onu, 2011). In the view of Kagwanji (2009), across Eastern Africa (specifically Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda), there is intergroup contests over access and use of landthat is intrinsically central to land conflict. Deninger and Castagini (2006) also submit that in rural Uganda, relatives among households experience small-scale land conflicts within them involvingproperty owners and local governments, especially when access to land for agricultural productivity is threatened. Deininger and Castagnini, (2006) further asserts that in Rwanda, the inequitable distribution, access and use of land among contending Hutus and Tutsis contributed to the civil war, which resulted in the gruesome genocide of the 1990s. Kinsey (2004) also submits that in Zimbabwe, the several unsuccessful resettlement programmes of government show the interconnecting relationships between poverty, property and land conflicts.

In Nigeria, land is still largely communally owned despite the Land Reform Act of 1978that vested land control powers on the state (Bello, 1994). Nothwithstanding, conflicts within and between families, communities and ethnic groups are still common over access and use of land (See Ibeanu, 2003; Alubo, 2006; Ayua 2006, Nwanegbo, 2012). For instance, Tiv-Jukun conflict and other similar ones across Nigeria have stimulated debate on issues of indigeneship and citizenship in the country. Egwu (2004) insists that in all of these conflicts, land is a central factor to the contests. He pointed to the role played by the use of the indigene-settler versus citizenship statuses that remain constitutional controversy as conflict drivers. It is against this background that this research focuses on the social context of Ezillo conflict in Ezillo community, South-East, Nigeria with a principal objective of probing its

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peculiarities different from similar conflicts elsewhere in Nigeria and its causes, pattern and consequences to Ezillo community development.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The social dimension of land conflict and community development in Nigeria is a mix marked by complexity and uncertainty. In the pre-colonial era, land provided space for social interaction and sustains networks of social relation that defines it as symbolic, inalienable, priceless, and sacred. Colonial liberal political economic regime redefined land to mean saleable property that can be own privately (Onwuzuruigbo,2013). Consequently, land as a source of community identity also became a store of transferable economic value. This dual meaning of land created contradiction that generates land conflict transcending colonialism. How to conceptualise land relations and define authority over land became controversial. However, as the interpretive meaning of these concepts undergo continuous modification, the question of whose identity is represented by land and whose authority over land is legitimate continue to generate conflict and contestation. Odgaard (2006), also points to the sociocultural role land plays in Africa particularly Nigeria to ensure human survival and wellbeing in terms of deepening cultural identity and social security. This suggests that the place of land in economic, political, and human development is unquestionable. This is further demonstrated by the diversified livelihood opportunities for survival and self-fulfillment associated with access and control of viable land. This explains why the quest to secure access to land is full of struggle and competition. This concern evidently provided the social context where land relation is under constant construction and reconstruction within interacting milieu (Alubo, 2006; Genyi, 2007). This no doubt has implication for supremacy contestations. The study hence focuses on the social context of Ezillo conflict in Ezillo community, South-East, Nigeria with a principal objective of probing its peculiarities different from similar conflicts elsewhere in Nigeria and its causes, course and consequences to Ezillo community development.

In the specific case of Nigeria, land conflicts like Aguleri/Umuleri, Ife/Modakeke among others (Toriola, 2001; Onwuzuruigbo, 2009; Osagie, 2014) persist with intractable attrition and struggle for supremacy between claimants of supposedly indigenes and alleged settlers as unique feature. Despite the devastating effects of Ezillo land conflict on social, economic and physical development, little attention is given to its social context. Scholars have aptly

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captured the impacts of these conflicts. Enuke, (2015) described land relations in Ezillo as a volatile social context as land has sacred meaning above its economic, social and physical development importance. Hence, the Ezillo has strong emotional attachment to land as life history and identity. Albert (2012) and Alimba (2014) in their separate work agreed that conflict over land is fierce and destructive due to strong socio-cultural and emotional attachments to land as sacred means of livelihood and survival as well as source of identity and authority particularly in Igbo land, Southeastern Nigeria. On the other hand, Agbo (2015: 12) argues that land conflict as supremacy contest, is a typical case that reflects the Machiavalian doctrine that belief in pay back for any action carried for or against anybody. In the same vein, Awanyo (2009) observed that disputes over land are more devastating and dehumanizing because it is understood to be a survival competition around issue of identity, rather than just access to land. Similarly, Sikor and Lund (2009) argues that access to land is connected to the wielding of power and authority. This is demonstrated as people lobby and struggle to convert land access to legitimate property. By so doing, strip others of their property rights particularly when the legitimating normative system is weakened beyond control. This in turn provokes change in social relations that affects inclusion criteria.

Hitherto, while empirical studies see land conflicts elsewhere as consequence of threat to land access, livelihood and identity survival, dearth of data exist on how the social context of Ezillo land conflict play out to trigger recurrent resurgence of conflict leading to configuration of contentious land relations that sustain protraction of land conflict in Ezillo community. To this end, the examination of the social context of Ezillo land conflict becomes expedient. Pilot study show that before 1927 Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo may have coexisted peacefully that there was no recorded incident of crisis. If this allusion is correct then, there is need to understand the historical and contemporary social processes that sustain the conflict. Similarly,according to literature, while colonial policies, population/migration and identity are critical to most land conflict contexts in Nigeria, notwithstanding, the distinct social context of Ezillo deserve interrogation and understanding to provide deep insight for explanation of why conflict here, is different from similar conflicts elsewhere in Nigeria. Unlike other land conflicts like Aguleri/Umuleri, Tiv/Jukun, Ijaw/Itsekiri, Ife/Modakeke among others, scholars have glossed over Ezillo communal conflict for decades. Hence, the studyfocuses on the social context of Ezillo conflict in Ezillo community, South-East Nigeria.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How have historical social processes inform and shape Ezillo land conflict?
2. What are the existing contentions on authority over land?
3. What are the implications of Ezillo land conflict on identity issues?
4. How does supremacy contest reverberate Ezillo land conflict?
5. What social networks sustain Ezillo land conflict?
6. What is the impact of the conflict on Ezillo community development?

1.4 General and specific objective of the study

Generally, theaim of study is to examinethe historical and the contemporary social contexts that sustain land conflict affecting Ezillo community development. To achieve this, the study will attempt to specifically:

1. Examine historical processes that have informed the Ezillo land conflict;
2. Probe the existing contentions on authority over land in Ezillo;
3. Examine the implication of land conflict on identity issues in Ezillo;
4. Investigate how supremacy contests reverberates Ezillo land conflict; and
5. Find out the social networks that sustain the conflict.
6. Examine impact of land conflict on Ezillo community development

1.5 Justification for the study

Ezillo community as a pre-colonial settlement started experiencing communal conflict during the colonial period. The conflict has persisted over the last eight decades with little scholarly attention directed to it. The research will uncover the historical andcontemporaryprocesses, that inform and shape Ezillo conflict keeping it intractable and persistent. Also, this research will know the contextual peculiarities associated with Ezillo land conflict that are uniquely different from other land conflict contexts in Nigeria particularly in South-East context. Ezillo communal conflict has led to the recreation of identity thus breaking Ezillo into distinct identity groups away from the principal Ezillo social identity. The research will reveal how the conflict affects identity dynamics in the community. The possible ways in which contest for supremacy creates and recreates land relation as well as how it instigates, shape and influence Ezillo conflict will emerge. The research will beyond establishing who the key actors are further uncover the basis for self definition among members of the conflicting groups so as to reveal identity and land interest aggregation in Ezillo community. By exploring the social context of Ezillo communal conflict, theory and research would have been extended. New documented perspective on the conflict will be available for further

research. This will be a departure from the use of oral tradition as the means of gathering data concerning the conflict. The study will also serve as a contextual contribution to the ongoing debate on conflict, security, peace and development.

1.6 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Autochthon: Is an earliest inhabitant, also referred to as an indigenous person, who is first or original inhabitant of a geographical territory.

Aborigine: one of the original native inhabitants of a community, town, state or country.

Elite: advantagedmarginal group of people in a larger population who have power, social clout, status and wealth, or charisma and skills than the rest of the other groups in the population.

Identity As contestable as the definition of identity can be, the concept has two dimensions to it s definition. First, is the subjective identity, this reflects one`s self-conception or self-perception. The second dimension is the objective identity. This refers to the perception of an individual without contemplation of the person's self-perception.

Intestate: Thisis a situation ofthe living not having made a valid will before death. Not legally devised or disposed of by will while

Testate: having made a will before disease.

Peasants: these are small farmers who, working with family labour and simple technology, grow crops and raise livestock primarily for their own consumption (Shanin, 1990). Economically, socially, and culturally, peasants are tied to the land. They may or may not own the ground. In some cases, the land is held by the tribe or community and parcelled out to families according to need; in others, it belongs to a property owner, who is owed a certain percentage of the produce as rent; in still others it belongs to the state. The family household is the center of peasant life, providing for most of its members' needs.

Landless peasants: these are peasants who over time have lost their rights to landthey hithatho own that transcends their offspring called children of the landless peasants. For the most part, they work as hired hands on the farms, plantations and other large farms. Because they do not own or have rights to land of their own, they always lack autonomy. This is the

social structural constant in their situation around the world. The shift from a peasant-based agricultural economy to market-driven "agribusiness" has numerous consequences.

Supremacy: a position of superiority or authority over all others.

Settler: This is regarded as a Nigerian resident of a place/landwhere he or she naturally does not come or share affinity of belongingness. The event of birth or time spent in a place is not enough requirements to guarantee or qualify one for nativity. You must trace your lineage to and descent to a location and group that historically and culturally belong to that location without which you are not qualify to be a native of the place.

Indigene: This refers to a Nigerian native of a particular location by lineage, descent, birth, longest resident or first to settle in an area sharing common history and culture.

2.0   **CHAPTER TWO**

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Introduction

The section presents review of relevant scholarly literature on land related communal conflict. This will be done basically, to understand expert's positions on the problem in different context from various perspectives to better understand and explain at the secondary level the Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo land conflict. This understanding will provide a better insight into the problem. The theory of Social Constructionism will be used to model the issues of the research problem. The review of existing relevant literature in this section will be done thematically, by following relevant sub-themes. The sub-themes include:

1. Land and social relations;
2. Land conflicts, control and identity;
3. Land conflicts in Nigeria; and
4. Land conflict and development.
5. Community development processes and land relations

2.1.1 Land and Social Relations

Despitethat international debates on land and social relations highlight privatization, collectivization and communal ownership and control (Ogedengbe, 2006), they are the principal processes. It however, remains unclear, which in particular, captures a more secure land and social relations in African context. Land may carry different meanings for different interpreters across space and time. However, land as a community in the African context (Ubi, 2001) should be interpreted first, as a symbolic social structure with embedded social relations. In addition, and as Dekker (2001) succinctly submits,land tenure is a formal regulation that control and guides the processes, procedures and practices involved in land access, use and ownership. This interpretation further concerns land relations evolved from

access, use and ownership of land. This relationship is latent in the daily power struggles, for legitimate authority to control, allocate and exploit the land (Von Benda- Beckmann, 1995).

During the Western feudalist regimes land was interpreted to mean the core economic store of value dispensable to the process of production in those societies. This meaning became crucial to the determination of land ownership and leasehold rights between landowners and their subordinates (Paul, 2003). It also informed and shaped landownership patterns. Property owners, smallholders, soldiers and the upper class (Marshall, 2005), could own lands. The land of the upper class otherwise called empire official was allocated by the emperor as private property. Constituting the empire officials or the landlord group are the upper class and ordinary peasant landlords; the former having more political power and a better social status than the latter. The royal family and officials had the privilege of direct enclosure of large parcels of lands. After them, came the officials and soldiers who were granted lands of varying sizes according to their ranks (Li, 2007; Lin & Chen, 1995). The scenero painted suggest complex and selective land relations that operate exclusive system of land disrtribution. For instance, the landlords, especially those with close links with the empire had more economic and political privilegesover others as they were, levied fewer taxes and required to contribute little labour to the state. The poor peasants have no such privileges as they are compelled to pay heavier taxes and contribute more labour to the state than the landlords. Huang, (1985) observes that the imperial state use heavy taxation to dispossess small peasant holdersof their land forcefully in favour of the upper class.

In contrast, the traditional Igbo society was fluid in land use and rights processes. It contrast the Western context in the sense that the previousIgbo acephelous feudalist land relations account reveals struggles and competition to own more land and secure same from fragmentation and concentration (Obioha, 2008). Institutional involvement ensures that members of the family get as much land as needed, for productive use from available family lands. Land here is constantly broken up into fragments of insignificant economic value. Family land holding and status fell rapidly due to family gender configurations (Ubi, 2001; Ofuebe, 2005). This indicates that, land concentration by large landowners over many generations is difficult due to the hazardous process of gender configuration as the female folks had no share in family land. it could take decades for household to accumulate plots of land to itself. In addition, they had to produce more males than females, and this could take many generations. Even, big landowners could turn to small owners. This relatively low level

of land accumulation reveal the nature of land fragmentation that sustain small-scale farming, specific to South-Eastern Nigeria rural area. However, this study is contextually specific with South-Eastern Nigeria, as a context contrasts with the Western experience. In the Southwestern context, rules to regulate land relations are set independently by households and their descent lineage groups.This was principally done to support and protect the interests of its membersirrespective of gender configuration unlike in the South-Eastern Nigeria (Mbah and Nwangwu, 2014).

Following the colonial ideologisation of land in Africa, Ranger (1985) contests the received colonial constructions of traditional land and social relations into private land and production/market relations, in which, individual ownership of land replaced collective ownership of land. Social relation in this context became profit/market driven. Land became a market commodity, with its price dependent on the laws of demand and supply. This contrast traditional African cosmology that provides no market value for land considered as sacred and symbolic source of identity (Omole, 1999). Before colonial rule in Nigeria for instance, the prevailing land tenure system forbade marketing land. Instead, the king or chief is the custodian of all land with divine irrevocable right to land administration and management of land access and use. They serve as trustee to the goddess of land and the people (Oyerinde, 2005). The king or chief also, allocate land to choosen migrants, settlers, or new comers after mutually establishing networks of social relations that guaranteed loyalty and conformity to the cultural prescriptions of the land. This social context sustains land access and use and harmonious land relation. Land has connection with goddess of land and the people imply that it belongs to the dead, the living and the unborn as well as to the death (Ogbam-Iyam, 2005; Dzurgba, 2007).

However, modernism intensified the social change that questioned and weakend traditional land relations in most parts of Africa particularly Nigeria. The communal nature of land ownership, the sacredness of land as a religious object and source of identity were not insulated from the weakening social transformation. This change marked the beginning of fall by the pre-colonial social structure that secured people`s social and religious affinity to land. The variation in land relations between market driven social relations and community driven social relations, has its implications on the historical and contemporary social contexts of land conflict, which this study will examine.

2.1.2 Land Conflict, Control and Identity

Land in Sub-Saharan Africa is traditionally tied to people`s identity and social and religious control. The region also is characterised by land dispossessions and contestations that have pith persons, groups and families against themselves (Bob, *et al*, 2008). In Nigeria, the issue in contest is about achieving equitable land distribution to avoid land concentration and joblessness. Arising from this issue are the ownership, control and identity questions (Best, et al, 1999; Ayoub, 2006; Egwu, 2009). This has led to many discrepancies surrounding land ownership, control, and identity, which exist now (Ezenwoko, 2014). Furthermore, this situation has had implications on the historical and cultural meaning of land. Consequently, land conflicts and contestations continue unabated. Imobighe, (2003) and Osagie, (2014) in their separate, similar but different perspective research enumerated the following examples of land related conflicts that have claimed lives and properties in Nigeria. Some of these conflicts are between the Zango/Kataf in Kaduna State, the Tiv/Jukun in Wukari, Taraba State,the Ogoni/Adoni in Rivers State, Chamba/Kuteb in Taraba State,the Itsekiri/Ijaw/Urhobo in Delta State,the Ife/Modakeke in Osun State, amongst others. Conflicts in these areas have negatively affected the socio-economic and political development and positions of different groups of people in the areas as it fosters animosity, fear, injustice and inequality that perpetuate poverty and senseless destruction of lives and properties.

Martins (1989), argues that land as a contemporary source of wealth is a strong determinant of economic power and control of production relations.It is also a factor in building and wielding decision-making powers, to affect economic and political outcomes. In light of this, the struggle for land suggests a struggle for political and economic power. According to Rugege *et al*. (2007) exercise of authority over land involves relationship between a legal subject and legal object. It is about complete and absolute control over the object (land) as well as, possible rights and capacities over it. Yet, Fernando and Linhare, (2004) differ slightly in the conceptualisation of ownership and control of land, which they call "authority over land". The authors assert that, authority over land is a key factor in any productive economy, since it confers property rights and defines access to and control over land as means of production. In addition, it confers rights in relation to the manner in which people own, occupy and transact land. Kagwanji (2009) posits that in Eastern Africa, (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda to be specific), the question of access, use and ownership of land has been at the centre of intermittent conflicts between ethnic groups in the areas. Fernando and Linhare (2004), however, argue that, lack of rights to access land and influence

its use are not sufficient causal factors of land conflict, but lack of established authority over land access, use and also controls ownership and land transfer processes.

These insights on access and influenceof decision concerning land use suggest that mere access to land is not ownership. In addition, it is not much of a problem to access land, but a big concern to establish or secure authority over any given land in Africa. More so, the debate demonstrates African perspectives on land conflict, ownership and control but fails to examine how specific cases like the Ezillo land conflict in South-Eastern Nigeria fit into the positions made. This research is expected to fill this gap.

Another social fact central to the competition for land and social conflict, is land as a primordial identity. According to Aluko, (2005), sources of identities include land, tribe, kinship, ethnicity, language, regionalism, religion, and social class, amongst others. This suggests that an individual can adopt as many identities as situation may warrant. Identity construction depends onself-perception and the imagined others perception of self including the identity adopted by competing others. This is further dependent on the reality and meanings projected in social interactions (Abegunde, 2011). This is the reason underlying the operationalisation of land and social identity.As contestable as the definition of identity can be, the concept has two dimensions to it s definition. First, as a reflection of one`s self-conception or self-perception. Secondly, identity is the perception of an individual without contemplation of the person's self-perception. Whether it is from subjective or objective perspective, identity is defined as any group attribute that provides recognition and meanings for individual members of the group, as individuals or collectively (Osaghae and Suberu, 2006). At least, two approaches could be used to capture and analyse the nature of Nigeria's identity diversity.

Firstly, Geertz's (1963) classified primordial affinity to land into tribe, kinship, and ethnicity. These social categories are based on the "givens" of life which are anchored on industrial society-type aggregations like class, political party affiliation, interest group membership, and so on. For Geertz, Africa and Asia are places where primordial affinity is more prevalent. Secondly, Oommen (1997) on his part describes identity diversity as the consequence of the transition from exclusionary and inequality-generating ethnicity and nationality identities to inclusionary and equality-oriented citizenship. Despite the explicit merit of the submissions above, the position is Eurocentric. The current Russian/Ukrainian border conflict (Ezenwoko,

2014) has proven that social conflicts, resulting from primordial ties to identity such as land can happen anywhere. The position is further weakened by a lack of current contextual content, which this research will provide.

Identity based land conflicts in Nigeria are historic. They involve contests over land affinity claimsamong indigenes, non-indigenes, migrants and settlers. These identity categories have ethnic, communal, religious and regional origins. They evolved from a social structure of discriminatory processes and practices.This is evident a process where non-indigenes, migrants and settlers are denied equal access to land resource. Also, the practice that denies people of their rights and privileges of a locality, village, community, town or state based on identity categories is exclusionary. According to Mitchell, (2000) sons and daughters of such localities are treated differently as sons and daughters of the soil are all indices of exclusionary land relation processes. This discriminatory structure perpetuates hierarchy and inequalityical, unequal, ranked system of citizenship that has provoked violent conflicts all over the country. These processes and practices have endangered national unity and raised animosity that goes to the very heart of what Ukoha, (2003) called the 'National Question' as these identity issues continue to grow in significance in the recent past, raising different dimensions of contestation, it further aggravate hatred that has threatened national security. However, these process and practice have deep historical roots in pre-colonial patterns of inter-group relations. The discriminatory practices and ethnic inequalities it entrenched are colonial creation that transcends the colonial regime to the post-independence administrations in Nigeria (Osaghae & Suberu, 2006). As Mandami, (2001) succinctly describe developments around identities as a precursor to ethnicity and ethnic politics in Africa.

These practices and processes have cumulatively provoked various forms of bloody self-determination agitations from different groups in Nigeria and Africa at large. The creation of more states and local government areas further intensified the salient of identity ties to land as a community. This has resulted in land concentration, contestations and conflicts around local issues such as tribe, kinship, ethnicity, regionalism, gender, religion, and social class, among others (Egwu, 2004; 2009). The increased significance of identity tied to land increased competition to convert land access to land ownership. This sharpened communal identities and conflicts between 'indigenes' and 'non-indigenes', 'sons-of-the-soil' and 'migrants' or 'settlers' (Ibeanu, 2003).

2.1.3 Some Major Land Conflicts in Nigeria

Land conflict has no boundary. Land disputes remain a major hindrance to land use, tenure security and community development (Otite, 2001). According to Johanson, (2011),land issues in Nigeria polarize interests, arouses emotion and territorial instincts of individuals, groups and communities to violent clashes in the country. Among the major land conflicts in Nigeria are: Aguleri/Umuleri, Tiv/Jukun, Ife/Modakeke and Ijaw/Itsekiri.

2.1.3.1 Aguleri / Umuleri

Aguleri and Umuleri are peopled by Ibo speaking sub-groups of Igbo extraction in Anambra State, southeast Nigeria. Land to the Igbo people is culturally symbolic source of identity and means of livelihood. The commoditization of land as a saleable property and store of value started with the emergence of colonialismthat added to the cultural meaning of land (Obioha, 2008). This dual conception of land fueled controversy arising from ownership and control of access to land. As in many African societies, Ibo society accepted peacefully, only some of the colonial culture andtenets of liberal economic policy as it affects the meaning of land. However, they were forced to adopt some other measures through force and obnoxious legislations (Ezenwoko & Osagie, 2014).

As colonial influence spread traditional culture of the people kept changing. Those related to customary land laws were not spared. According to Nmah, (2011),customary land laws affected by regime change included land sales, inheritance procedure, land pledging, communal ownership, and land gift among others. The socio-economic, political and demographic pressure at this point in Ibo land reinforced the change. The immediate implication of the change to the people was a rapid social dislocation that the people were not prepared for. Normative expectations and prescriptions about land relations were turned upside down. It is against thisbackground that the emergedsocial disconnect between cultural conception of land and what change has turned it to be necessitated the 1978 land reform policy aimed at equitable distribution of land as solution to increasing unequal access to land. According to Atilola, (2013) this Act vested the control of land on the state. Despite this, land conflicts continue to reoccur between families, communities and ethnic groups over control of access, ownership and use of land. While Tijani, (2006) identified identity crises as the cause of the Aguleri/Umuleri conflict, (Alubo, 2006; Ayua 2006, Nwanegbo, 2012) in their separate works argued that the conflict is a direct result of unhealthy rivalry in coexistence of traditional land and conventional land tenure.

Similarly, Onwuzuruigbo, (2009) and Ibeanu, (2003) agree that identity crisis and rivalry within two land tenure systems may not in the case of Aguleri and Umuleri be sufficient causes of conflict over land but the colonial activities induced forces of migration, population explosion and rapid urbanization in the communities. The colonial policy that divides and rule created animosity that pitched local elites against one another and undue favouritism that favour more of Aguleri than Umuleri ownership claims to Otuocha land.

2.1.3.2 Tiv and Jukun Crises in Taraba State

The Tiv and the Jukun people had shared home and habitation for a long time. Land acces, use and claims of ownership have for decades generated conflicts that have turned neighbours to strangers and enemies. According to Egwu, (2004) the crises starting from 1959, 1980, 1990, 1994, 1991, 1992 and 2001 between the Jukuns and their Tiv neighbours have had far-reachingnegative impacts on the development and coexistence Tiv and Jukuns people respectively. As sedentary agrarian community, the two neighbours may find it difficult to survive without meaningful access to farmland. This may complicate the struggle for arable piece of land in such context. Beyond access to land, Nwanegbo, Odigbo and Ochanja, (2014) argued that various meanings of citizenship, indigeneship and settlership in Nigeria are possible conflict drivers. Although the central issues of conflict may be land and access to it but there could still be other local intervening conflict triggering issues other than the national question. For example, Mustapha, (2002) questioned the relationship between the two groups before 1959 and colonization. This question known will reveal the historical trajectory of conflict in the area. According Best & Idyorough (2003),impact of north/southcross-border migration, colonialism and cultural imperialism are likelydivisive social processes polarizing hitherto coexisting neighbors into indigene/settler identity cleavages.

This generates distrust, fear and conflict that dampen and made controversial land relation.Considering that before colonial regime the area had been peaceful habited by the Tiv and the Jukun people, Egwu, (2004) indicted colonialism as a cause to the post-colonial conflict. Pointed to the colonial divide and rule policy as what nurtured some conflicts between the Jukuns and most of its neighbors, Egwu concluded that cause of conflict in this area is located in surving colonial land policy. The indigene/settlerquestion has remained serious and contentious in deciding who is entitled to own land in this area. This issue has become basis for discriminating against perceived settlers by perceived indigenes. Bottled-up

anger and animosity have grown from this discrimination tendency which over the years has led to the build-up of accumulated grievances and tension among people. On one hand, while the Jukuns see their Tiv neighborsas settlers who are not entitled to any land in Jukun communities, on the other hand, the Tiv has self- hperceive of being entitled to land just like the Jukun (Erim, 1984). The Tiv argues that the expansionist tendencies of the Jukuns aimed at extending kwararafa kingdom and to acquire more subjects from Tivs nationality was the real cause of conflict.

2.1.3.3 Ife/Modakeke Crises

The Ife-Modakeke communal crisis is over a century old. Its cause, history and consequences were carefully examined and scholarly articulated in various studies. These studies include Johnson, (1973); Akinjogbin, (1992); Albert, (1999); Aguda, (2001); Oladoyin, (2001); Agbe, (2001); Toriola, (2001); Babajimi, (2003). While Babajimi, (2003) argued that at least seven major wars have been fought out of this conflict – 1835-1849; 1882—1909; 1946-1949; 1981; 1983; 1997-1998 and 2000. According to Akinjogbin (1992), Ife-Modakeke conflict is basically depicted as a conflict between Ife 'landlords' and the Modakeke 'strangers/tenants'.

In contrast, Toriola, (2001) concluded that landlord/stranger interaction is not enough factor that trigger the conflict pointing out that beyond mutual social interaction, economic survival pressure, political relevance and identity issues have tendency to underpin conflict. There is also the tendency for the Ife people to claim land ownership rights above their neighbour the Modakeke people based on historical fact that Ife is considered widely as the ancestral home of the Yoruba people. But one will expect that land here will be for all who are of Yoruba descent. Protraction of land conflict under landlord/stranger divide is strange given the expected ethnic homogeneity.

However, Agbe, (2001) argues that rent and royalty (*Isakole*)entitlement determination local government creation and location of its headquarters are serious rsk factors ofconflict. Albert, (1999) on his part argues further that the cause of Ife-Modakeke conflict cannot be outside inconsistencies and contradictions from Nigeria`s post-colonial legal pluralism depicted the fusion of customary and statutory land tenure system. While the former present basis to question the capacity and control culturally provided to Ife as ancestral home of the Yoruba to mediate land conflict and related issues. The later position portends a kind of indictment to the rationale for the emergence of 1978 land tenure Act and its promised intervention to make

land accessible to all under state supervision. Putting economic, political and identity issues Ife-Modakeke conflict into perspectives therefore, one will need to imagine what exactly could have underlay this intractable land conflict.

So, it is envisaged that some unanswered questions in this context may be answered from this research. The land related contradictions emerging from this crisis have resulted in lose of many lives and properties stagnating physical development and social well-being. Johnson, (1973); Oladoyin, (2001) and Aguda, (2001) in their separate works agreed that the Ife-Modakeke community conflict protraction has defy peace agreements for more than 100 years now casting doubt on the efficacy of both the traditional and conventional methods of conflict resolution in the area.

2.1.3.4 Ijaw/Itsekiri Crises

As home tothe people of Ijaw,Urhobo, and Itsekiri among otherethnic groups, the Niger Delta region parade occupational fish farmers. This region has a history of oil deposit in commercial quantity. This is why oilprospecting and exploration are ongoing activities in the area (Akpan, 2010). A large number of canals, rivers, streams, lagoons, creeks and tributaries are present in the region. Land disputes here are not only a reflection of broken land relations but also a manifestation of struggle for larger share of 13 percent oil derivative allocation from Nigerian state. This is not including the oil royalties from multinational oil prospecting and exploration corporations like Shell, Exxon Mobile among others. These gains have jacked up the value of land and the quest to secure land within the region such that mere speculation of oil prospect in any land generate ownership and access control contestation, competition and struggle that lead to conflict. The agrarian crisis in thisoil-rich Niger-Delta region are triggered by pecuniary interest in rent and royalty that involve the state, the locals and the multinational corporations prospecting and exploring oil in the area.The issues of contensions are tied to environmental degradation, pollution and gas flaring as well as the dispossession of land displacement of indigenous people from their traditional homes and sources of livelihood. Above all, is the politicisation of issues of rent and royalty entitlements of the people thereby alienating them from their inherited land wealth. Buttressing the above claim is Onyekpe, (2012) argument that land disputes is a natural consequence of poverty/population explosion, claims of aboriginal/primordial affinity to land amongstakes in land particularly between Ijaw and Itsekiri communities. Onyekpe further noted that between

1920s-30, land relation was not a factor in any disagreements and conflicts among the communities. Unlike now land was not scarce in relation to the populationat a time because fish farmers needed more water body to farm than land(Ogbogbo, *et al*, 2012).

The emergence of oil economy in the Delta provided opportunity for rent and royalty collection different from the traditional agrarian occupation of the people. The rural traditional authorities and the urban elite from the communities found opportunity to jostle for rent/royalty collection and distribution. These leaders interfacing the multinational corporation exploring oil on behalf of the rural stakeholders are vulnerable to compromising accountability. The unequal or no distribution of collected rent and royalty become a major factor in triggering contestation and conflict. As oil exploration and exploitation continue to thrive in this area and capital flight continues to see oil wealth generated remitted to the metropolis, the people from whose land the wealth is derived are left with their developmental need almost unattended to.The far reaching negative impact on land and aquatic life of the people has threatened sustainability livelihood and reconstructing peaceful coexistence (Akpan & Akpabio, 2003). For instance, Akpan, (2010) further affirms that the loss of farmland through environmental degradation arising from oil exploration.Also, the near absence of fresh clean water for fishing and domestic us due to oil spillage and pollution has reached epidemic level such that complicates sustainable rural development and livelihood of the people as it compounds the problem of unemployment. Thissituation has aggravated youth vulnerability to elite mobilization and recruitment for criminality in most Niger-Delta region.

2.1.4 Land Conflict and Development

Literature is replete with land conflict as a consequence of developmental failure and underdevelopment. The last two decades have witnessed a rapid growth in the conflict/ development nexus. Thisis reflecting the increasing role conflict plays in human and material development or underdevelopment (Lund, 1998; Hussein, *et al*, 1999; Woodhouse, *et al*, 2000; Nwanegbo, 2006; Wright, 2006). Obviously, human suffering resulting from land conflict has infected society with underdevelopment that has attracted extensive attention (see for example Otite, 2001; Ubi, 2001; Imobighe, 2003; Omotayo, 2005). Some other experts see social conflict as a product of change and also change process that affects development by stimulating economic, social and political indices to provide sustainable development (see for example Sassen, 2006; Genyi, 2007; Awanyo, 2009; Omobowale, Oni, &Ugbem, 2012; Kabir, 2013). This becomes obvious when land is considered as a store of value and identity

that provides social relations and contention. This has implication for social transformation and development with the capacity to ameliorate the plight of the vulnerable groups in society.

For instance, as driver of conflict, land significantly connects economic, social, environmental and political change throughout the 20th century (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Carius & Lietzmann, 1999). During this period, remarkable socio-political and economic transformations including the Chinese and Russian revolutions were sparked in part by inequitable distribution of land (Balk, 2008). In Bangladesh, the Philippines, South Africa, and Israel, struggle for land has also been identified as source of internal strife (LaFeber, 1993). Between Senegal and Mauritania, El Salvador and Honduras, Nigeria and Cameroon among others, in era of globalisation, land struggle still persists (Brockett, 1994). The 1980s and 1990s witnessed revolutions over pronounced land concentrations and the entrenched powers of land-based elites, springing from the rural hinterlands of numerous Latin American nations, where rapid population growth, economic decline, and failing industrial sectors left countless people landless (Booth, 1991). In all, the scarcity of accessible land is fundamental to the cause of poverty and the desire for agrarian reform.

Land as a store of value is also a means of investing and accumulation of wealth. Investment in land is considered to serve as security to livelihood, well-being and development in any society (O`Lear, 2005). It is also a social nexus for family and friends. In addition, that land also depicts cultural identity means it is a source of pride and cultural affirmation. Its functionality transcends social to both political and economic importance (Sultan, 2003; Ehusani, 2005). The well-being and development of people and societies finds expression only in a harmonised land tenure system that includes all and does no harm to stakeholders in land business or decision-making. By implication, the traditional and modern approach to land use issupposed to be harmonised into greater productivity.

However, the elite capitalise on the gap between customary and statutory tenure to play power game in their quest accumulates more land. The scheme involves the peasants and the landlords using their politicalprivilages and connection to gain control over land in exchange for money or political position.The end of this arrangement leaves the subsistence livelihoods of the poor majority threatened. A context of multiple and contradictory land rights claim characterise Nigerian land tenure and this has weakened land governance legal framework (Nnoli, 1998; Nwanegbo, 2005a).Remedy in times of infraction is hard to come by as there is

dual legal interpretation of law in the consideration of customary and statutory provisions. This challenge can be tasky when justice system in terms of cost is relatively unaccessible to all. This constrains inclusiveness in legal decision delivery (Nwanegbo, 2005b; Abegunde, 2010). This jeopardyhas led to growing confusion over land rights and access litigation (Udo, 1999; Okafor, 1997; HRW, 2006; Rahmato, 2007). This contradiction complicates physical, human development in rural communities in Nigeria. Drèze, (2000) and Gakunzi, (2005) in their separate works agree that, conflict is the major obstacle to development in the contemporary world. This is justified looking at the effect of land conflict on residents, which is reflected in the destruction of lives and physical infrastructure. This is the kind of devastation that leaves behind fear that affects trust and hampers trade, social interaction and frustrates physical development.

Land conflict is a significant driver of economic, social, environmental and political, and change throughout the 20th Century (Homer-Dixon 1999; Carius and Lietzmann 1999). Monumental political transformations during this period, including the Chinese and Russian revolutions, were sparked in part by inequitable distribution of land (Kay, 2002). The struggle for land has also been identified as a source of internal strife in countries such as Bangladesh, the Philippines, South Africa, and Israel and the precipitate factor of war between Senegal and Mauritania and El Salvador and Honduras. Even in the present era of globalization, world cities, and rapid urbanization, land struggle persists. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed revolutions over pronounced land concentration and entrenched power of land-based elites, springing from the rural hinterlands of numerous Latin American nations, where rapid population growth, economic decline, and failing industrial sectors left countless people landless (Brockett, 1988,1994; Booth, 1991; LaFeber, 1993). In this region of the world, landlessness have long been regarded as the cause of poverty, and the desire for agrarian reform continues to be a powerful source of political and social confrontation (Paige, 1975, 1996; Tutino, 1986; Seligson, 1995; Diskin, 1996; Mason, 1998).

The connection between land scarcity and conflict has long been the focus of studies examining rural unrest in the developing world (Moore, 1969; Johnson, 1968; Davies, 1971; Gurr, 1971; Huntington, 1971; Paige, 1975, 1996; Prosterman, 1976; Midlarsky, 1982; Tutino, 1986; Brockett, 1988, 1994; Homer-Dixon, Boutwell, and Rathjens, 1993; Seligson, 1995; Diskin, 1996). A recent literature on so-called environmental security suggests that such scarcity may directly generate internal as well as cross-border fights, as groups vie for

access and control over limited resources (Ullmann, 1983; Mathews, 1989; Myers, 1989; Brock, 1991). Likewise, environmental degradation, created by overexploitation of resources, may lead to worsening socioeconomic conditions that precipitate conflict, and, as a result, represents an indirect cause of struggle. Some contemporary examples of resource-scarcity wars include the fight for control over water between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia, and cross-border disputes over oil between Iraq and Kuwait (Homer-Dixon and Blitt, 1998; Serageldin, 1995).

The concern that there will be an outbreak of wars instigated by struggle for scarce resources has garnered much attention by the international community, and, consequently the environment became a primary topic for national security under the Clinton Administration (Westing1 989; Myers1 993; Levy 1995). Central to the environmental scarcity contention is the neo-Malthusian notion that population growth is the root cause of environmental problems, and therefore a primary "trigger" to violent reactions. In contrast to the scarcity school of thought stands a critique based on empirical observations (Levy, 1995; Le Billon, 2001; Peluso and Watts, 2001). Indeed, numerous cases provide compelling evidence that conflict often occurs under circumstances of resource abundance, such as the violent struggles that emerged as groups vied for control over oil in Ecuador and Nigeria (Watts, 2001), gold in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and diamonds in Sierra Leone and Liberia (Fairhead, 2001). The resource abundance argument posits that re-source-based wealth incites greed-driven conflict (Fair-head, 2001). Primary commodities, especially high-value resources such as oil and diamonds, area attractive to ruling elites, and, consequently, their capture may spark struggles between and within states for territorial control (LeB illon, 2001). In fact, much evidence suggests that countries whose economies are dependent on the export of primary goods are more prone to political instability and conflict (Ross 1999). Finally, resource abundance is linked to governments plagued with poor economic growth and instability, creating greater vulnerability to conflict (Auty, 2001; Ross, 1999). What remains unclear within both the resource scarcity and resource abundance positions is how political and economic forces interacting across spatial scales, in general, structure resource access. A comprehensive account of conflict over resources, in this case land, requires that it be situated within the historic, social, political, and economic circumstances of specific places.

In most developing countries, land is not only the primary means for generating livelihood but often the main mean for investing, accumulating wealth, and transferring it between

generations (Schama, 1996; Anderson, 1999; O`Lear, 2005). It is essential to the well-being and development of people and societies. It also acts as a social nexus for family and friends, a source of pride and cultural identity, and a resource of both political and economic importance (Sultan, 2003; Ehusani, 2005). Well-being and development of people and societies find expression only in a harmonised land tenure system that includes all and do no harm to any stakeholder in land business or decision making. By implication the traditional and modern approach to land use are harmonise into greater productivity. However, Nigeria is a plural society (Duke, 2004) that presents interesting examples in the area of land conflict. Imobighe, (2003) and Mbah and Nwangwu, (2014) highlight the following examples among others: Aguleri-Umuleri in Anambra State; Yoruba-Hausa Community in Shagamu, Ogun State; Ijaw-Ilaje conflict in Ondo State; the intermittent clashes in Kano, Kano State; Basa-Egbura in Nassarawa State; Eleme-Okrika in Rivers State; Hausa/Fulani-Sawaya in Bauch State (Imobighe, 2003:13). These conflicts have become so pervasive that there is hardly any part of the country that has not witnessed one conflict or the other. These conflicts have implication for economic and political development in Nigeria.

Because some of the consequences of land conflict are hardly felt outside community boundaries, there is often the tendency to forget that conflicts do have significant impact on inter-group relations at the local level. From the account of (Aaron, 2012) many of the land conflicts that ultimately resulted in more profound national conflicts had their origins at the local base. Militancy in the delta and Ife-Modakeke, Aguleri- Umulere conflict all started locally (Onwuzuruigbo, 2011). No doubt, states across Nigeria have recorded many conflicts that have affected inter-group relations and, quite expectedly, the resource that has been in contention here is land. Broadly, the root causes of this category of conflict can be brought under seven headings: disagreements over historical claims, indigene/settler dichotomy, consequences of changes in the nature of power balance; elite manipulation, youth reactions to vulnerability and exclusion and alterations of boundary structures. Disagreements over historical claims over land have emerged mainly because of the absence of documentary evidences of historical rights to land. In communities across Nigeria, the traditional land ownership structures between communities have been affected by successive legislations by governments, right from the colonial era till the present day. Consequently, land tenure arrangements between communities become violently contestable, as communities come up with claims of ownership rooted to conflicting oral traditions.

Many of Nigeria's deadliest land conflicts pit the recognized original inhabitants, or indigenes, of a particular place against supposedly later settlers (Anifowose, 2003). Sadly, in dozens of communities, the administrative lines government draws to help manage diversity also sustain conflict. First among these is the thorny question of who is an indigene, meaning roughly the original inhabitant of a place. Officials use this slippery term to limit access to public resources, such as land, schools, and government jobs. In effect, the population of every state and local government area (LGA) in Nigeria is divided into indigenes and settlers- "people who cannot trace their roots back to earliest times" (Duke, 2004). Settlers can still be Nigerian citizens, and thus are not completely stateless (Alubo, 2006). But discrimination against them can provoke serious conflict. Unfortunately, despite the heavy social, economic, and political tolls these conflicts inflict, serious thinking around how to prevent and resolve them has barely started. This study is one kind of these thinking to advance more holistic understandings of justice needed to advance development. Given that the indigene-settler distinction is also explosive because it reinforces and is reinforced by other identity-based divides in Nigeria. These differences in ethnicity, language, religion, and culture can be longstanding and deeply felt, but how they factor into conflict is again not well understood. Consequently, violent conflicts have often emerged as a result of these disagreements. Among some of these conflicts are those between the Umuleri and Aguleri in South East Nigeria, Ife and Modakeke in South West Nigeria, and the Chamba and Kuteb in Northern Nigeria (Danfulani, 2009).

Change in climatic conditions is also a factor in conflict considerations. Also important in this consideration is when droughts have affected grazing land pastoralists use for their animals and such animals have trespassed on farms. Examples of these have been common within Jos Plateau, Benue among others. Consequently, slight alterations in the environment have been known to ignite conflict (Avav, 2002). The third factor – changes in the nature of balance of power. More often than not, problems have emerged when ethnic communities that had been allocated land and had thus been playing second-fiddle positions to their 'landlords' suddenly assume important positions in national politics and they are using such positions to seek greater autonomy from groups that have historically being their 'landlords'. A recent example of communal clashes of this nature was the case in South West Nigeria, where the Modakeke, historically referred to (perhaps erroneously) as tenants to Ife landlords, wanted to seek greater control to land and autonomy (Peter, 2003; Toure, 2009).

Elite manipulation is another major cause of conflict over land at the local level (Tenuche and Ifatimehin, 2009). The pattern of expression here is not different from other ways through which elites have exploited communal differences to advance selfish interests. However, it needs to be pointed out that very rarely has this been a sole cause of conflict. Rather, the way this often manifests is that, once there is land conflict, elites come into the scene to exploit it to their advantage. Indeed, in all the communal conflicts identified above, prolongations of tension have been linked to elite manipulation (Asuni, 1999; Hagher, 2002; Ukoha, 2003). The importance of youth vulnerability and exclusion to conflicts in Africa is fast assuming academic and policy relevance, especially in Nigeria (Egwu, 1998; Imobighe, 2003; Mitchell, 2000). Could this be a consequence of the whole issue of youth bulge that seems to be prevalent in Africa. Nigerian youths for instance have been at the forefront of many recent communal clashes over land (Asuni, 1999; Aaron, 2012). The best example that comes to mind is in the Niger Delta region, where many of the ethnic conflicts over oil have been fought mainly by youths. Land use and development must go beyond efforts to try to address apparently conflicting interests among opposing parties. It requires taking into account the historical and contemporary political economy, as well as cultural dimensions, that shape the nature of competition over land and development priorities.

Several considerations are behind the widespread trend towards greater conflict (Shipton 1994). These include, increasing demand for land due to cash-cropping, agricultural intensification, the expansion of settlements, rising land values, and government policies requiring demonstration of effective land occupation can cause farmers to close areas to herders. This generates conflict. Continuous cropping through the use of irrigation or chemical fertilizer, for example, can eliminate the need for fallowing. Farmers who take up livestock rearing may want to keep pasture or dry season water sources for their own animals. Herders may take up cultivation, cutting off other farmers from wet-season pasture. Droughts, civil conflicts, increased rangeland competition, or shifting rainfall patterns increasingly drive herders farther afield in search of pasture, expanding the area of potential conflict with farming communities (Kratli and Swift, 1999). From the foregoing, several considerations and development interventions like including irrigation, rangeland closures, forest protection, and so on, can greatly alter existing tenure niche relationships among groups can actually serve as incentives for conflict at the expense of human well-being. This is because the situational factors and incentives favor the pursuit of individual or group interests at the expense of other claimants to land resource. The above social interaction suggests critical implication to physical development and social well-being.

2.1.5 Community development processes and land relations

The previous section discusses land conflict and development suggesting that the social impact conflict on developments is intensified by risk factors such as inequitable land access, use, ownership and land dispossession. It points to the need to understand the relational and political, rather than only technical and positivistic. This section deals with community underdevelopment processes and land relations aspect of conflict. A relational approach to community development involves the articulations interest in terms of action and inaction resulting in either conflict and underdevelopment or peace and development. However, conversation on land relations is not complete without analysing power relations which lie at the heart of institutional practice, which, combined to an unequal, constructed social structure perpetuates the dynamics that drive social injustice and dispossession (Erickson, 1988; Enweremadu, 2012). This section will discuss the way in which the state's mechanisms of political control are reproduced by developments and related actors, such as the acquisition of legitimacy to own and control access, use and ownership of land through the fallacy of political representation and other means of undermining communities' communal authority over its land.

Although closely related in many ways to private and business-oriented enterprises, state-led development is one of the critical sectors within the development industry and particularly, high modernist megaprojects. As previously remarked, the social impact of development practices are rarely unchallenged by the affected social actors and their solidarity networks of civil society. However, the state bases development's legitimacy on the powerful and, however, increasingly contested argument of political representation in the framework of a democratic political system. Consequently, rather than allow development to be driven by the people only few powerful interests decide the form and direction of development. In the context of this reality, land relations are bought over to favour only the powerful in the distribution of land. Hence, the inequitable access, distribution, ownership and management of land in most society. Thus, not only that relations favour few individual at the expense of the majority of the people, the nature and direction of land related development is determined by the few powerful individual land owners constituting limitation to development. The stakeholders in relations differ in their view of the problem and seem unaware of the implications for living conditions in the years ahead.

Scholars agree that there are no miraculous solutions. According to them, the secret of success is, first, a frank acceptance of the problem, then a pragmatic approach as to the

measures to be taken. In this respect, the decentralised rural development Policy is a promising option for equitable access, use, ownership as well as the sustainable management of land relations that does not individualise ownership of land, and for the top/bottom land tenure question in particular (Obioha, 2008). The foregoing suggest movement toward equal land distribution, use and ownership different from individualisation of land right but has not sufficiently adius reason behind the persistent attrition associated with increasing individualisation in land relation.

The old pattern of inalienable community ownership of land is now being challenged by those most intimately concerned. This situation has arisen as a result of the following developments: firstly, the reduction in cultivable area due to the general struggle for land space both as response to population growth, livelihood, wealth and identity survival and the resulting pressure on what land remains; secondly, a tendency to levy a rent on land, so as to derive a cash income from land rented out to others. Consequently, conflicts over land use, which used to be between persons seeking land and land "owners", now also oppose brothers withinthe same lineage.Behind this situation is the break-up of family units due to land fragmentations that reduce the economic value of land (Obioha, 2008). And with the break-up of the social fabric, we are also seeing the break-up of collectively- owned property. As a result, individuals are beginning to own landed property in their own name. Both communal land and clan-owned land are not immune from these tendencies, and are consequently being parceled out and appropriated by individuals and smaller family units. Though these trends are not universal, they are becoming more common in certain areas (Tenuche, 2009).

For instance, in settlements close to urban area, most of them in Nigeria donot have a clear development plan. Although, since the emergence of land reform of 1978, there is increasing efforts have been made on town planning, though not everyone is aware of the fact. Consequently, local communities are often surprised to find their lands being set aside for housing developments, which result in the restructuring and reallocation of land in the form of building plots. When this occurs, large families have particular difficulty in securing enough plots for them to live on. Moreover, in these areas the market value of land(Genyi, 2007) is very high, making land a potential source of income. The combination of these two phenomena has led to the break-up of extended families, in order to try and securesufficient living space. People try to predict building development projects, which may be decided on with very little warning, and obtain land for speculative purposes.

Considering, the central and northern regions, where land access, use and ownership is highly contestable due do fragmentation in identity and culture (Oruonye, 2012). These regions are characterised by high population densities, generally around 37 persons/km2but in some places as high as 90 persons/km2 (Mezie-Okoye & Charles, 2016). They are also the region's worst affected by the desertification, with the result that demand for cultivable land far exceeds the supply. Consequently, there has been a great deal of emigration to potentially richer regions. Increasing competition for fertile land has led to crises within family units and consequent break-ups. To ensure its survival, each smaller unit then tries to gain possession of a portion of the community inheritance, claiming and seeking to assert its exclusive right of ownership. Competition for survival and population growth is conflict risk factors that contribute to land conflict but not the only impediments to development.

The southern, south-western and south-eastern regions of Nigeria experience fair share of conflict and underdevelopment it contributes to. However, generally regarded as the country's soil fertility belt Teriola, 2001), these regions receive large numbers of migrant farmers and transhumant herders. The increasing pressure has resulted in the cultivation of large areas until recently regarded by the locals as reserves of land. Unable to control the phenomenon, many locals have now introduced a renting system, which now represents a substantial source of income for some "land-owning" households. Since it is forbidden by the traditional land management rules, the practice is covert but over the last decade, the practice has spread with the arrival of urban investors, who are exacerbating the trend towards speculation in land. Increasingly, members of clans with rights over land are seizing control of large areas for speculative purposes. Their strategy is to clear and farm a plot of land for a couple of years, and then leave it fallow. By virtue of this short period of use, it becomes the property of the farmer and, later, the object of speculation. The large emigration southward cannot be the only reason for land conflict considering the fact that the emigrant can also constitute major supplier of labour and market to their receiving communities. So, how land management and individualisation of land right sustain this emigration and conflict over land is not clear from the foregoing positions.

Considering the consequences of individualisation of land rights,the decline in customary land management practices described above is a hindrance to the promotion of development activities. The situation is well illustrated by (Olawoye, 1982) to understand management attitudes, we need to be aware of the traditional principles governing access to and use of land. In particular, it is not permissible to plant trees on land which does not belong to you. In

certain places in the west of the country, they go so far as to say that you must not make any improvements to land leased to you. These restrictions, originally intended for migrant farmers, now also apply to localswho are not "owners" of the land.

Conflict is also arising between "land owners" themselves, who are the guarantors of the integrity of customary rights. A clash between such men is regarded as outright war, in which losing the game often means losing one's life. In other words, when the conflict escalates to a certain point and rigid positions are adopted, only the elimination of one of the protagonists can settle the problem. During such times, the disputed land cannot be used or improved, as if the land in question were in fact "ownerless". Such situations highlight some of the obstacles in the way of rural development projects. And yet, there is abundant evidence of the degradation taking place; if things continue as they are, the land will no longer be able to bear such levels of exploitation. For this reason, we would pro -pose that any reluctance to introduce improvements in land management, thereby exposing the resource to degradation, should be regardedas an environmental crime(Meier, *et. al.,* 2007) however, beyond management and individualisation induced conflict and underdevelopment, over-politicisation of land tenure can be impactful.

Land being the principal means of production for rural people, control of land ensures dominance over those who use it. This is perhaps why in egalitarian societies (Mamdani, 1996), any conflict over land tenure is repressed with the greatest energy. Similarly, under authoritarian regimes, because of their apparent stability and the curtailment of freedom of expression, land tenure conflicts are almost non-existent, or at least remain latent so long as the regime continues. But as soon as there is a change, the conflicts rise to the surface again.

Since the decentralisation process began in 1978, the danger of things getting out of control has increased. The political landscape is now littered with political parties, each ambitious to gain power. Generally speaking, they all build their electoral base from the grass roots up. The leaders, who tend to be the educated elite and businessmen from a given area, have the task of mobilising the electorate. They, in turn, rely heavily on local traditional chiefs and religious leaders. To gather votes, they use all kinds of strategies, good and bad. During election campaigns, some politicians have no hesitation in appealing to people's baser instincts. When they lack the means to convince or corrupt the electors, they make false promises which will never be realised. And, very often, given the prevailing "political illiteracy", many local party representatives adopt illegal ways of persuading people to

support their cause (Stephen, 2002). They may be isolated cases, but threats to confiscate women and land have been reported.It is interesting to note that land tenure conflicts in other countries in the sub-region and in southern Africa (e.g. Zimbabwe), are perfect examples of the way the land tenure issue is manipulated for political ends. The roots of the recent clashes between native Ivorians and foreigners (in particular immigrants from Burkina Faso and Mali), and those between blacks and whites in Zimbabwe, are to be found in the over-politicisation of the land tenure issue (Jens, 1999; Van der, 2011).

In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the immigrants who started off as "labourers" in the coffee and cocoa plantations have succeeded in gaining access to land and working on their own account. Indeed, with their reputation as tireless workers, they have progressed in a few decades from the status of labourers to that of wealthy farmers. Nowadays, they have their own plantations, and their vitality seems to pose a threat to the future of local people. This has resulted in tension between the two communities, which makes the land tenure issue a powder keg (Sparrowe, *et. al.,* 2001).This situation has been a real boon for certain political parties, which have not hesitated to seize on the issue to destroy what they regarded as the electoral strongholds of their rivals. The native people have thus found a pretext for denouncing long-standing agreements, and the smallest misunderstanding is quickly transformed into a violent, bloody conflict(Shanin, 1990) (for instance, at Tabou and many other places in the Ivorian countryside, where thousands of Burkinabé were forced to return to their country of origin, and some simply killed).

It should however be acknowledged that not only foreigners are affected by the land tenure disputes that have left so many families in mourning. Ivorians from other parts of the country have also paid the price for settling in new areas and working hard. For instance, there have been clashes between Baoulé and Bété at Soubré, Baoulé and Gnanboua at Zougougbeu, Baoulé and Bété at Gagnoa, Attié and Mbatto at Alepé, Abouré and Mbatto at Bonoua, and Baoulé and Wê at Duekoué. (Nwanegbo, 2006) This all goes to show that over-politicisation of the land tenure issue runs counter to ensuring long-term investment in the countryside. Sometimes the challenging of existing agreements (which is really a way of settling old scores) is accompanied by massive destruction of what has been achieved in terms of development (Roy, 2004). Here again, it is the land which suffers because, as a general rule, the owners lack the means to make the improvements which would ensure sustainability. Beyond the land tenure fermenting conflict of development and coexistence, is the issue of how the activities of newcomers in a particular area is regulated.

The current wave of investment in farmland by businessmen, civil servants and other town dwellers, though to be encouraged, must be better regulated and organised if the situation is not to run out of control. The fact is that large areas of land are being "sold" to these newcomers, without regard for land availability and local demand. For this reason, the administration and provincial co-ordination groups (Putzel, 2009) should be required to give their opinion on the suitability of such disposals, in addition to the local villageland management committees (Peters, 2004). Conditions regarding improvements, fertility maintenance and protection against degradation should also be drawn up and submitted to the above technical personnel and monitored to ensure strict, rigorous application. There will also need to be periodic assessments (Onwuzuruigbo, 2013) of land availability. This should make it possible to regulate acquisitions by newcomers while respecting local availability and demand. All these tasks come within the powers of the states in Nigeria, which is responsible for drawing up development guidelines up to the community level, for carrying out tasks relating to the implementation of decentralized rural development policy.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.2.1 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is essentiallya theoretical agenda that situate man at the center of reality (Berger& Luckmann, 1966; Ugbem, 2014).Making sense out of social world according to Schwandt (2003) involves viewing knowledge as not discovered by the mind but constructed and notcreated. This supports Berger and Luckmann (1991) original idea that knowledge is a social construction. Similarly, Hammersley (1992), in furtherance of as social construction asserts thatreality is also social definition that takes place in the event of social interaction as in daily face to face social interaction where meaning are symbolically interpreted. However, this reality refers to the subjective experience of everyday life, how the world is understood not the objective reality of the natural world. Everyday life has reality that is shared with others. Others themselves experience this reality, hence the explanation of their different mode of experience. Face-to-face situation is a prototypical case of social interaction that continues to impinge on each other "my" and "his" interchange of expressivity. For instance he frown at seen me frown and smiles at seen me smile. This continuous reciprocity of reality producing act is simultaneously available to both of us. In face-to-face situation the "other" is fully real. Kirk & Miller (1986) agree that the search for a

final, absolute truth be left to philosophers and theologians while subjective reality searched for with the space of interaction where they are constructed. Consequently, social constructionism places great emphasis on everyday interactions among people who use language to construct their reality.

Berger & Luckmann (1991) are concerned with knowledge creation and development that transcend objective reality to how it emerges and how it comes to be the creation constructed from social interaction in the society. Drawing from Berger and Luckmann submission, the division of labour in both simple and complex society demonstrates how more complex forms of knowledge and what they term economic surplus gives rise to expert knowledge. Following the above flow of thought, is Schwandt, (2003) perspective of expert knowledge development. He posits that this type of knowledge emerged from social construction and developed by people (experts) devoting themselves full-time to their subject. These experts lay claim to original status and ultimate jurisdiction over that knowledge and so enjoys a privileged position in society.

Social constructionists believe that society exist both as objective and subjective reality. The former is brought about through the interaction of people with the social world. Thesocial world in turn influences people resulting in routinisation and habitualisation. That is, any frequently repeated action becomes cast into a pattern, which can be reproduced without much effort. This frees people to engage in innovation rather than starting everything anew. In time, the meaning of the habitualisation becomes embedded as routines, forming a general store of knowledge. This is institutionalised by society to the extent that future generations experience this type of knowledge as objective. Additionally this objectivity is continuously reaffirmed in the individual's interaction with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Schwandt, 2003; Ugbem, 2014). This suggests that in the society, subjective reality translates to objective reality with time. However, the experience of society as subjective reality is achieved through primary, and to a lesser extent, secondary socialisation. The former involves being given an identity and a place in society. According to Burr (1995), our identity originates not from inside the person but from the social realm. Socialisation takes place through significant others who mediate the objective reality of society. This renders it meaningful and it is so internalised by individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). This is possible through the medium of language as means of transmitting thoughts and feelings

constructingsame into concepts (Burr, 1995).Languagein this context makes thoughts and concepts possible.

Berger & Luckmann (1991) maintain that conversation is the most important means of maintaining, modifying and reconstructing subjective reality. Subjective reality is comprised of concepts that can be shared effortlessly with others. By implication, there is shared meaning and understanding, so that concepts do not need to be redefined to assume reality each time they are used in everyday conversation. Example *'have a good day at the office'* is an example of this.

In summary, social constructionismemerged fromexploring the nature of reality and meaning attached to it by interacting parties engaged in social interaction.Reality to a constructionist is in a continuous flux of creation and recreation under social interaction. This perspective demonstrates the process of knowledge creation supported by facts, concepts and shared meaning and understanding. It highlights the socially constructed reality and meaning as conceived by interacting parties in social interactions. Through this construction, reality and meaning are processed and continuously modified to determine social action. Social interactions however, present contexts that provide continuous, reciprocal, interchange of spontaneous expressive acts available to interactions and produce, subjective evidence like frowning, yawning, laughing etc (Best, 2008). These evidences define contextual reality and spontaneous construction of meaning within social interactions. The socially constructed reality at personal, group and community levels of interaction create concepts or mental representations of each other's actions over time. The use of these concepts becomesinternalised into habits and routin attracting known reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. When these roles are made available to other members of society to play out, the reciprocal interactions that present reality and construct meaning. This meaning over time transforms to social structure of institutionalized knowledge.

In the context of Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo land conflict in Ezillo community, the theory explains how land conflict is socially constructed. The quest to secure access and livelihood, identity and authority over land provide the social environment for supremacy contests over land. It is also within this context that the construction and reconstruction of land social relation take place. These processes have pitched groups and communities against one another. In-group/out-group or intra/inter-group land relations in Ezillo community is a

socially constructed that reflects continuous reconstruction of identity and authority nuances. This reflection sustain supremacy contest with land as primary object of contestation and struggle. Thishas implication for land access social relation. Consequently, it is not enough however, to access land as a space but accessing land with culturally embedded authority over it is paramount. Having authority over land has a direct link to social identity in Nigeria, which in turn determines dominant and subordinate group (Mbah & Nwangwu, 2014). These two groups may have access to land but their authority over it is a negotiation embedded in social construction and reconstruction. People construct meaning of authority and identity based on the reality arising from everyday face-to-face interaction. These meanings attach to social reality as daily experienced go a long way to createand recreate communal conflict in Ezillo community.

Historically, there is social structure of interaction contextually situated and socially maintained within Ezillo community groups. This structure present interpretive cultural meaning of access to land, its ownership and control embedded withsubjective considerations such as identity inferiority and superiority. These considerations over time had undergone and are still undergoing modification as Ezillo community groups interact. This modification is a consequence of series of construction and reconstruction of meanings of land and reality of subjective considerations of identity in terms of access to land, ownership and its control. This is the place of social constructionism inpresenting the social context for supremacy contestation, competition and contention that foster conflict. The social structuralconstruction furthermore, created out of Ezillo community land history embedded with seeming discrimination and suspicion is continuously questioned by interacting groups, hence the clash of interests and the protraction of intractable conflictin the area to reconstruct and change existing structure of meaning and reality of land access and land relation. The quest for identity and livelihood survival of the community is threatened by a structure of in-group versus out-group contest over the reality and meaning of land relation and identity discrimination. The more the community group members interact between in-group and out-group and within in-group the more the need to reconstruct the established meanings and reality become glaring. Resistance to this imposed structure of interaction through social reconstruction result into controversy, contention and conflict.As a philosophical orientation, social constructionism holds that meanings of social structure, social actions and behaviors are not objective phenomenon but subjective and socially constructed.

For instance, within Ezillo, there had been diverse structures of land meaning and land relation socially constructed, prescribed, and proscribed. This is possible due to continuous interaction, reconstruction and modification of realities and meaning of land and land relation that characterize Ezillo social context. This has also provided the basis for social contradiction, competition, contention, contestation and conflict in the community.

3.0   CHAPTER THREE

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Research Design

Introduction

The objective of the study is to examine the social context of Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo land conflict in Ezillo community with the view of exploring the social contextual peculiarities that made Ezillo land different from similar conflicts elsewhere in South-East Nigeria and beyond in a manner that for over eight decades, the conflict evaded significant scholarly attention. The study therefore, adopted exploratory design and qualitative research approach.

3.1. 2Exploratory Design

To be able to engage first hand details about the peculiarities of Ezillo conflict require in-depth exploratory interrogation hence, the use of exploratory design. Also, the dearth of scholarly data on the conflict suggests that not much empirical studies have been done on this conflict. The methodis considered suitable as it provided framework for deep engagement of

sensitive issues of the conflict unknown to literature yet in the quest to address the possible causes of the conflict. This conclusion is in line with the position of Kumar, (1996) who observed that exploratory research design is suitable for research problems that have not hitherto receive adequate scholarly attention. Reports emerging from findings show that there are few writings and no earlier empirical studies on Ezillo conflict. This report designates the conflict to be in a preliminary stage of investigation.The exploration of new phenomena in this way may help the researcher's need for better understanding, may test the feasibility of a more extensive study, or determine the best methods to be used in a subsequent study (Punch, 1998).

Qualitative Approach

Qualitative approach adopted for this study provided the needed platforms for deeper engagement of issues and extraction of in-depth insights direct from the people involved in Ezillo conflict and also those it affected. The objective of this research is to gain familiarity of and achieve new insights into the understudied land conflict in Ezillo community. This is buttressed by Kumar,(1996) who posits that qualitative researches unlike quantitative, frequently stress the importance of direct experience to extract reality from natural social settings so as to fashion an understanding of the social world via the contact.This approach has enabled me to effortlessly pin down the real issues of the conflict by engaging directly conflict actors to tell their stories themselves instead of relying on hear say or third party. It was possible to measure impulses, feelings, emotion, reaction and trend relating to the actors history, life style, identity, social interactions and social process as well as community development trajectory.

3.2 Study Area

3.2.1 Historical review of study area`s origin, migration, contacts and conflict

The issue of who settled in Ezhiulo first is sparsely discussed in literature (Ugbo *et al*, 2008; Enuke, 2015). Ifemesia, (1980:74) in attempt to proffer reasons for migration posits that ancient wars, expansion, safety or search for more lucreativetrade and fertile land for farming cannot be ruled out as the push factors of migration. In this wise he affirms that though nobody is sure of the time of Ezillo migration, but added that it was believed to have taken place between 13th and 17th Centuries. Also, it was generally believed that the Mgbo stock came to Ezhiulo through Uru-agbo to Amofia (Enuke, 2011).There are two versions of oral account of who settled in Ezhiulo first. According to one version, the people of Ezhiulo trace

their origin to one Ebenyi Ali Aja who first settled Ezhiulo. The name Ezhiulo in Ezillo social thought denotes "*good house of accommodation and hospitality*" *(*Enuke, 2010*)*. In other words, the name describes the land, the people as well as their values. The word Ezhiulo was later misspell by the British as "*Ezillo*", when they first reached the area in 1905 (Enuke, 2015). Furthermore, the oral account state that Ebenyi Ali Aja migrated from a town called Amofia Mgbo in search of uninhabited place to hunt wild animals. In the process, he discovered a vast area today called Ezillo where he hunted for several years without meeting any rival. According to the accounts, another individual called Agbaja Ota Okpa later emerged to hunt in the same area and encountered Ebenyi Ali Aja. Feeling threatened, Ebenyi retreated and returned to where he migrated from, Amofia Mgbo, reinforced and came back to Ezillo with bands of hunters to secure Ezhiulo from Agbaja Ota Okpa who he considered as an invader.

A warrior, loyal to Ebenyi Ali, their master, led each of the seven bands. In a matter of days, Ezillo was surrounded from all directions, recaptured and occupied. In order to observe their periodic rest and share their daily catch under the supervision of Ebenyi, a makeshift rest house was constructed on the captured territory. With time, each group had its own rest houses from where settlements started springing up. Each bandleader became the founder of their respective scattered settlements that later transformed into the main seven hunting and farming villages in Ezillo (Ogoja Provincial Annual Report, 1936: 3).

Ezillo and Ezza contact historically, occurred in two phases as noted earlier. The first phase was a survival search for greener pasture as farm labourers before colonisation while the second phase was an invitation to render military service to Ezillo during the colonial era. While the first was characterised by exchange of farm labour for farmland or wives, the second was purely a rescue mission to dislodge Mgbo forceful occupation of Ezillo land. Mutual trust and confidence largely sustained peace initially unlike in the second contact that generated suspicion, fear and conflict. Chronologically, these land conflicts are examined.Ezillo and Ezza agreed in a blood covenant *Igba ndu*[1] marked by *Imabe Ogbu*[2]that

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[1] This is terms is traditional oath or covenant taking involving exchange of blood done to cement an agreement.
[2] This is a traditional process of land allocation for residential, resettlement or farm layout a community elders and the traditional ruler perform as a customary transfer of legitimacy over a certain potion of land to an indigene or a settler who demands it and has community confidence. It is symbolised by the planting in one section of the land a tree called *Ogbu*

after dislodging Mgbo, the entire borderline land area of 38.364Ha [3] between Mgbo and Ezillo will become permanent Ezza settlements as a protection to guard against future invasion. The agreement was signed and sealed by elders of both sides and a detachment of Ezza warriors from Izzo community was dispatched to do the job in Ezillo. The war ended in favour of Ezillo and Izzo Ezza warriors settled in Ezillo as agreed in the late 1920s from where in no long time population pressure pushed Ezza into occupying occupying land outside the originally allocated pushing Ezillo people inward.Consequently, in early 1930s, issues of violation of cultural values, norms and land dispossession arising from population pressure rose to challenge the coexistence of Ezillo and Ezza people in Ezillo community. Hence, that was the beginning of conflict situation.

The first conflict between Ezillo and Ezza happened in the 1930s was over land encroachment, ownership right and identity supremacy struggle. Initially, it started as failure of Ezza farmers to release leased land to their original owners after expiration of the lease term without making trouble at the end of its tenement. It degenerated into verbal altercation and later litigation before violation conflict ensued. The colonial authority`s intervention was drastic. Native police called warrant officers were recruited among the people and deployed within Ezillo to support traditional authority to enforce customary laws of Ezillo. For this reason, native courts were set up in Nkalagu, Ezillo and Ishielu to prosecute and convict offenders with the intention to deter prospective troublemakers.

3.4.2   Demographic data of Ezillo

The study area is Ezillo community, which serves as headquarters to Ishielu local government area in Ebonyi state, southeastern Nigeria. While the National Population Census estimate 2015 puts the population of Ebonyi State at 2,676,947 the total population of Ezillo communityis put at 351,048 inhabitants with land area of 872 km² (Oji, *et al*, 2015). Ezillo has a very fertile and economically viable land with large population of farmerswho double astraders some of who are strangers based there for trading in local farm produce between the rural community and other neighbouring towns and communities. Ezillo is historically a major trade route, because of its strategic location as a transit community with ever busy Enugu – Abakaliki Expressway bisecting it. The community shared boundary with two

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[3] Mbafu, E. N. and Ogah, N. N., (2008) Survey map of the Ezza-Ezillo land allocation, Surveyor General; Tracing No. EB (N) 028; Nov.

incongruent states-Enugu and Benue state, and three local government areas in Ebonyi state Ohaukwu (north), Ezza (east) and Onicha (south). It is a transit route throughEastern and Nnorthern Nigeria. Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo are kinsmen from Ibo speaking Igbo sub-ethnic groups that coexistin Ezillo community, Ishielu Local Government, Ebonyi State.

Ebonyi State is one of the five states in South-East Nigeria. Created on 1st October 1996, the state was carved out from Abia and Enugu States to constitute the old Abakaliki division (from Enugu axis) and the old Afikpo division (Abia axis). Both were merged to form Ebonyi State with Abakaliki as its capital. The state is bordered by Benue State to the north, Enugu State to the west, Imo and Abia States to the south, and Cross River State to the east. Like all other states in the federation, Ebonyi State is divided into three Senatorial Zones,Ebonyi Central,Ebonyi North and Ebonyi South. The state also has thirteen Local Government Councils.Ebonyi State constitute of three socio-linguistic cultural areas based on local dialectical and settlement patterns, namely the Abakaliki area popular with scattered communities, hoeing and mercenary culture, Afikpo area is popular withundulated landscape, hamlet settlements and fishing culture. Ohaozara area is popular with natural salt lake endowment, local dehydration salt processing techniques, combination of scattered and hamlet settlement. Generally, except in Afikpo area where its topography is not favourable for extensive agriculture more than subsistence and fish farming, other areas have in common rich and extensive farming culture. Widely acclaimed locally developed commercial rice, yam and cassaver farming exist in both Abakaliki and Ohaozara areas. Notwithstanding these observed nuanced cultural divergences and convergences, these zones and their communities share similar cultural features, namely, communal ownership of land as the primary means of production, the family as the basic social unit, social stratification system, African Traditional belief system, and the system of political organization that is based on gerontocratic structure and operated through age-grade system.

According to Oji, *et al,* (2015), while 75% population lives in the rural areas, only 25% are found in the urban areas in Ebonyi State.The main stay of the economy of the state is agriculture with people predominantly farmers. The National Bureau of Statistics estimates that about 70.7% population of Ebonyi people in 2010 were employed in the agricultural sector. This is against an average of 45% employed in the same sector in the other South-East states in the same year (Peter and Chikodiri, 2014). The following staple food in Ebonyi State includes rice, yam, and cassava.

The age-long communal land ownership system still operates in Ebonyi State with minimal state interference in some areas particularly rural areas. The consistent weakening by social change of the normative values and mores that regulates land relations in most parts of the state has adversely affected culturally prescribed peaceful allocation of farm land to peasant farmers. There is hardly any farming season in some parts of the state that with will not witness experiences of aggressive competition and struggles for land fraught with animosity and rivalry. This has posed serious limitation to peaceful coexistence of people in some farming communities. Access and use of land is threatened by this limitation.Report from this research has shown that this limitation is underpinned by the mismatch of current and historical realities that affect the meaning and values traditionarily attached to land by indigenous land owners. This brings to question authority claims over land leading to identification of land following ancestral identity line. This process translates into identity contest over identity supremacy claims that complicate peace process and development potentials. As population continue to increase along with people`s need to access land for livelihood and to secure their claim to aboriginal identity affinity to land. Secondly, the problem of undocumented history of land ownership and control that people intermittently twist to their favour leading to perennial rounds of protracted conflicts.It is against this background that the choice of the Ebonyi state, the Zone, LG and particularly Ezillo community becomes expedient. The experience of protracted land conflict has reduced farming in the area essentially to a subsistence engagement with little to sell to meet other important household needs, self and community development.
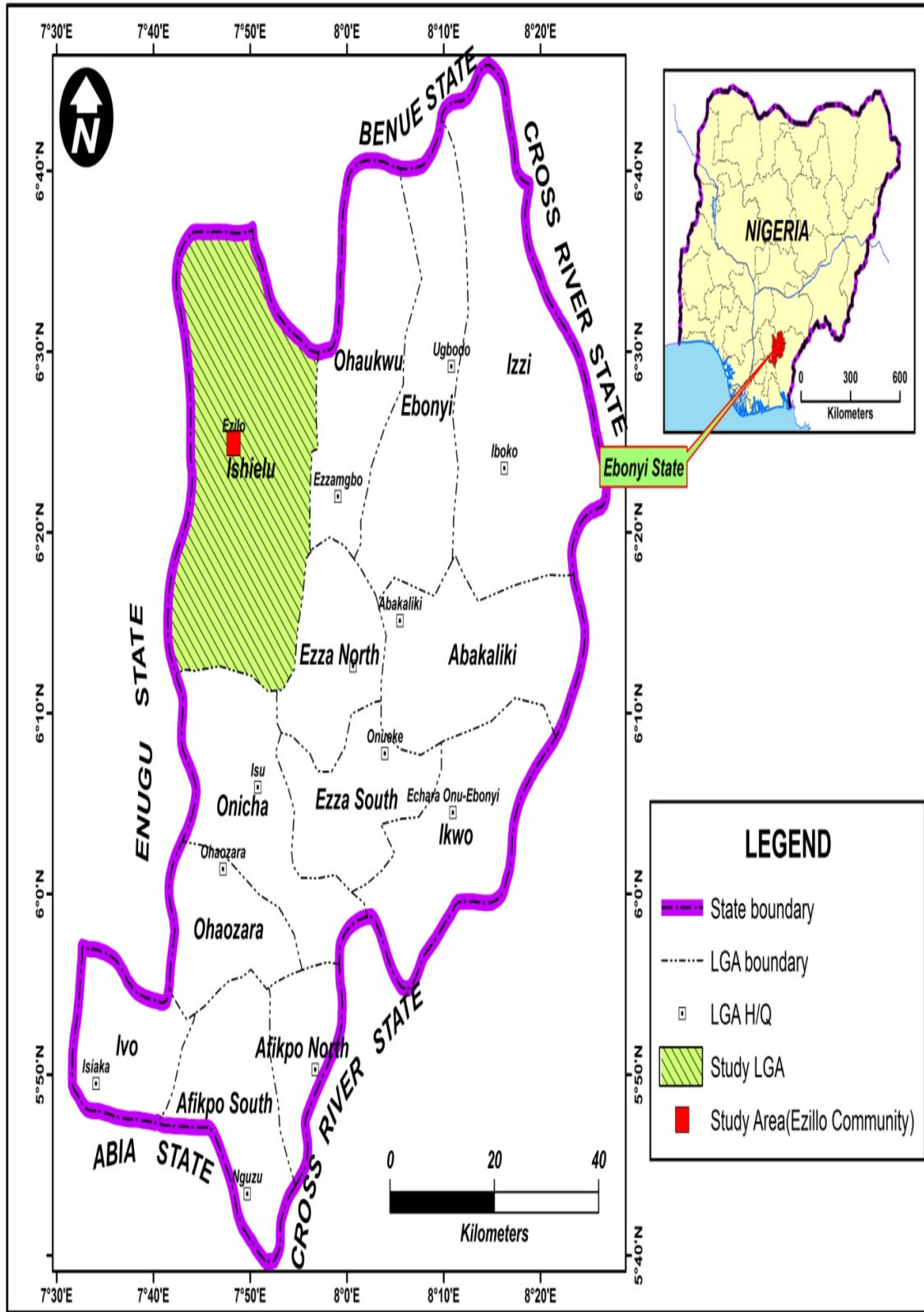
Fig 1: Show the map showing the study area.
Source: Geography Department, University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria.

3.4.3 Historical overview of social process in Ezillo

3.2.3.1 Festivals

Festivals in Ezillo are processes of feast done in honour of time, season or belief, though some months are without ceremony. The processes that culminate into festival and the feast itself from my field observation are the hallmark of interactions that inform and shape process of fence mending, reconciliation and conflict articulation in Ezillo society. It is a time when geneology is traced and ancestral linkages knitted to strengthen kinship bunding particularly with the Ezza people with who Ezillo share kinship. Festival feasts in most cases are done in honour and worship of certaindaities or idols like the god the earth (land), god of harvest among others. While these festivals are tied to time seasons and market days, some are fundamental in the processes that characterise land relations heralding farming, planting, or harvesting seasons in Ezillo. For example, in March, there is festival called Onwa Nkpokoro Agba; in April is Onwa Ine-Ebenyi (meant for the outing of the circumcised brides from their fattening room); in May is Onwa Okenshi (process of transferring circumcised brid to her husband. In local palance, *Onwa a la-ala ibe zhi*); in June is festival of Onwa Emeshi; *Ikpobe Ji Le Afor* (Aphoo) leads to Onwa Obodo in July or Onwa Iri Ji Oha (new yam festival in which family heads lead their family members (male) to the farm to harvest new yam for the feast while women go fetching firewood for the feast cookings). Onwa Obodo is also time for arm-giving to elders, including widows. The man sends two big tubers of yams harvested each to the eldest man in his family, kindred, village head. This process is called *Iphehu.*Some sacrifices called Nja Ji are performed using fowl for those whose yam did do well on *Eke* market day.

Another festival is the Fire Bomb (Egbe Igo)festival usually in June and July; Onwa Abba in August for honour and celebration of *Abba Umuakpu diety*; Onwa Aji (September) Aji feast is the third in ranking of feastsin Ezillo, after Utarali and Ine Ebenyi. Onwa Oruomo in October; Onwa Utarali in November (this feast is rated the highest among feasts in Ezillo. It is the feast where the spirits of the death is remembered).

3.2.3.2 Masquerades

In Ezillo, Masquerades are used for fence mending, tracing ancestral root, conflict mitigation, entertainment, dispute resolution and friendship. Masquerade are categorised according to the roles they play in the society. Masquerade (man) can be broadly divided into Maa Uchi or Mma Ephe. Maa Uchi (Nocturnal Masquerades)- Achipfu-Nneje, Okpoto, Awuru, Ekanwu

among orther.Secondly, Omabee Utarali is played in the night and in the day especially on Eke and Orie atarali market day. Some people like women, children and uncircumcised male are forbidden from seeing this masquerade.

3.2.3.3 Religion

The people practice two separate religions: Christianity and African traditional religion, which started as early as the people of Ezillo did. Christian missionaries brought Christian religion between 1926 and 1930s. The worship of these gods or spirits as noted earlier has festivals attached to them as just as these spirit deities are linked to land, hence the saying '*Elu rie Ali rie'* (Let the heaven eat and the let the earth eat). These are the two forms of god in Ezillo is Almighty God in heaven and god of the earth.Because both sides- Ezillo and Ezza share common faith, faith has become a very strong source of peace and conflict resolution.

3.2.3.4 Marriage

Marriage in Ezillo in exceptionof Catholic Priest is perceived compulsory such that whoever fails to marry at a certain age limit is treated with contempt. Marriage in this community in influenced by some factors: family pressure, influence (marriage that attract prestige to the family is a taget of any parent), prestige (marriage that attract prestige to the family is a taget of any parent), poverty (some give their daughters away in marriage for the purpose of being protected), age (maturity is very important factor in Ezillo marriage), and culture generally affect marriage.Intermarriage between Ezillo and Ezza has remain a very strong tool used for fence mending, tracing ancestral root, conflict mitigation, entertainment, dispute resolution.

3.2.3.5Conflicts and conflict Resolution in Ezillo

In Ezillo traditional setting, the people live in hamlets (Nwa Nduegu), villages (Nduegu), Ndu ulo (Ancestral homes). Ndu ulo are further divided into kindred (Onuma), family units (Onu Mkpu), the villages (Obodo), among others. These are the various forms of settlements that also providetraditional channels through which disputes or conflicts are to be resolved in Ezillo. Those not resolved at any of the stages could go to the highest body, either the elder's council *Obuleche* or the royal father through his cabinet, depending on the nature of the matter. A case would be handled by the councilor of the affected area before it moves to the Eze`s cabinet. When misunderstanding occurs between people living within one hamlet, village, kindred, family unit, etc one of the persons affected in the conflict is expected to report it to the vgeneral meeting of those areas for hearing, adjudication or arbitration.

In some areas, two gallons of wine and colanuts are involved. This is called *'izaa ikpe'* it lies on the person who first complain to first present the matter. Then the person complained against could respond. After a cross examinations, the body would enter into a privy meeting or synocracy (Igba Izu or Ije lee izu) with witnesses or interview the witness in the presence of the complainant and acussed. Thereafter, they will come out with ther ruling (synergic decision).If the ruling is accepted by the two, the matter ends there if not it proceed via the aggrieved to a higher body for hearing.

However, threats to life, poisoning land matters etc are handled first by elders before taken to *Obuechi* or court, but in most recent times, the Ezillo town union known as Federated Ezhiulo General Assembly (FEGA) or their agents (organs) handles matters that are civil and are more critical in nature. Cases that are beyond human understanding are handed over to God or the earth goddess, Ali through oath taken by anybody on an issue, such issue is allowed to rest till at least one year; if nothing happens, the person who took the oath will be taken around *Afor market* after the ceremony of *Inya Onu* which is the sole responsibility of the opponent who made him take the oath. If it is land matter or property the person whio survived the oaththen claims ownership of the property or land.

The use of masquerade to settle dispute is common in Ezillo. Masquerade also mediates in conflict issues and often resolves themisunderstandings. Conflicts within the area designated for masquerades *Ode or Omebe* need not to be reported as the matter reports itself through quarrel which the masquerade abhors during its stay with its people on earth. The decision of the masquerade in arbitrating over any matter is final. However, that was when Christianity and modernity had not taken root as they have done today. Today, the bodies mentioned above could perform this function through delegation or committee and still achieve the same result.

3.2.3.6Colanut (Oji)
The ceremonies of kola *(Oji`s)* presentation are a good example of the central value of life (Ndu) among the Igbo Ezillo. It is the first act in any social gathering. Whether the gathering is abouyt settling dispute, marriage, friendship, and funeral (in some parts of Igboland not in Ezillo where kola is never used in funeral). According to Enuke, (2015) kolanut is a common fruit in Nigeria, he posits that the fruit is planted mostly in Western region, eaten mostly in Northen region, and symbolically reverenced in Eastern region and other parts of Nigeria. It

is eaten raw. The process of kolanut breaking and eating between Ezillo and Ezza serves to strenhgten kinship bund and reduce conflict.

3.5 Study Population

The population for this study consisted of adult (18 years and above) residentsof Ezillo community comprising of Ezillo people, Ezza-Ezillo people and other groups in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.However, specifically involved are those who have consistently resided in Ezillo for atleast a decade.

3.6 Data collection Methods

3.6.1 Secondary Data

The secondary data used for this study came from books, peer reviewed journal articles, magazines, periodicals and reports.

3.6.2 Primary Source

Observation

The non-participant observation technique was adopted.The patterns of inter-group interactions that are relevant to Ezillo land conflict were observed and recorded. Preference were given to the non-participant observation technique, because, it is expected to provide on-the-spot opportunity to observe the patterns of inter and intra-group interactions, without being actively involve, in the events being observed. I visited places considered to be a spot where the people un-wine after the day's work and listen as well as observe social interaction. Specifically, the non-participant observation achieved observation understanding and explanation of social process realities in their natural forms and patterns. The reality of networks and community development, show of supremacy and some historical processes like kolanut breaking, masquerade, marriage, festivals, and religious worships.

Archival Documents

Substantial bodies of archival materials on the Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo conflicts were sought for,in the National Archives in Enugu. These included colonial Intelligence, and confidential reports on communities in Abakaliki districts and Provinces, which include Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo. Official document of colonial officials and some local leaders, minutes of official meetings, colonial and post-colonial official gazettes and other documents on the many phenomenal land conflicts in Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo are also to be included. These materials were consulted, for detailedinformation on available historical facts, which the discussants and interviewees may not provide.

Key Informant Interview (KII)

Eighteen Key Informant Interviews were conducted.Interviewees were purposively selected. Youth leaders: Ezillo – 2, Ezza – 2; Opinion leaders: Ezillo – 2, Ezza – 2; Politicians: Ezillo – 2, Ezza – 2; Clergies: Ezillo Christian/local shrine priest – 2, Ezza Christian/ local shrine priest – 2. Also interviewed is one law enforcement officers in charge of Ezillo community. The instrument`s target is to engage individual experts, (those listed in the categories above) from relevant, specified areas of competence, relevant to land conflict.

In-depth interview (IDI)

Thirty two In-depth Interviews were held. Male town union executives: Ezillo – 4, Ezza – 4, Female town union executives: Ezillo – 4, Ezza – 4; Community members: Ezillo – 4, Ezza – 4; Ezillo and Ezza representatives in link communities of Abakaliki and Enugu: Ezillo – 4, Ezza – 4. The instrument's target is to get an in-depth detailed data across social strata, from the various groups, for robust insight on the conflict. The purposive sample method was used to select interviewees from each of the community groups, residing outside Ezillo community, who support or fund the Ezillo conflict in any way.

Focus Group Discussion(FGD)

Also, 16 Focus Group Discussions were held. The community groups include Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo groups that make Ezillo community. Elderly male above 59 years: Ezillo – 2, Ezza –2; Elderly female above 59 years: Ezillo – 2, Ezza – 2; Male youth groups: Ezillo – 2, Ezza – 2, Female youth groups: Ezillo – 2, Ezza – 2.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis: while content analysis examined the narratives, KII, IDI and FGD summarised, dwelling on Ezillo and its cultural context, as it affects land conflict.

3.6 Methodology Matrix

Research objectives	IDI	KII	FGD	Archival Research
Historical processes and Ezillo land conflict	✓	✓	✓	✓
Existing contentions on authority over land in Ezillo	✓	✓	✓	
The implication of conflict on identity in Ezillo	✓	✓	✓	
Supremacy contests reverberating Ezillo land conflict	✓	✓	✓	
the social networks that sustained the conflict	✓	✓	✓	
Impact of land conflict on community development	✓	✓	✓	

3.7 Ethical consideration

In order for this study to be ethically responsive, fundamental ethical risks were avoided using oral and written permission that sort for consents and approval of the respondents before the commencement of the interview process. All participants were duly informed, and allowed to make free decisions on whether to participate, or not in the study.

3.8 Methodological Limitations and Challenges

3.8.1 Interviewees Mentality

Before I entered the research field I did some self observation about the area being guided by members of my church located in the area. Then I had several discussions with my translators, my translators are Pastor Abel Ebenyi and I found out some information about Ezillocommunity. First I went to meet the Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo Almagamented Community Town Union President General I explained my purpose of the research and I asked them to provide me household list in terms of Ezillo andEzza village and clan composition of the community. They agreed to provide me the list and I had informal conversation with them about Socio, Economic background of the villages relevant to the conflict. Most of the other Executive and Members of the Town Union the Presidents introduced me to say that, the people who live in that area have been displaced several times by war and conflicts over controversial authority claims over land. The Federal and State Government and NGOs have already provided as emergency relief intervention, miscellaneous aid to increase daily life; children school education, housing, and health. Because of that assistance people become dependency mentality. The Government officers and NGOs workers used to come to the villages and they meet people and they also filled questionnaire for selected beneficiaries for their projects. According to the informant, people used to tell incorrect data to receive emergency relief and intervention benefitsdonated by government and NGOs. Most of the informants asked me to beware of thosekinds of people. Sometimes, also,some other people voluneers information with the premonition that some kind of future welfare programme is in the pipeline that will impact the people on the basis of what information they provides to researchers. So, if providingcorrect information is perceived to jeopadise chances of getting more benefit, they simply provide incorrect data.

However, before starting household interview I explained the purpose of the research. Some people asked, if I answer the questions what benefits can I received. But all respondent did not ask that question. I feel that people were not telling truth. Some Ezza and Ezillo people who live few meters away in Ezillo are very aggressive in response to the questions. They said that, the government and NGOs consider only Ezza and Ezillo people related to them first forsupply of all benefits to them. They are not caring about the common people affected by the war. Some of these respondents had big contradictions with the Federal, State and local governments as well as the NGOs. In fact, the see anybody approaching them for researcher as agent of the government or NGOs considered as biased in their intervention.

3.8.2 PeculiarSociohistorical Suspicion

Some Ezillo people who live in most war affected areas such as Isimkpuma, Egu-Achara among others,still have memory of historical socialisation that Ezillo and Ezza relations is conflictual and so thefears of Ezza invaders to Ezillo is the beginning of wisdom. Consequently, there is daily self-help control, survailance and intelligence gathering structure across Ezillo community that make access to the community a bit difficult as all unfamiliar visitors are subjected to search and trailing to final destination for safety. The Ezillo people feel that Ezillo identity is threatened by allowing Ezza people to occupy most of Ezillo land. As they mentioned it passively (my translators were very familiar to the issues on ground) by recounting Ezza its local administrative structure in Ezillo. This structure recognised Ezza autonomy and identity as different from Ezillo peoplee.But Ezillo people especially women have fear forEzza unpredictable action. Some women rejected the household interviews because of that reasons. Some Ezillo people have sympathy for the Ezza on the basis of inter-group marriage and some are Ezza soldiers. They think, if they speak something it can be transmitted to either Ezza or Ezillo people then it will be a problem for their personal security.

3.8.3 Security Problem

In Isimkpuma Ezillo, I had bad experience. During my field research period Isimkpuma Motor Park Market was my last area of coverage. Before I left my translator, I organized one focus group discussion; unfortunately I couldn't do it because of insecurity andthreat of violence. My translator and the faceless street boys had mild altercation over whose interest our research isrepresenting. The boys refusing to be identified insisted we settle them or risk

disruption of the focus group discussion. This incident created apprehension and my discussant gathered refused to participate in that focus group discussion.

3.8.4 Language

Language problem was one of the barriers I faced also. Central Ibo dialect and the Ezillo and Ezza language assents are barely similar. The percentage of my indigenous Ibo language speaker not hearing the Ezillo or Ezza language assent is higher than the Ezillo or Ezza speaker hearing my Ibo language assent. I don't know speaking mostEzillo or Ezza words. I decided to use translators. I received three translators support; my translators are from Ezillo, Ezza-Ezillo and Ezza. They did good job for me. First I explained my purpose of the research, then I showed them my interview schedules and guide and discussed with them. But sometimes while conducting the interviews they provided the translations what interviewee said. But majority of questions were open and sometimes interviewee took long time to respond. The respondents provided answers for some questions four or five minutes they provided translations within one minute. My problem was I did not know whether they include or not all information what interviewee said. Another issue was I had to depend on them finding the background information in Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo speaking areas.

3.8.5 Transportation

Transport was another challenge. My Residence was in Enugu town close to Ezillo community in a neighbouring state outside Ebonyi State. I did not have transport problem when I was conducting interviewe with Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo migrants resident in Enugu as displaced in the diaspora. The Town and locations of my respondents are very near to my resident place I didn't face any transport problem. Ezillo is roughly situated 12 km away form Enugu roads are also good and within 45 minutes one can reach to Ezillo. But to transvers Ezillo villages with very poor road network was not easy to travel. My translator suggested going by hired motor bikes and that was serious money as each of the two bikes use were collecting #4000 (Four Thousand Naira) dairly. I decided to find out temporary residence in Ezillo. My Translators advised me that that was little bit dangerous. They told me still some people help the Ezza and Ezillo people as mercinaries who do background survailance and intelligence gathering that could implicate a stranger on sensitive mission like mine. They discouraged me by concluding that this situation poses insecurity for residence. After that advice, I continued coming from Enugu. Despite that the journey from Enugu is roughly 1hr :30 minutes drive, the roads are very difficult as vehicles are stopped up to ten check points. Each check point took 20-25 minuets to check passengers; bus also has to wait for their permeation. I daily travelled from Enuguto Ezillo and that was very hard experience.

3.8.6 Sensitive nature of land

A number of other challenges bordering on the sensitive nature of land and the sensibility of the respondents and discussants were experienced in conducting the research, posing limitations to the methodology. The main challenges relate to the sensitivity of land issues, the ongoing transition in south east region involving relocation from trouble areas like in Northern Nigeria back home some victims of Boko Haram and Herdmen riot. As some hitertho displaced migrant return, they join those locally dispossessed of their land by Ezillo conflict, relocation and identification of land potion become problematic. Land is by its nature a sensitive issue, but it is even more sensitive in a post-conflict context like Ezillo community where every new entrant is immediately identified and activities placed under survailance by the homebased actors. Some of the issues the research set out to generate information about are inherently controversial, and they tend to engender strong emotions from those involved. Examples include historical processes that inform conflict, existing contention on authority over land, identityand supremacy issues in the conflict, conflict networks and the developmental consequences of conflict in the community.

The area is characterised by harsh physical terrain and limited infrastructure. While every effort was made to plan the field trip, make use of local contacts, and to provide adequate notice of the dates for visiting specific locations, accessing groups of people to discuss with, key informants and information still proved challenging. Many potential key informants could not be accessed because they were repeatedly traveling outside the community for security reasons to avoid being trapped down by their opponents, others were otherwise regularly engaged in meetings connected with their official community duties.

It was also evident that the issues of interest to the research have been the subject to many perceived fruitless tresearch projects in the community. As a result, some of the key informants and community members in FGDs were rather sceptical about the research mission, wondering how different its findings would be from similar exercises undertaken in the past. Although the private sector are key actors in land matters, particularly as investors interested in gaining access to large tracts of land in Ezillo community, they are often not willing to engage in such exercises. This may well be their reaction to the negative publicity they have been subjected to over land acquisitions, as they are often depicted as the villains. As a result, it proved very difficult to gain access to private sector actors and get their perspectives on the issues. Only few private sector actors were available and granted

interview.Similar difficulties were experienced in getting access to political office holder and information on ongoing emergency funding for the displaced victim and the distribution of relief materials to curshion the effect of conflict in Ezillo. Although there are many initiatives being implemented in support of land governance as post-conflict relief and intervention, the researcher had challenges obtaining up-to-date information on which of the actors got what, when, where and why.

The researchwas alive to the above challenges and had made every effort to mitigate the impacts they had on the findings and analysis. Given the controversies and strong positions of different respondents on the key issues for the research, efforts had been made to triangulate information and data through the use of diverse sources of information that include the local church of my denomination Deeper Life Bible Church, Ezillo District)national government archive, local government library, civil society group, communities leader and members, as well as opinion leaders. The cordial relationship established during the preliminary pilot study paid off for me as the fear of been seen as a stranger was reduced to the bearest minimum.

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Discussion of Findings

4.1.1 A Historical Examination of Ezillo Land Conflict

Ezillo land conflict has historical trajectory that transcends generations spread across pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial eras with contemporaneous oral accounts of related events and social processes. At least two versions of the narrative have consistently survived till date. Interestingly, the conclusions of each version are largely not far from the other. Despite usual distortions and exaggerations associated with undocumented oral account of origin, scholarly attempts have been made to validate the content of these two versions of Ezillo oral accounts origin that survived. Such efforts succeed mainly because oral accounts especially in non-literate societies unlike in literate societies is still largely known as a vibrant alternative research tool (Afigbo, 1965:26). The issue of who settled in Ezhiulo first is sparsely discussed in literature (Ugbo *et al*, 2008; Enuke, 2015). Jones, (1961) in attempt to proffer reasons for migration posits that ancient wars, expansion, safety or search for more lucreative trade and fertile land for farming cannot be ruled out as the push factors of migration. In this wise he affirms that though nobody is sure of the time of Ezillo migration, but added that it was believed to have taken place between 13th and 17th Centuries. Also, it was generally believed that the Mgbo stock came to Ezhiulo through Uru-agbo to Amofia (Enuke, 2011). There are two versions of oral account of who settled in Ezhiulo first. According to one version, the people of Ezhiulo trace their origin to one Ebenyi Ali Aja who first settled Ezhiulo. The name Ezhiulo in Ezillo social thought denotes "*good house of accommodation and hospitality" (*Enuke, 2010*).

In other words, the name describes the land, the people as well as their values. The word Ezhiulo was later misspelt by the British as "*Ezillo*", when they first reached the area in 1905 (Enuke, 2015). Furthermore, the oral account state that Ebenyi Ali Aja migrated from a town called Amofia Mgbo in search of uninhabited place to hunt wild animals. In the process, he

discovered a vast area today called Ezillo where he hunted for several years without meeting any rival. According to the accounts, another individual called Agbaja Ota Okpa later emerged to hunt in the same area and encountered Ebenyi Ali Aja. Feeling threatened, Ebenyi retreated and returned to where he migrated from, Amofia Mgbo, reinforced and came back to Ezillo with bands of hunters to secure Ezhiulo from Agbaja Ota Okpa who he considered as an invader.

A warrior, loyal to Ebenyi Ali, their master, led each of the seven bands. In a matter of days, Ezillo was surrounded from all directions, recaptured and occupied. In order to observe their periodic rest and share their daily catch under the supervision of Ebenyi, a makeshift rest house was constructed on the captured territory. With time, each group had its own rest houses from where settlements started springing up. Each bandleader became the founder of their respective scattered settlements that later transformed into the main seven hunting and farming villages in Ezillo (Ogoja Provincial Annual Report, 1936: 3).

As a trade route, migrants from other towns across northeastern Igboland (NEI) and beyond frequently stopped over at Ezillo, especially, at the rest houses, to exchange their products for bush meat caught by Ezillo hunters. This exchange platform eventually evolved into major markets, village squares and playgrounds, which are commonly found today in Ezillo. Ezillo is also a gateway connecting major towns in NEI and other Igbo trading people of Abam, Aro, Ohafia, Edda, Issu, Awka, Onitsha, Nnewi as well as the people of Ijaw, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Edo, Efik, Anang, Ibibio in present day South-South and the people of Idoma, Ukelle, Igede, Igala and Tiv in today North central states of Nigeria (Ogoja Provincial Report, 1936). There was a strong intergroup relation that thrived among these various groups before colonialism. Cultural exchange existed across NEI and beyond. Inter-group invitation to festivals, burial, farm labour exchange, and farm proceeds' exchange, land pledging, land gift, kola tenancy, farm labour patronage and labour migrations built robust land relation across the area that significantly intensified social interaction with other groups like Ezza group (Wallace, 1926; Ogoja Province Annual Report 1931:532).

Another version of the oral account of origin, states that the origin of the people of Ezillo could be traced to one Mgbom Eze who hails from Ishieke Izzi. Put differently, they (the Ezillo people) are perceived as migrants from Ishieke Izzi in present Ebonyi and IkwoLocal Government Area (LGA) (Onwe, *et al*, 2015). A search for a free fertile land to practice their hunting and gathering occupation led them to discover Ezillo land which was then

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uninhabited. According to oral account, Ezillo people are from Mgbo clan whose ancestral father is called Mgbom Eze who migrated to Mgbo from Ishieke Izzi. This account for the affinity between Ezillo, Mgbo and Izzi people (Enuke, 2011). Despite distortions from reconstruction of these myths of common origin based on prevailing social situations and interpretations, it is obvious that there are some similarities in the two versions of the Ezillo myth of origin. Thus, while Ezillo people came from Amofia Mgbo according to the first version, Mgbo people themselves originated from Ikwo and Izzi according to the second version. This account is supported by notable documented historical accounts (Ituma, 1986; Ofomata, 2002; Ogba, 2005). Who are these Ikwo and Izzi is answered by Colonial Intelligence Report NAE, (1911; File No.7644, *Vol. I,* p: 33) and Isichei, (1976) both agree in their different report that Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo (in order of seniority) are kindred from one ancestral father called Ezekuna Ekumaenyi known to be a great farmer and warrior.

According to Afoke and Nworie, (2010), Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo settled originally at Amana, Amagu, and Akpelu respectively but loyal to Ezekuna Ekumaenyi. From these settlements, their descendants fanned across the broad plains of northeastern Igboland (NEI), in an insatiable quest for land and this inevitably, brings them into conflict with other Igbo and non-Igbo groups as shown on the map bellow. The desire for land was stronger than kinship and by late 19th century, the Ezza, Ikwo and Izzi were locked in bitter and protracted internecine wars. Their land hunger sprang from their unique ecological context of agriculture[4]. Ezza and its neighbours in the map bellow, engaged in several wars. Military service, for age-grades of fighting age, was compulsory (Afoke and Nworie, 2010). The population of some defeated foes were forced into exile, their village raised and occupied, or, in many cases, the vanquished surrender and join the victors who assimilated them as colony. Okpoto, Agba, Ezza Effium, Ezzamgbo, Oshiri (now in NEI); Ezzagu and Amagunze (now in Enugu state), Ukelle and Agala (now in Benue state). Ezza lies on a plain about 300 feet above sea level on the western side of Abakaliki Division (Ogoja Provincial Annual Report, 1910:261). The people construct Ezza identity around their occupational life, culture and social organization. They operate patrilineage, age-grade hierarchical structure, gerontocratic leadership model and village system social structure (Afoke and Nworie, 2010). Generally, Ezza people are perceived as brave, cheerful, industrious, and above all truthful (Cudjoe,

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[4]This is a context derived from single-minded and tireless dedication to farming rice that is seasonal. Unlike other parts of Igboland, the planting season is longer keeping the NEI farmers waiting too long to harvest the tuber and seed.

1953) but fighters, usurpers and expansionist (McFarlan, 1956). These tendencies generate fear and suspicion about Ezza.

In order to prosecute these wars, all Ezza people are groomed from childhood in warfare as a tradition. Warfare is an important part of the customary rites of passage a child must pass through to become a man or a woman (Isichei, 1976). The history of Ezza expansion is therefore the history of conquest and annexation. In some cases, however, the defeated wilfully surrendered and accepted the over-lordship of the Ezza to avoid destruction. Amuda village is an example, founded by one Okpoto who preferred to be colonised by their Ezza conquerors rather than migrate (Cudjoe, 1953:89). Such conquered settlements are called *Ndiegu*, or the frontier settlers where young Ezza warriors are resettled (Cudjoe, 1953:90). The Ezza community that prosecute war abroad is called *ndiazu*. The foregoing is succinctly captured below on**Fig 2 Map,** showing the pre and colonial interaction routes within and around the north-eastern Igbo land and other Igbo people into other non-Igbo neighbours.
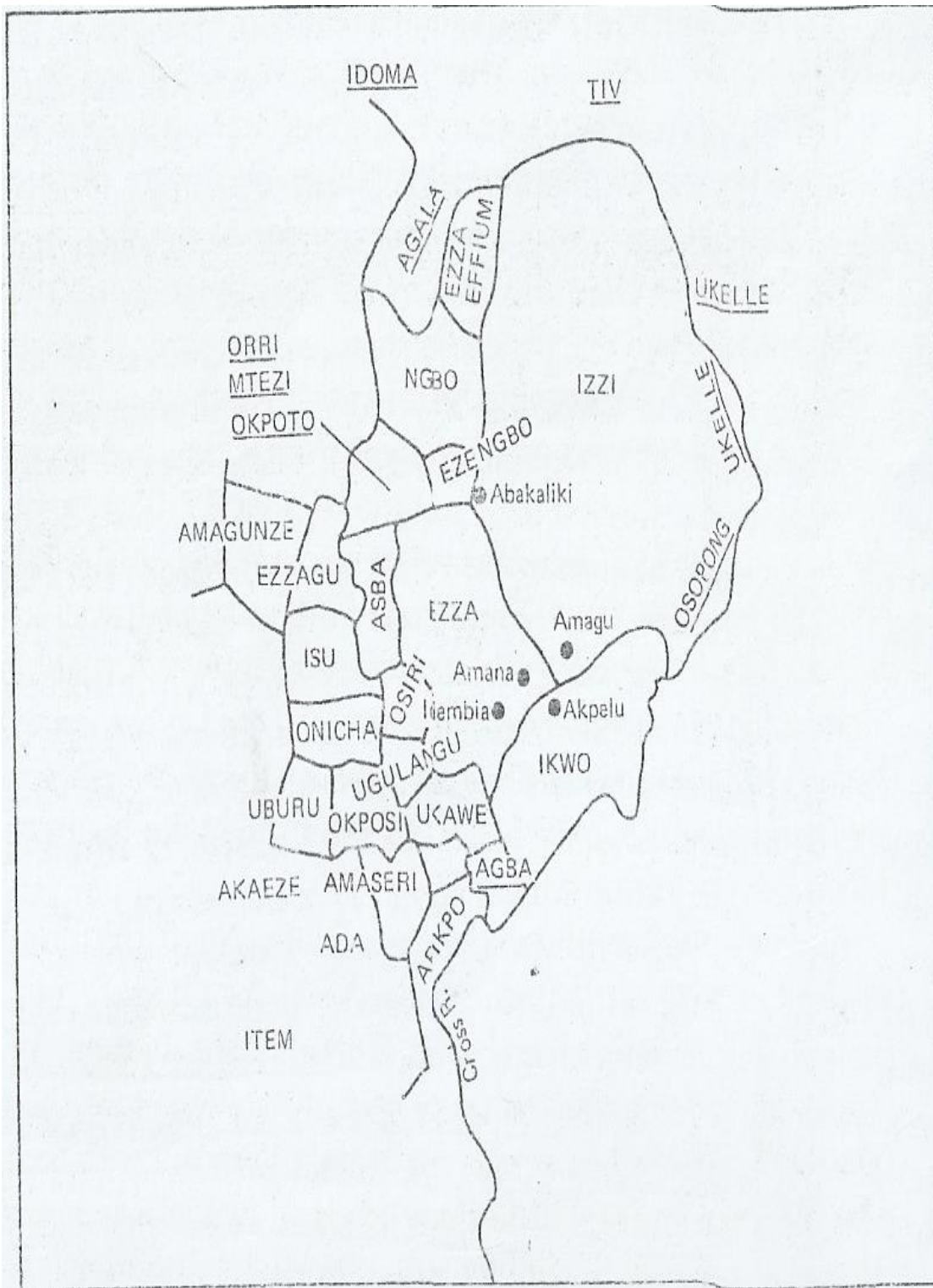
Fig. 2: Show the map of the North-Eastern Igbo and their neighbours (Isichei, 1976).

Consequences of Ezza`s history of warfare, colonisation, assimilating and displacement of other groups by dispossessing them of their land, include resentment and suspicion other groups have against the Ezza as expansionist. Thus, suspicion and fear of domination largely inform conflict between the Ezza in relationship with other groups (McFarlan, 1956:143). This informed further enquiry for deep insight into precolonial oral account of northeastern Igbo people. Records in Colonial Intelligence Report NAE, (1911; File No.7644, Vol. I, p: 33) documents that NEI comprising Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo were group of three sub-Igbo ethnic groups originally called the *Wawa group*.[5] The colonial authority identified them as sub-Igbo ethnic groups and created Abakaliki Division under Ogoja Province for NEI. Whereas Intelligence Report on Ezza clan was compiled by G.B.G Chapman (1930) then the Assistant District Officer, that of Izzi clan was compiled by J. G. C. Allen, Assistant District Officer. In addition, D. H. Shelton, Assistant District Officer, compiled the Intelligence Report on Ikwo clan.

These facts of common history, ancestral ties and shared Igbo identity point to a strong sense of homogeneity and ethno-historical cultural links among Ezillo (from Mgbo of Izzi clan), Ezza-Ezillo[6] (from Ezza clan), and Ikwo peoples. While Shelton, (1930) identified the people as Igbo sub-group in NEI; they were observed as Wawa group by the colonial masters and created Abakaliki Division out of Ogoja Province for them. To the colonial authority, Ezillo people, like their kindred in Izzi, Ikwo and Ezza are largely an agrarian people. This somewhat conforms as McFarlan`s (1956) and Basden`s (1966) submissions stressed that intergroup interactions within the NEI have been intense and complex particularly as it relates to occupational and cultural exchange. Descendants of NEI people including Ezillo people expectedly took after their ancestors and today contributing immensely in agricultural revolution in Nigeria. It follows, therefore, that in rationalising precolonial Ezza first contact with Ezillo as migrant labourers, goes beyond economic survival or expansion drive to the facts of their sharing common ancestral ties and Igbo identity. Like other groups in Ishielu area and beyond, Ezillo hosted Ezza migrant labourers first for farming services as brothers.

According to Brayne-Baker`s Intelligence Report on the Ishielu Area, Abakaliki Division, Ogoja Province (1936), reveals that:

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[5]This is the name assigned to Igbo sub-ethnic group peopled by Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo, Ohaukwu, Izziahmgbo, Mgbo and Ezillo located in the North-eastern Igboland formerly known as Abakaliki Division under Ogoja Province (see Chapman, 1930; Shelton, 1930) now constituting Ebonyi North and South Senatorial zone, Ebonyi State South-eastern Nigeria.

[6] This is the name assigned to Ezza people settlers in Ezillo community.

> ...during the past ten years preceding the arrival of colonial authority in Ezillo area, there has been considerable influx of the virile and land hungry Ezza tribe into Ezillo. Based on good will and in return for appropriate presents and labour, these immigrants are allotted specific portions of Ezillo land for farming and residence. On the other hand, other villages of Ezillo area are as follows: Nkalagu, Iyono, Amezu, Umuhuale, Nkalaha, Obeagu and Obeagu Ezza (Bayne-Baker`s, 1936: 6-7).

At this time, while Ezillo farmers in their farms used these migrant farmers, the labourers were also interested in exploring new areas to settle down for farming. These were the target and needs that characterised the Ezillo and Ezza first contact. In order to meet this target of farming settlement the needs for farm labour by their host Ezillo must be satisfied. Hence, there was the emergence of reciprocal exchange platform that exchanged farmland for farm labour. The platform evolved into a very strong good will and mutual trust that metamorphoses into inter-marriage relations between Ezillo and Ezza. This was the beginning of first Ezza-Ezillo generations having Ezillo and Ezza parents. As their population increased, Ezza-Ezillo identity increasingly gained salience leading to self-consciousness. Request for land allocation became legitimate based on inheritance by birth.

A further examination of archival records shows that both Ezillo and Ezza people are not only farmers but also successful traders who farm and trade on farm produce (especially yam, rice and cassava). While Ezillo unlike Ezza are more into artisanship, the Ezza are more nomadic and into merchandising of farm labour as labour migrants who settle anywhere and work for other groups on their farms for returns either as land, wife, money or any other valuable. Ezza unlike Ezillo sell their military capabilities as mercenaries to other communities. These qualities encouraged and sustain their expansionist project targeted at expanding their territorial and sphere of influence. (Ogoja Provincial Annual Report, 1911:551). These values are very significant selling point in Ezza history, culture and social interaction that shapes reality of their social relations with other groups. Indeed the study revealed that some of the other Igbo sub-groups referred to them as 'war like' [7]fighters who always want to own and control everything particularly land, political power and economic opportunities.

In addition, both Ezillo and Ezza people share common method of social control located in a strong belief in the sacredness of land along with spirit of *Ali* (Earth) which they believe control both the living and the dead. Paying attention to the agrarian lifestyle in NEI area as

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[7]Cleverly, subtle, indirect and ingenious warmongers.

buttressed earlier and the Ezza expansionist tendencies, Jones (1961) argued that Ezza`s passion for land acquisition sprang also from their hoeing culture and their single-minded and tireless dedication to farming. This culture is one built around yam, cassava and rice cultivation interpreted in rites of passage as traditional evidence of complete manhood like warfare. Those who scale through the test are called *Okaji (*great farmer) just like those who scale through warfare test mentioned earlier are called *Onyibe* or *Onyiribe* (Victor or conqueror) in Ezza local parlance. Land, *Okaji* and *Onyibe* are inseparable titles in NEI that survived colonialism till today.

Upon arrival in 1905, the British saw Ezillo as a strategic agricultural hub inhabited by resilient farmers (Isichei, 1976). They also noticed a massive influx of migrant farmers and traders, which made this gateway community economically vibrant. Many of these migrants settled and got integrated into the Ezillo society. Consequently, this culture of unrestricted accommodation of strangers in Ezillo afforded large number of immigrants to come from different cultural backgrounds and settled in Ezillo prominent, among them were the Ezza people. This later accelerated acculturation in the community. When the British reached northeastern Igboland in 1905, the process of Ezza expansionism and warfare was continuing to be a threat even to the colonial administration of the region (Chapman, 1930:10). Consequently, boundary barriers were raised and called Ezza limits to check Ezza expansionist tendency. Subsequent Ezza attempts to cross the natural frontiers where they existed in order to overrun Ikwo, Izzi and other border communities were resisted using the British military might. However, other colonial structures aimed at classifying and identifying the people northeastern Igboland were constructed by the colonial masters (Isichei, 1976).

Described as undoubted, unbounded and unrelenting warriors of Igboland (Ofoke, and Michael, 2010), the Ezza people have a history of military capability and mercenary services. Their gallantry in prosecuting war against their opponents is not strange to even the colonial regime. They are engaged as mercenaries in many places like Effium, Mgbo, Oshiri, Ezillo, Nkalagu, Ohofia, Edda and Abriba. Their potent warfare strategies easily overwhelmed their opponents into surrendering in defeat in favour of Ezza client who pay for their services (Isichie, 1976). Ezza`s gallantry and bravery contributed largely to the sustained massive opposition against colonialism among in Igbo land (Wallace, 1926). The original home of the mainstream Ezza people present is Ezza south and Ezza north LGA of Ebonyi State (Ugbo *et al*, 2008). The European imperialism came into old Abakaliki Division in 1905. Ezza people

played a leading role rising to challenge colonial regime in the region (NAI CSO26/147 (File No. 26804); Wallace, 1926; Ituma, 1986). Although migrating from one location to another was traditional to the Ezza people, their war with the colonial army pushed many more Ezza men to invade and occupy new areas now called Ezza colonies, outside their ancestral homeland. Ezza Effium, Ezza-Ojiegbe and Ezza-Ezillo are some of these new Ezza settlements outside their ancestral home. Ezza people occupying these areas are collectively referred to as Ezza in diaspora (Echiagu, 1998; Isichei, 1977; Jone, 1961).

Ezza and Ezillo contact historically occurred in two phases as noted earlier. The first phase was before colonisation by the British and in form of survival provoked migration in search of farmland to farm and farm for others as migrant labourers. This was done in exchange for farm land or wives. The second phase of contact was during colonization and informed by Ezillo`s need for military services that will support Ezillo warriors dislodge Mgbo from occupying Ezillo land. However, while the first contact was largely free from conflict due to trust and confidence, same cannot be said of the second contact marked by suspicion and fear. Consequently, the history of land conflict in Ezillo is the history of land-based supremacy wars among kindred, Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo. Consequently, the chronological examination of land conflicts in Ezillo cannot be complete without reference to these historic supremacy struggles.

Land conflicts in Ezillo areas were characterised by struggle for space and against land encroachment by immigrants that challenge the authority of Ezillo people as indigenous owners of land in Ezillo area. The British colonial authority met the conflict and intervened to stop it. Prevention strategies were drawn. These included military patrol, arrest, prosecution and imprisonment of offenders in the then newly established Abakaliki courts and prison. Despite these interventions, the Mgbo continued to appropriate and exercise control over some Ezillo land particularly in the border areas against the will of the Ezillo people (Ogoja Provincial Report, 1936). Consequently, the Ezillo people found the need to invite and engage the military services of Ezza warriors who were feared and deferred by Mgbo people having earlier encountered the Ezzas in bloody wars of boundary dispute and supremacy struggle. As already noted, the first phase of Ezillo-Ezza contact was unplanned, having been provoked by spontaneous migration of farm labourers. The second phase of their contact, on the other hand, was characterised by consciously constructed contract.

Notwithstanding colonial interventions, the elders of Ezillo people travelled to Onueke the ancestral home and political headquarters of the Ezza nation in early 1920s, [8]entered into a strategic military treaty with Ezza opinion leaders to provide mercenary services for Ezillo (Ugbo and Igiri, 2008). Specific targets, compensations and conditions informed the collective bargain between Ezillo and Ezza people. For instance, it was a mandate for Ezza warriors to join Ezillo warriors and fight Mgbo people to recover the occupied Ezillo territory. The land in contention is at the borderline between Mgbo and Ezillo. Secondly, that the invited Ezza warriors and Ezillo warriors will together be settled permanently on the occupied land so recovered from Mgbo as buffer to secure it from future attack and invasion. In addition, that this settlement will serve as permanent compensation for Ezza military service rendered to Ezillo (Dike, 1983). In addition, it was agreed that a symbolic *Imabe Ogbu*[9] *and Igba ndu*[10]will be performed by the elders of the two parties. It was also agreed that written agreement between Ezillo and Ezza be drawn. Consequently, with targets, compensations and conditions well spelt out, Ezza elders agreed and directed a community in Ezza land called Izzo community to provide Ezillo people with their needed warriors for prosecution of the war and recovery of occupy lands in Ezillo. This interaction and treaty is aptly captured in Duru (2009:23), thus:

> An agreement between Ezillo and Ezza on other sundry conditionality of living together in Ezillo land was drawn following the Ezza elders directive. The agreement provides that while Ezza warriors and Ezillo warriors were to share and co-habit borderland between Ezillo and Mgbo, they must recognise the authority of their host over Ezillo land. Expression of identity by Ezza warriors must not overshadow indigenous cultural values of their host community. It provided that loyalty to Ezillo traditional authority must not be divided under any guise. Tributes, rent and royalties from Ezillo land must be paid as required by the laws of the land. After the agreement, the blood oath traditional processes were performed to concretise and activate the treaty heralding the release of the warriors to their Ezillo host. The war was fought and won by the Ezillo with support of Ezzas warriors. After the war, both parties lived peacefully together until issues of migration and population pressure, identity supremacy suspicion, access and authority, mutual fears of domination evolved to transform social harmony and stability into conflict between both parties (Duru, 2009:23).

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[8]Mbah and Nwangwu, 2014, p.685

[9]This is a traditional process of land allocation for residential, resettlement or farm layout a community elders and the traditional ruler perform as a customary transfer of legitimacy over a certain potion of land to an indigene or a settler who demands it and has community confidence. It is symbolised by the planting in one section of the land a tree called *Ogbu*

[10] This is terms is traditional oath or covenant taking involving exchange of blood done to cement an agreement.

There was another massive influx of Ezza people from mainstream Ezza communities (in Ezza north and south LGA in Ebonyi state) into Ezillo not long after the Ezillo-Mgbo war ended in late 1920s. These later migrants contributed in Ezza-Ezillo population growth. They also complicated Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo social interactions in terms of the agreed condition of living and its violation. This is because it was difficult for the Ezza immigrants to deny their migrant kindred. Their claim to Ezza identity provoked solidarity and support. These migrants spearheaded the violation of stated conditions and agreement entered between the Ezza elders and Ezillo people concerning Ezza stay in Ezillo (Wallace, 1926).

Beyond these violations was the population pressure within the land areas allocated to Ezza by Ezillo people. This became unbearable and led Ezza to migrate inward into Ezillo and occupation of empty land without permission from Ezillo traditional authority. Some Ezza were accommodated by Ezillo people based on good will they share initially on the basis of Ezza labour and capabilities. This condition continued into a point when there hardly existed in Ezillo clan without Ezza settlers almost outnumbering the host. Presently, Ezza people dominate two villages in Ezillo with the remaining five villages hosting Ezza people almost half of their total population. The initial agreement was that if the war against Mgbo invasion is fought and won by the combine forces of Ezillo and Ezza warriors and the lost land (Egu-Achara) is reclaimed from Mgbo, the two warriors will settle on the land Egu-Achara permanently. **Fig. 3** is a map of Ezillo community showing the strip of Egu-Achara land reclaimed by the combined forces of Ezillo and Ezza warriors originally allocated permanently to the Ezza-Ezillo warriors to settle by Ezillo people. The total area of 38.364Ha [11] was the original area land given to Ezza-Ezillo warriors to permanently settle by the elders and traditional ruler of Ezillo community.

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[11]Mbafu, E. N. and Ogah, N. N., (2008) Survey map of the Ezza-Ezillo land allocation, Surveyor General; Tracing No. EB (N) 028; Nov.
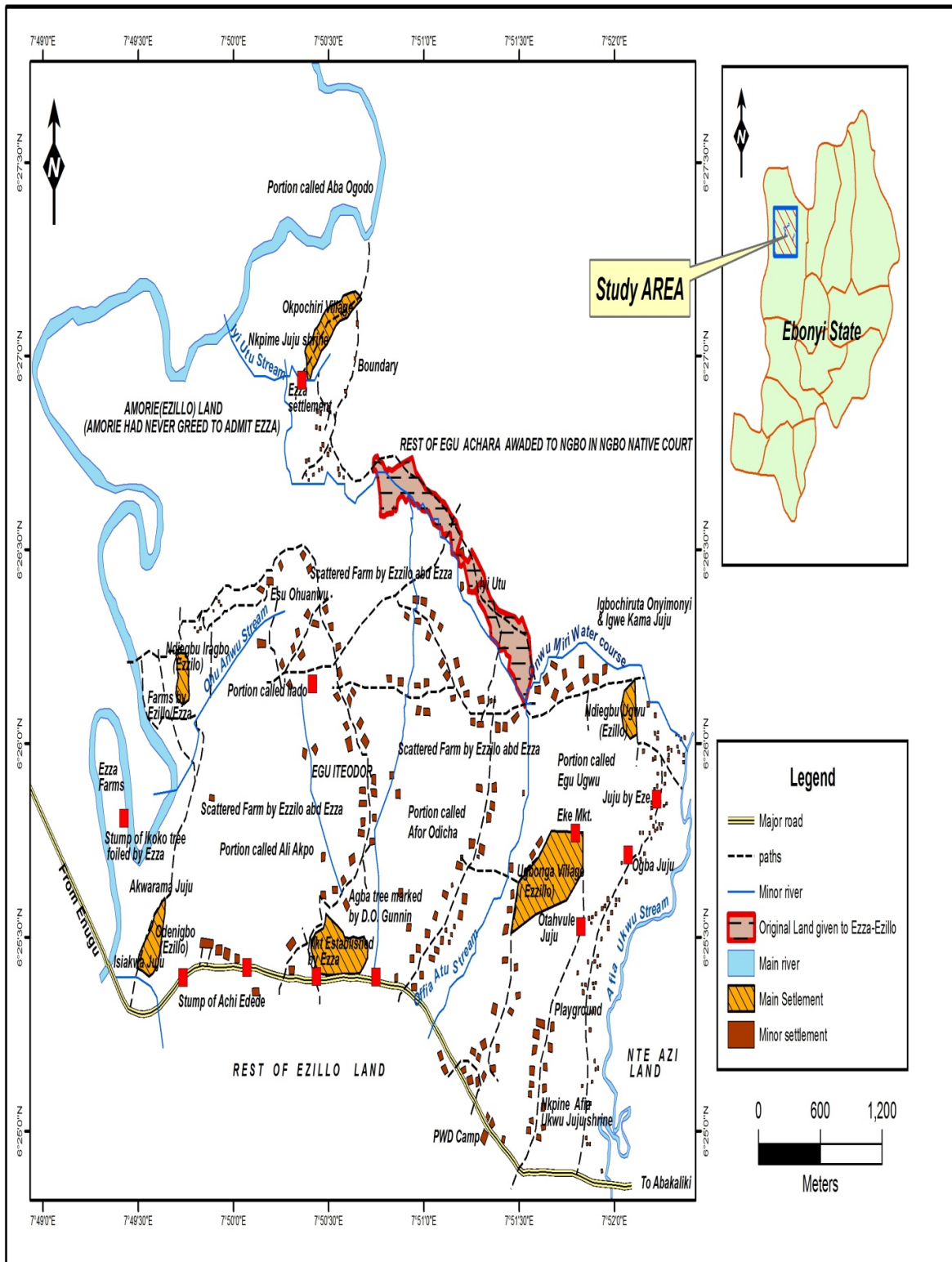
Fig. 3: Shows the map of Ezillo community, strip of land originally allocated to Ezza-Ezillo people by Ezillo.[12]

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[12]Source: GeographyDepartment, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan.

First conflict between Ezillo and Ezza happened in the 1930s over land encroachment, ownership right and identity supremacy struggle. This was after Mgbo people were defeated by the combined team of warriors from Ezillo and Ezza and Ezillo land recovered in late 1920s (McFarlan, 1956:143). Initially, it started as default on the part of Ezza farmers who found it very difficult to release leased land to their original owners without making trouble at the end of its tenement. It degenerated into violation of local indigenous rules and regulations for land acquisition, access and use in Ezillo (Enuke, 2011). However, the Mgbo and Ezillo conflict naturally wind down, this followed the defeat Mgbo suffered from Ezillo and Ezza warriors even when their court cases were still undecided. Another inherent crisis of confidence and legitimation brewing between Ezillo and Ezza people in Ezillo emerged. The dangerous dimensions it took suggest immediate nipping in the bud by both traditional and colonial authorities before it escalates beyond control. The colonial authority`s intervention was drastic. Native police called warrant officers were recruited among the people and deployed within Ezillo to support traditional authority as law enforcement structure in the area. Native courts were set up in Nkalagu, Ezillo and Ishielu to prosecute and convict offenders with the intention to deter prospective troublemakers.

On one hand, the Ezillo people were determined to stop Ezza from further occupation of land in Ezillo using dialogue and court actions starting from 1934. But Ezzas resorted to spontaneous offensive attacks on Ezillo targets razing homes and invading villages. Despite court cases filed by both parties to the dispute still pending, Ezza refused court orders restraining them from further encroachment into Ezillo land. They claim that their land in Ezillo is an inheritance from their warrior ancestors who paid the ultimate price in the war front to secure Ezillo land. They further emphasised that this present Ezza-Ezillo generation must bequeath to their coming generation their entire land in Ezillo without compromising any inch. To this end, the Ezza claimed that neither court decision nor pronouncement can stop them from possessing their possession (Ogoja Provincial Annual Report, NAI CSO 26/147 (File 26804). For instances, Ezza unrestrained push from border area allocated to them into Ezillo hinterland land continued to increasingly encircling and shrinking Ezillo land. This resulted in not only limiting Ezillo inhabitable space but also generating land scarcity that affected communal land allocation for farming purposes in Ezillo. Resistance on the side of Ezillo lead to affray that led to heavy casualty on both side of Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo.

In late 1938, while the colonial authority was busy mapping out Ogoja provincial boundaries, another conflict attack occurred. This mapping project was a major distraction to the colonial authorities from taking any meaningful action against the upheaval knowing that there is still a court case aimed at resolving Ezillo Ezza land ownership question. According to Basden, 1966), the conflict was a continuation of the Ezza expansionist offensive that led to the court case still pending. The Ezillo insisted that only the borderlandallocated to Ezzamust be occupiedtogether with Ezillo people by the invited Ezza people despite the sudden increase in Ezza population in Ezillo because of later Ezza migrant who came to settle with their invited Ezza kinsmen in Ezillo. The population pressure then left Ezza with no choice than to push for space inward Ezillo to accommodate their migrant brothers. It is important to mention that Ezza claim to land ownership at this point was based on inherited allocation and acquired farm land.

The Ezzas therefore felt that the inactivity of the colonial Britain to fully intervene as shown in the stay of action order in the first land case of 1938 was an opportunity for them to really get as much land as possible from Ezillo people before the court judgement. Notwithstanding, the pending court cases on the land issue, the warring parties resorted to guerrilla warfare with heavy casualty on both sides in Ezillo. Many lives were lost and properties destroyed. This unprecedented and precarious dispossession of indigenous land by settlers in Ezillo coexists with abominable denigration of Ezillo cherished cultural practices and customs, as well as intimidation and assault of the people of Ezillo (Enuke, 2011). These actions were taken on the basis that some parts of Ezza land in Ezillo were inherited as compensation allocated to Ezza ancestors for fighting to secure Ezillo community from Mgbo invasion. Whereas other portions of the Ezza inhabited land was legitimately purchase from Ezillo people by Ezza immigrants.

Consequently, the Ezillo people filed another suit challenging the propriety of incessant attacks in Ezillo before a colonial court in Abakaliki seeking a restraining order against the Ezzas who they accused of land encroachment (NAE, No.01985/5:1944). Unfortunately, this case was delayed until 1942, following colonial boundary adjustment program. While the delay lasted, the Ezza resorted to massive overrun and occupation of several villages in Ezillo, chasing people away from their homes and destroyed buildings, taking over farmlands and dispossessing people of their economic trees in Ezillo. By 1942 when the case was decided in favour of the Ezillo, many lives had been lost and properties destroyed. Large portions of land had been occupied symbolising concession to the Ezzas by Ezillo victims of

that conflict. Though the case was decided in favour of the Ezillo not much was done to recover the lost land already occupied by Ezzas in Ezillo given the fact their rightful owners either may have been killed or chased away (Ugbo, *et al*, 2008).

Another confrontational land dispute erupted according to archival record thus:

> Contributing to violent conflict is the unilateral exchange and transfer of communal land to strangers like Ezza by Ezillo local elite who are suppose to ensure communal interest without public consent. This transaction aim at exchanging land for wife, pecuniary interest or farm labour services for these elites. A court case was filed by an Ezillo peasant whose land was taken over by strangers through this kind of transaction between Amuji Ezillo and Ezza people in Ezillo at Nkalagu Native Court in 1951(See AIDIST 2/1/156:566-570).

An interviewee recalled an experience that buttresses the above position thus:

> For instance, a men called Ogbulogu serving as Ezillo representative member of Nkalagu Native Court and a another councillor Nwigwe from Ezillo were revealed by evidence to be behind the influx of Ezza migrants occupying and dispossessing people of their land in Ezillo by force. These leader receive gratification without anybody`s consent from strangers in exchange for communal land. This was revealed when a court action was instituted against unlawful building of houses by Ezza people on one Stephen Oke`s land in Ezillo without his permission. Ogbulogu and Nwigwe confessed they invited the Ezza migrants to settle in Ezillo land without community consent.[13]

The scenario above suggests that several other Ezillo land have been lost to the earlier and latter Ezza immigrants apart from the invited warriors. The implication of this migration and invitation is costly to Ezillo as it short-changed the communal land ownership rights for personal property interest. To this end, it is difficult for the community to sustain its claims to such lands already disposed. The political and economic implications of transferring community inalienable right to its land to individual in exchange for material gain tantamount to land becoming private property. This negates the original meaning of land as socially embedded development resource communally own in Ezillo community. A KII describes the implication of transformation thus:

> The social implication of the foregoing emerges from apparent reconstruction of land relations that inevitably result into duality land meaning and vulnerability to social inequality. Consequentially, politics of land meaning and interpretation have restricted access and use of land. For instance, there is power relation that plays out in whose meaning of land in

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[13]IDI/ Ezillo /Male Farmer and town union executive/ 60 years old/ 3rd July 2016

> Ezillo is legitimate the Ezillo property owners or the Ezza tenants. This has totally reconfigured access and use of land ethos in local land relation.[14]

With this evolving social and economic sphere of local land relation, the survival of peasants whose livelihood depends on land became threatened. Struggle to control land cut across various interests. These interests are for instance, the traditional authority, family heads, state authority and the peasants. Land been a store of value and a cultural asset that project identity, had its implications also across socioeconomic, legal and political lines. That is, it is not enough to have access to land, there is need to also to have established legitimate institution to authorise your authority to exercise power of control over any given land. Without this process, claim of land ownership is deemed illegitimate. Beyond this that is source of most local conflict elsewhere including Ezillo, is the legitimation clash of authorising institutions- statutory institution and traditional institution.

There is dilemma here about which legitimation is legitimate. This crisis of legitimacy and legitimation has led to competition that triggered conflict of interests with the peasant majority exposed to vulnerability. If access to farmland is restricted by this rivalry the peasants are worst hit. It is traditional for peasants to access farmland or land space based on the authority of their traditional rulers and family heads. The people as legitimate consider this. Also, as citizens of a sovereign state we are compel by the constitution to be loyal citizens by obeying Land Use Act (LUA) as an Acts of Parliament. It has overriding power over any other ordinance. The LUA in Nigerian context is aimed at nationalisation of all land in Nigeria vesting power of control on the government to hold on behalf of the people in trust as a trustee (Dike, 1983). This policy integrates both customary and modern land laws as basis for remedy in land cases thereby providing for dual meaning and interpretation to land in the country. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that purchase of land is regarded as legitimate basis for the claim of ownership.

Secondly, the dilemma of this duality in land meaning and interpretation has made a strong case for hitherto glossed over issue access and property. These issues inter faced raise power relation question of "how power is exercised to secure legitimate authority over land". This in many cases has resulted into violent resistance with consequential repression that has fuelled the violence to degenerates into full-scale war. The bottom line is that it is not enough to access land. Access without a legitimate authority to exercise control over land has not provide authentic ownership status. Conversion of access to property ownership is another

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[14]KII/ Ezillo /Male Farmer and Opinion leader/ 60 years old/ 30th July 2016

phase of controversy. It requires the legitimation that involves economic and institutional approach. The economic is involved in the sense that you are receipted for exchanging land for an agreed economic value. The legitimation institution is the involvement of the traditional authority that issues a consent note. Finally, the statutory institution that certifies your ownership right to control the land as legitimate by issuance of certificate of occupancy. Drawing from the import of the foregoing is A FGD that sums thus:

> .....the economic transfer of Ezillo land by Ezillo people to Ezza or anybody with evidence of receipt of economic value in exchange is a justification not to deny the Ezza-Ezillo people or any other their economic right to land in Ezillo while enforcing the customary right to land in the same community. Therefore, it is basic to know that according land its cultural place or value and at the same allowing, it to be sold in economic exchange for money is contradictory. Consequent upon this is inevitable conflict of interest among the stakeholders involved in land relation.[15]

Another KII gave a contrasting idea of the real cause of conflict. He has this to say:

> Beyond allegations and clash of customary and statutory interest in land relation is the reality of political connection to the series of attacks. It has been observed that the political elites from both side of Ezza and Ezza-Ezillo had in several occasion-instigated conflict between the two warring groups purposely and pretend to have solution to the issues of conflict raised if voted to office. Sometime, they use the conflict as medium to settle political differences and political power negotiation.[16]

However, conflict of interests regarding land in Ezillo can be classified to comprise the litigation phase and the confrontational phase.

The litigation phase of the conflict involved the various consideration of conflicting land issues between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo in the court of law. This period was when the two parties were adopting the option of dialogue to resolve their differences. The toleration and dialogue started after the Mgbon-Ezillo war ended. According to Jones, (1961) before 1930, several court cases had been disposed off in the native courts in Nkalagu and Ezillo and some still pending even up to the 30s. Prominent among them was the one that dragged on due to the Ogoja Provincial boundary demarcation exercise until 1942 when it was decided. By this time patience had stretched beyond limit evidenced by attacks here and there due to unlawful land encroachment and occupation. This marked the beginning of the confrontational phase.

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[15]FGD/Ezillo/Male Farmer and Elderly man/ 62 years old/ 1st August 2016
[16] KII/ Ezza /Male Political Scientist/Lawyer and political office holder/ 59 years old/ 4th August 2016

The confrontational phase and the first violent conflict between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo according to archival records:

> .... started in early 1930s while the boundary case between the two parties was still pending at Abakaliki customary court. It was instigated by alleged neglect of court order by parties to the conflict. The order was that parties should stay action on the object in conflict (land) until the case is finally decided. This was the extent of the colonial intervention after abuse of colonial court order was noticed. There was immediate mobilisation of forces that invaded the trouble spots arrested and disarmed perpetrators of violent conflict. The arrested were torture and brutally treated while confinement at Abakaliki prison that some even died in detention. They were compelled to shift their swords and wait for court decision over the undecided case. Subsequently, both Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo withdrew from physical confrontation and resorted to litigation depending on court judgements emanating from the numerous litigations between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo (NAI CSO26/147File26804).

The Ezza people refusal to obey strictly the terms of the earlier agreement and treaty signed with Ezillo people largely contributed to conflict between them. The Ezillo believe that the Ezzas have breached the agreement principally in two ways. First, expanding beyond the limit of the borderline land earlier allocated thereby encircling and pushing Ezillo inward. This has been further compounded by the general perception of Ezzas as expansionists. Secondly, the Ezza takes delight in the denigration of Ezillo cultural values. They are perceived general hostility to the host community cherished customs, culture and traditional practices. It was alleged that such abominable hostility include: desecration of sacred places including looting of artefacts and fishing in sacred streams; harvesting and bringing new yam into Ezillo market before Ezillo people celebrate new yam; unmasking Ezillo masquerades in the public; assaulting Ezillo traditional ruler and his wife in the public; renaming Ezillo markets and schools an attempt to restrict free access to public utilities. Several other allegations from the Ezillo have been made against the Ezza, including engaging in litigations over land and economic trees, acts of intimidation and assault on Ezillo people without any provocation. Indeed, there have been avalanche of court cases between Ezillo and Ezza people decided while some are pending. It is therefore, against this background, that we hereby examine chronologically, the several postcolonial court cases that shaped the litigation landscape of Ezillo community conflict.

Some vital aspect of the Ezillo conflict have either been trivialised or treated defectively by few existing published works suggesting politicisation of the whole processes. There were rather more legal restrain due to the decisiveness of colonial authority compare to the

postcolonial time when stakeholders had more political and economic weight to negotiate justice (Onwe, *et al.*, 2015). This is suggesting that stakeholders then, were not as self-conscious to assert themselves as they are today in Ezillo. This underpins the claims by scholars that Ezillo conflict is motivated more politically than culturally given the ancestral bonding supposedly existing between Ezillo and Ezza people (Dike, 1983; Enuke, 2011). This contrast the current recurring spontaneous, sporadic and intermittent nature of conflict in Ezillo seen from a political angle as largely reflecting politically designed and orchestrated action aimed at mobilising sectional sentiment to strengthen political support and legitimation. The increasing political volatility in Nigeria (Obioha, 2008; Onwuzuruigbo, 2013) generally and in Ebonyi state in particular have provided vent for the proliferation of court cases to claim or counter claims to land ownership in Ezillo. An interviewee has this illuminating account of postcolonial court cases between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo group thus:

> i). Ndeguba Amorie village Ezillo vs Umuezeoka Ezza-Ezillo led by Martias Adaka decided in 1978 at Abakaliki High court in favour of Ndeguba Ezillo.
>
> ii). Mr. Ali Nwede of Ugbonna Ezillo vs Umuezeokoha decided in 1983 at Abakaliki High court in favour of Ali Nwede.
>
> iii). Mr. Abel Ebenyi of Ugbonna village Ezillo vs Alex Usulor of Ezza-Ezillo decided in 1987 at Nkalagu Customary court in favour of Abel Ebenyi, suit No. NKCC/19/87.
>
> iv). Mr. Eje Nwebenyi of Ezillo vs Nwanja Onuoha of Ezza pending in customary court of appeal. Suit No. ECC/10/92.
>
> v). Linus Nweze of Isimkpuma Ezillo vs Nwobasi Ebilima of Ezza decided in 1999 at Customary court of appeal Abakaliki Suit No. ECC/4/99 in favour of Linus Nweze.
>
> vi). Amuji Ezilloclan vs Omena Ede of Ezza pending at Abakaliki high court. Suit No. HAB/41M/2003
>
> vii). John Chima of Ezza vs Sunday Ezigbo of Ugbona Ezillo pending at high court Ezzangbo. Suit No. HKW/1/2006[17]

It is worthy of note that, in all these cases relating to land dispute and illegal displacement of peoples` from homes and farmlands, hardly any of them was decided in favour of the Ezzas. However, it was alleged that in all the cases decided hardly did losers of the decided cases complied with court decision. This contempt of court judgement intermittently sparks off protest between losers and winners of decided court cases in Ezillo. This lawlessness and

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[17]KII/ Ezillo / Male lawyer and Youth leader/ 45 years old/ 23th July 2016

inability of the authorities to comprehensively bring defaulters to book account largely to subsequent violent conflicts in Ezillo. Having lost confidence in the capacity of the court to resolve Ezillo land conflicts, the government resorted to the option of constituting panels of inquiry into the conflict.

The civilian governor of Ebonyi state intervened by setting up a panel of inquiry that culminated into mobilising a peace committee in 2008. Their mandate was to come up with sustainable solution to Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo conflict for government to adopt. After inquiries and investigations, the committee resolved and agreed that additional plots of land be given to the Ezza-Ezillo settlers to accommodate their increasing population in Ezillo. An area of 279.304Ha southward was recommended for allocated in addition to the originally allocated land. The government in 2009 acceded to this recommendation and allocated 279.304Ha area of land as recommended by the committee report. While**Fig. 4** bellow is a map of Ezillo community showing additional strip of land allocated to Ezza-Ezillo by Ebonyi state government with the area of 279.304Ha, **Fig. 5** bellow is another map of Ezillo community showing the combination of the origin strip of land allocated and the additional one allocated put at total area of 317.668Ha for the Ezza-Ezillo.

The most important implication of this government intervention was that the government`s pronouncement automatically provided legal/statutory legitimacy and authority to the Ezza-Ezillo people in their quest to exercise claims of authority over land in Ezillo community. it increased Ezza-Ezillo stake in the ownership of land, processes and practice in their host community. From this point onward, influx of Ezza from the mainstream Ezza communities was accelerated. So, the Ezza people continued asking for more land due to population pressure. This has challenged indigenous peasantry from accessing farmland and even space for habitation as Ezillo also continue to grow in population. Displacements and refugee issues arising from this additional allocation are attributed to these resentments from Ezza-Ezillo continuous encroachment.
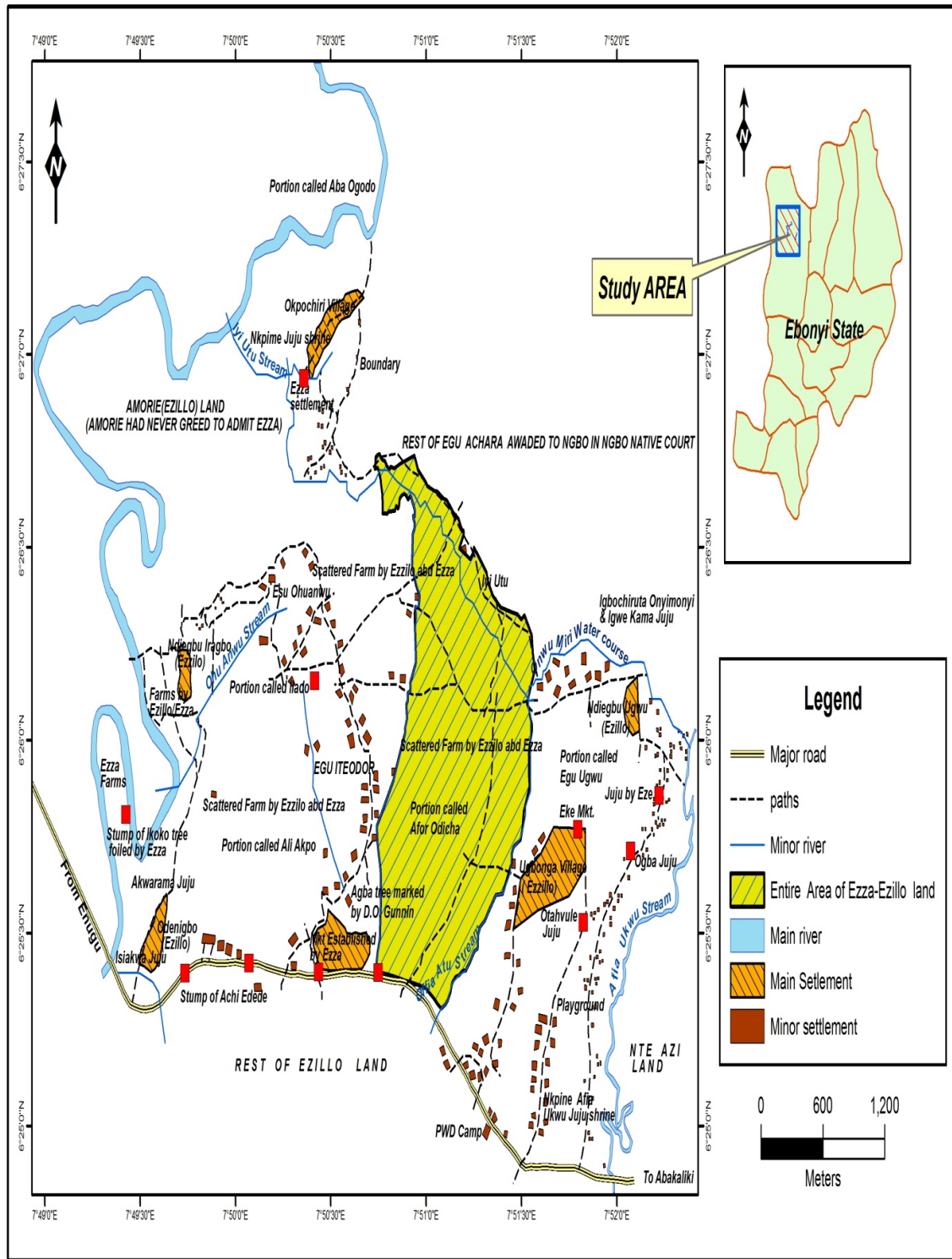
Fig. 4: Show the map of Ezillo community showing additional strip of land allocated to Ezza-Ezillo by Ebonyi state government.[18]
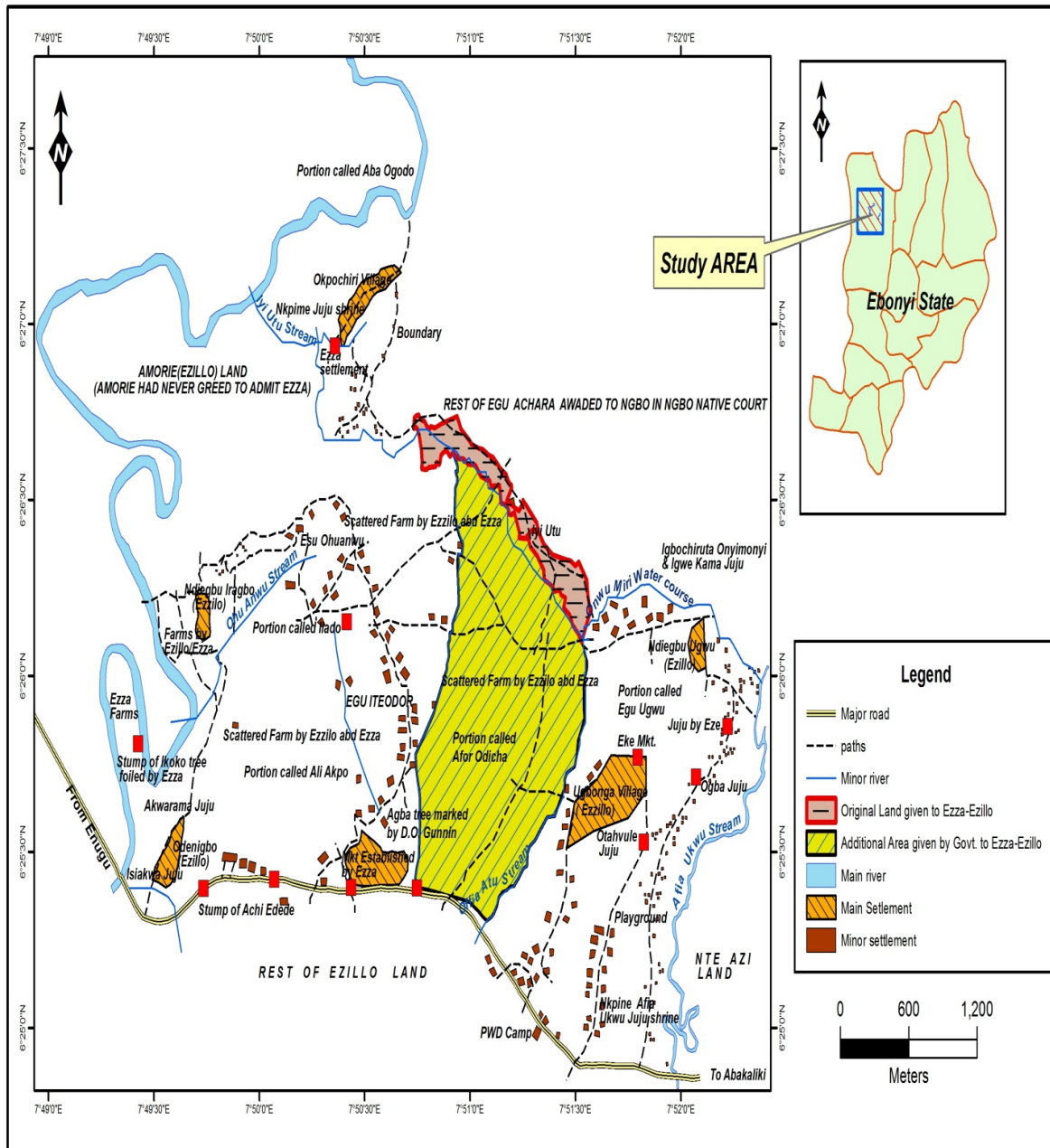
Fig. 5: Show the map of Ezillo community showing strip of land originally allocated to Ezza-Ezillo by Ezillo people and additional land allocated to Ezza-Ezillo by Ebonyi state government.[19]

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[19]Source: GeographyDepartment, Faculty of the Social Sciences University of Ibadan.

According to the Memo to the Ebonyi State Peace Committee on Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo conflicts, (2008) and Oji, *et al*, (2014) are in agreement in their position that the Ezillo attributes the denigration of their cultural and traditional heritage by the Ezzas as some of the causes of the dispute between them. The Ezza people are indicted to have flouted new yam festival rules – bringing new yam to Ezillo market by the Ezza before the cultural rites of new yam in Ezillo, looting of the peoples' artefacts and antiquities, killing of fish in sacred ponds and rivers, desecration of the chieftaincy institution as evident in the beating of the traditional ruler of Ezillo: His Royal Highness Igwe Chima Eze, Onyibe and his wife in 2008. In 1992, the Ezillo people also alleged that the Ezza people seized Nwafor Isimkpuma market and renamed it Eke – Ezza. But because we consider Ezza-Ezillo as our brothers, against all these odds we Ezillo let them lie low. Ezza-Ezillo is more in population in some of Ezillo villages. We have intermarried and are suppose to be one now but they are not helping matter at all with their conduct (Enuke, 2015). A respondenthas this to say:

> Since Ezza-Ezillo demand for Izzo autonomous community was rejected, the Ezza became more aggressive in their relationship with Ezillo. They have alleged that government is bias in its intervention in Ezillo conflict in favour of Ezillo. Consequently, they suddenly continued to rename social structures bearing names to Ezza names.[20]

Another key informant buttressed Enuke, (2015) in his opinion posits thus:

> In a descending order of seniority, there are seven villages in Ezillo: Amofia; Amaleze; Umuakpaa; Amukpa; Amauhu; Umuezoke and Amorie the youngest village. In all this villages Ezza-Ezillo people constitute almost half of their population.[21]

Yet another interviewee has this to say:

> The reality is that Ezza and Ezillo conflict can be likened to a conflict between a bully boy and a bullied boy. The intimidating, suppressive and repressive tendencies of the bully against the bullied describe the experience of Ezillo people in the hands of the Ezza-Ezillo. Ezza has not stopped seeing Ezillo as a naughty small boy who bits more than he can chew. Ezza consider themselves as big boy who preferred to be called Ezza nation in Ebonyi state and beyond where they have about half the state population. They alone have two LGAs (Ezza North and Ezza South LGAs), 60% and 50% of Ishielu and Abakaliki LGAs. Comparing this statistics, Ezillo is actually a small boy fighting a just war of survival against oppressive tendencies.[22]

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[20]IDI/Ezillo / Male lawyer and Youth leader/ 47 years old/ 27th July 2016
[21]KII/ Ezza/Male Retiree and town union executive / 58 years old/ 9th July 2016
[22]KII/ Ezillo/Male Retiree, Opinion leader and traditional council member /62 years old/ 10th July 2016

Another respondent has this to say:

> Go and ask, any fight against Ezza person anywhere is a fight against Ezza nation everywhere. The government has no choice but to settle Ezza-Ezillo issues without bias to avoid unnecessary friction and ensure safety of lives and properties in Ishielu. Peace, security and stability of Ezillo community cannot be guaranteed by biased intervention from any quarter. Our population and solidarity is our strength. Ezillo is no match to Ezza in anyway. For instance, Ezza people are in majority in the state having unlike any other two LGA out of thirteen. They are fifty percent population of some LGAs in Ebonyi state, more than 60% in Ishielu LGA, in Benue state, they are 60% of Ado LGA population, about 50% the population of Nkanu east LGAs in Enugu state, and some less.[23]

However, to ensure security of lives and properties in all community within its territory is the essence of good governance. Unfortunately, bias tendency of government in reconciling the interests of aggrieved parties in conflict is not hidden from the public. This is in line with Onwe, *et al*., (2015) submission, that rather than playing an unbiased umpire in the Ezillo crisis, the government seem to be taking side based on it utterances and body language. The Ezza peoplein a focus group discussion considered the Ebonyi State government decision support and implementation of the two key recommendations of the Peace Committee (special broadcast by Governor Martin N. Elechi, of Ebonyi State Thursday the 2nd Day of October, 2008), buttressed the above assertion.

> It is unjust for Ezillo people demand that Ezza-Ezillo vacate the land they occupy in Ezillo having earlier been formally invited to deliver services that secured Ezillo land and compensated by Ezillo land. The Ezza considered the government position concerning Ezillo/Ezza treaty is biase. The land originally ceded to Ezza-Ezillo for their settlement ("Egu Echara") under the agreement with Ezillo is a narrow strip of land with a total area of 52.54 hectares far less than space that can accommodate us. To make it sufficient for the settlement Ezza-Ezillo people need more land fromEzillo through the government.However, the state in reaction, decided to substantially increase the size of the land original allocated. This space is described as the intersection of the old Enugu-Abakaliki road with the New Enugu – Abakaliki road at a point called PWD Camp (also in local parlance called Aaron Camp). It is at Latitude 06° 24' 56.62" and longitude 07° 52' 29.34" E and moving westward along the old road for a distance 910.106 metres. The boundary of the added land begins at a culvert on Offia-Atu stream on latitude 06° 25' 1446"N and longitude 67° 50'40.32" to the old settlement area by this new demarcation is 253.75 hectares. This brings the total land mass to be occupied by Ezza-Ezillo to 306.29 hectares up from the original 52.54 hectares (81-84). But politicisation and support for the eviction of

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Ezza-Ezillo from Ezillo and biased distribution of government and NGOs intervention disfavour Ezza interest [24]

The data suggest support foe the eviction of Ezza-Ezillo from Ezillo and biased in distribution of government and NGOs intervention are alleged biase of government against Ezza people has been biased in its interventions in favour of Ezillo group. This perception evolved into distrust and weak cooperation with government peace moves and intervention programs in the community. The evidence includes the discrimination in the choice of who receives relief package among victims of the communal conflict. When the entire community is involved in conflict everybody must be carried along in the reconciliation process anything short of that complicates the process. Onwe, *et al*., (2015) recounting reaction to government position concerning the 2nd October 2008 report on the way forward admitted that beyond allocation of additional land space to Ezza-Ezillo, government must ensure that stake holders are involved in the decision. This order is coming without any effort to ascertain the extent to which Ezzas claim to own this new location is valid whether by inheritance or purchase. The government white paper of 2nd October 2008 and major reactions to it according to Ugbo, *et al,* (2015) here bellow summarised thus:

> The blue print/white paper representing government position directed the Ezzas to vacate disputed land and relocate back to the originally allocated land. A position the Ezza-Ezillo rejected and considered discriminatory. They contended that there were other people occupying the place originally allocated to them coupled with the fact that the government made no effort at providing any social amenities that could attract them to the original place. This resistance by the Ezzas and the acclaimed biased government position as well as the insistence of the Ezillo tribes that they could no longer tolerate the Ezzas in their midst exacerbated the Ezza/Ezillo crisis as shown in the 19th February 2010 mass killings and the horrendous 31 December 2011Ezillo massacre whose masterminds have not been identified till date. This informed the Ezillo self-determination struggle to put to an end Ezza humiliation and violation of our collective rights to land in Ezillo land (3-8).

It is in this connection that we can appreciate the reality of the Ezzas perceived existence of bias and discrimination in trend of government interventions in Ezillo and also understand the conflicts that usually erupt between them, the 31 December 2011Ezillo massacre which was a spill over of the 19th February 2010 mass killings. The literature on Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo interaction is a complex one beyond what any of the group involved will now contemplate quitting but reconcile. The two epochal contacts the groups had were marked by peace and

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[24]FGD/Elderly Men/ Politician/60years and above /Ezza/12th August 2016

friendliness and this led to intermarriages that have produced generations of Ezza-Ezillo identity. Therefore, identity considerations must transcend intergroup differences to accommodate the Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo inter-marital based identity that by reason of their birth are indigenes of Ezillo. Rather than tap into the potentials provided by intermarriage like bridge building, toleration and oneness, it continue to create dividing lines of discord.

Postcolonial land conflict experiences in Ezillo defer remarkably from what they were before or during colonial rule. One of the new dimensions to it is Ezza`s demand for autonomous community and separate traditional authority different from Ezillo traditional ruler in Ezillo community. Ezillo people perceive this demand as an affront on their identity. They reasoned that if this is allowed, it would lead to more serious internal colonisation and devastation of Ezillo political, economic and cultural autonomy. The complexity of contemporary version of this conflict has been extended beyond its usual bound. It has grown in sophistication to the extent of deploying latest warfare strategies and test of technological of advancement.

This is evident in the alleged hired and deployment of mercenaries with explosive devices capable of mass destruction of person and properties at ones. Report from the field has it that during one of the several conflicts in recent times, Egyptian mercenaries were arrested and upon interrogation revealed that his mission was to blow up the Ebenyi River Bridge in Ezillo. In fact, Ezillo has on prominent river called Ebenyi River. The river is worship like a shrine in Ezillo because it is believed to have provided water for drinking, farming, green vegetation and soil fertility in the community vast land. The river serves as oracle from where the people get interpretation to any mystery happening or about to happen in Ezillo. It is almost at the boundary between Ezillo community and Enugu State boundary communities of Obegu, Mile 35 and so on. There is a very long bridge over the river as shown in **Fig 5** bellow. This bridge across river Ebenyi was the alleged target of the hired mercenaries. If the bridge is dismantle or destroyed, it obstructs the expressway to Enugu from Abakaliki and Abakaliki to Enugu. In fact, commutation to and from Enugu to other parts of NEI, parts of Cross River and Benue states will be cut off from that axis. This is how important Ebenyi River Bridge is to the people of NEI and beyond.
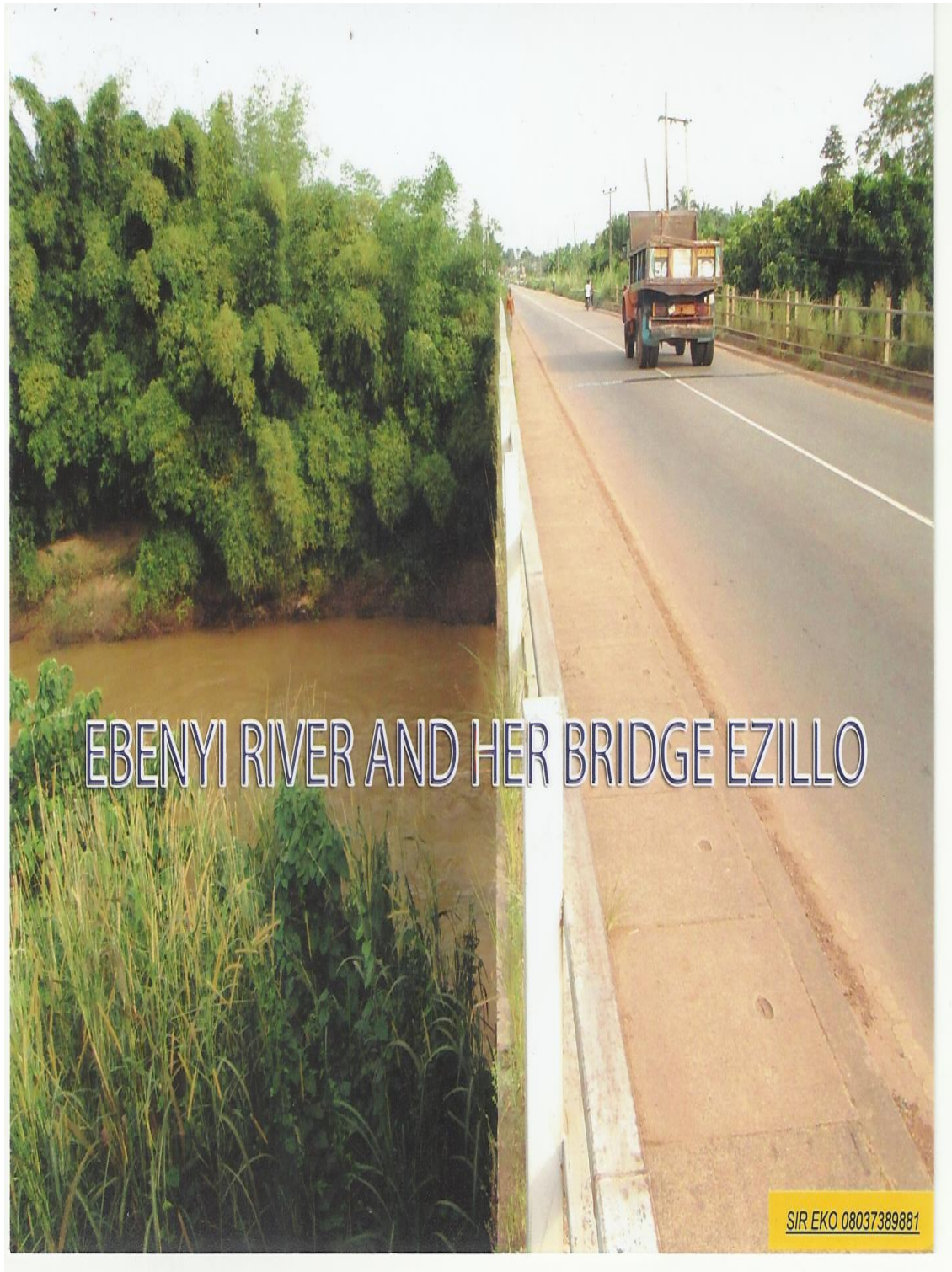
Fig. 6: Shows a picture of Ebenyi River and her Bridge in Ezillo community.[25]

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[25]Field observation (2016) Ezillo community, Ebonyi state Nigeria, 3rd October.

On 9 May 1970, Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo people clashed over the case of Iyonu in Ezillo community. The people of Ezillo requested Ezza immigrant in Iyonu, Ezillo to withdraw their people from Ezillo land in Iyonu clan. The Ezza accepted but pleaded that those of the people living on the land be allowed to harvest their crops from the land before leaving. This request was granted by Ezillo people. However, the Ezza did not leave at the end of the harvest period instead they started bringing in more and more of their kinsmen to occupy the said land in dispute. In 1972, there was another bloody mayhem generated by ignoring executive directive for both party to conflict to shift their sword and maintain status quo, directing Ezza to return back to Egu-Echara where they were originally given. This directive was issued by Ishielu Divisional officer Mr. J. M. C. Ifediora on the 30th December 1972 episode after the Nigerian civil war.

The climax of the 1972 conflict was the Ezza-Ezillo`s demand for autonomous community in their host community Ezillo. Conflicts around this demand have continued to linger up till date. Since this intention for autonomy came out, intermittent conflicts are easily linked to it and overnight it escalates into violent conflict. Both sides of the community as highly sensitive to the existence of Ezillo as a community consider the issue. The demand was presented to both the Senate and house of representative in 2003 and 2007 respectively. In the two occasions it suffered setback and got disposed off. It was alleged that the Ezza political elites in the federal parliament conspired to initiate the creation of autonomous committee for Ezzas in Ezillo. The crisis resulting from that took the lives of many people including four Ezillo youths. Ezza having autonomous community in their host community Ezillo was one of the longest trending issues of conflict in Ezillo. Subsequently, after the conflict generated by the demand for Izzo autonomous community in Ezillo community by the Ezza-Ezillo group subsided, Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo people reverted back to engaging the court of law for remedy through the filing in of series cases that opened the door of litigations over the appropriateness or otherwise of the Ezza-Ezillo demands for self autonomy in an autonomous community and their other claims in Ezillo.

Similarly, in 1990, after the creation of new Ishielu LGA with Ezillo as headquarters, the community mapped out a parcel of land at Isimkpuma for Federal establishments like INEC, Police and National population commission. Though the land was acquired by Ishielu LGA, it was alleged that Ezza people later occupied the entire land claiming they own it. This action further escalated the then fragile peace leading to another bloody clash with Ezillo despite the signed peace accord (Enuke, 2015). Again, it took the intervention of the Ebonyi

state leaders of thought, the executive governor and members of the Ezillo peace committee for peace to be brokered.

The then Ishielu LGA Chairman Bar. Onwa consulted the elders of the two contending groups (Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo) in Ezillo and members of Ezillo peace committee and mobilise them to intervene between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo with the mandate to convince the two parties to vacate the occupied land where government want to build strategic institutions like LGA headquarters and other accompanying infrastructures. Pointing out that the Ezillo community will loss out should another community show interest. **Fig. 7** bellow is a picture of leaders of thought brainstorming in conflict mediation session in Ezillo community to avert communal war.

Constrained by the insistence of the two groups (Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo) that they were not ready to let go the government acquired land, the executive chair of Ishielu LGA then took the matter to the executive governor who convened a meeting of the entire Ebonyi state elders of thought and the members of the Ezillo peace committee. By this time, fighting had already escalated. As shown in **Fig. 8**, a picture of Peace accord junction where traditional incantation and oath was taken to stop conflict by Ebonyi state leaders of thought. Some traditional rituals followed this and concoction prepared and buried with local bowl, arrow, den gun, big live ram, machetes and the likes. This arrangement traditionally symbolises death and burial of conflict and war between brothers. This junction became symbolic point of sacred agreement between Ebonyi elders of thought and Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo people.

This symbolic agreement was followed by the planting of peace tree as shown in **Fig. 9** apicture of peace tree planted by the Executive Governor of Ebonyi State in the presence of members of peace committee and other stakeholders on 16th September 2016 at Ishielu LGA headquarters in Ezillo. This tree planting is placed customary burden on the conflicting parties to the conflict.
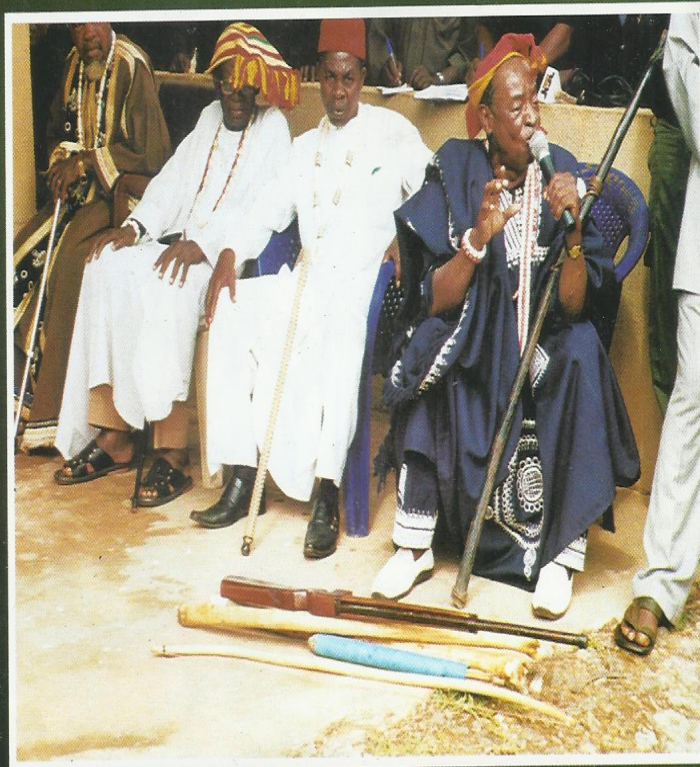
Fig. 7: Picture of leaders of thought brainstorming in conflict mediation session in Ezillo community.[26]

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[26]Field observation (2016) Ezillo community, Ebonyi state Nigeria, 3rd October.
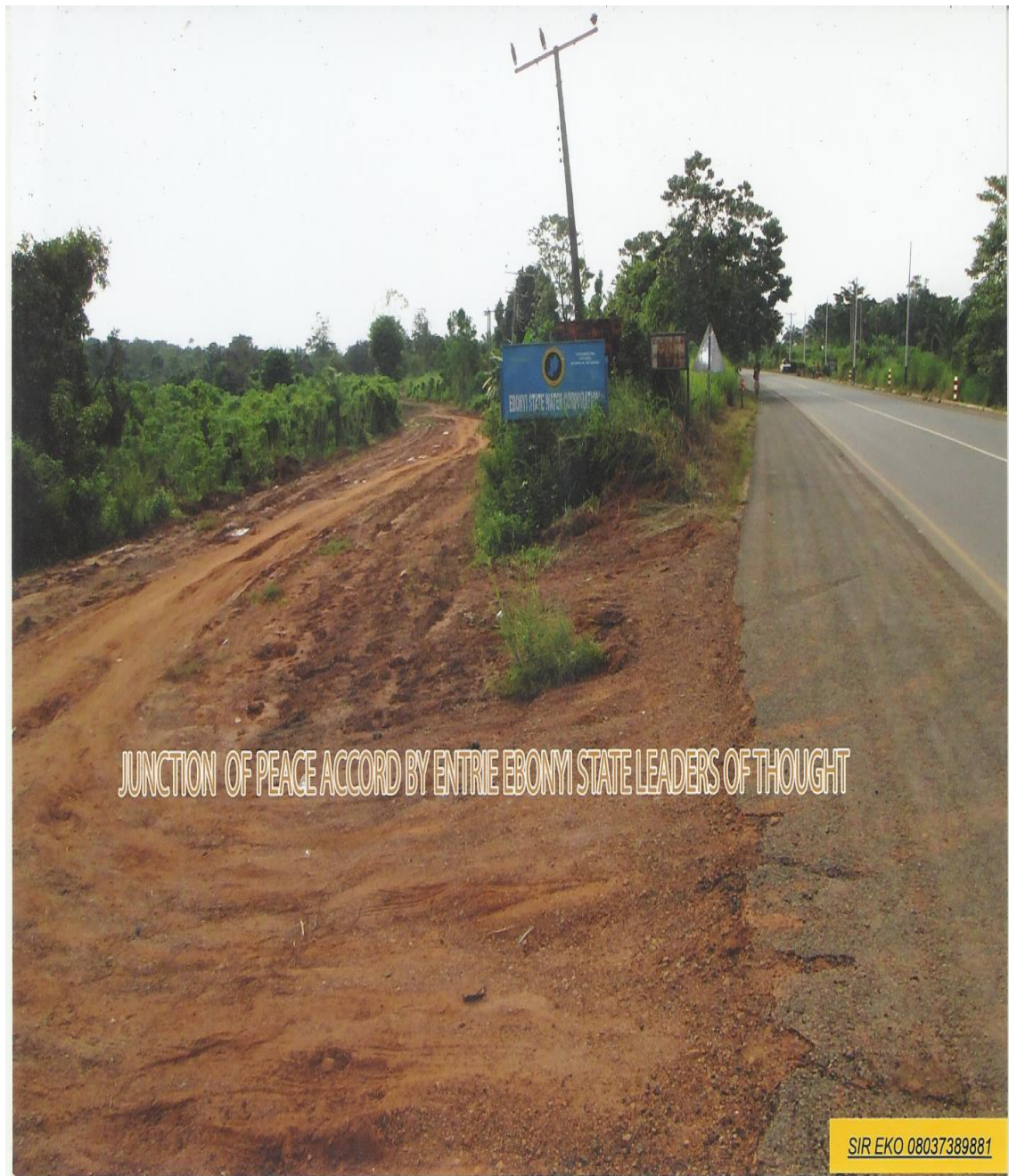
Fig. 8: Picture of Peace accord junction where Traditional incantation and oath was taken to avert conflict by Ebonyi state leaders of thought.[27]

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[27]Field observation (2016) Ezillo community, Ebonyi state Nigeria, 3rd October.

Fig. 9: Picture of peace tree planted by the Executive Governor of Ebonyi State and members of peace committee on 16th September 2016 at Ishielu LGA headquarters in Ezillo[28].

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[28]Field observation (2016) Ezillo community, Ebonyi state Nigeria, 3rd October.

Similarly, a village market was alleged renamed from its original name in 1996 sparking a protest that led to the death of Idenyi Ali and displacement of Mr. Oruma Oke from Ezza. This provocation again led to destruction of lives and properties. In 2006, in a reaction to high profile political manipulations to justify the propriety of demand for autonomous community for Ezzas, conflict broke out following the alleged beating of Ezillo traditional ruler late Ezeogo Chima Onyibe and his wife publicly in the market by suspected Ezzas assailants.

In 2007, some Ezza boys came to Nkwo-Egbirigba, an evening market in Ezillo and inflicted machete wounds on Ejike Igwe Ogbuewu and Ogele Onuma Eze. That forced the market close that day. These boys claimed ownership of the said market. This led to the burning down of houses belonging to both Ezillo and Ezza people in Umuozoke village in Ezillo. Similarly, in May 2008, following disagreement between an Ezillo boy and some Ezza men over location of telephone booth and rent payment. The Ezillo boy erected a telephone booth on disputed piece of land near Isimkpuma Motor Park. The booth was pulled down by some Ezza youths because the Ezillo boy declined payment of rent to Ezza rent collectors. Beyond pulling the booth down, the owner was beaten to a coma. When Ezillo youths got wind of the above development, they organized a retaliatory attack on the Ezzas the following day. This resulted to loss of lives and the destruction of properties worth million of Naira. Ever since then the market had not been rebuilt.

Until now, tenancy and ownership right issues in this market are yet to be fully resolved. This has restricted access to the market and social interaction in the market. At the end government enquiry into the conflict causalities, a white paper was release with a recommendation that the Ezza –Ezillo people should within a specified time relocate to the original location allocated to them at is Egu-Achara. The picture bellow in **Fig. 10** captured the different scenes of destructions resulting from Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo conflict in 2008 over claims and counter claims of land ownership and control of Isimkpuma motor park market in Ezillo community.

Scenes of Destruction
Following the Ezzilo mayhem

Shops & Trade-ware burnt

Automobiles & other wares burnt during the crisis

Motorcycles and other valuable properties destroyed
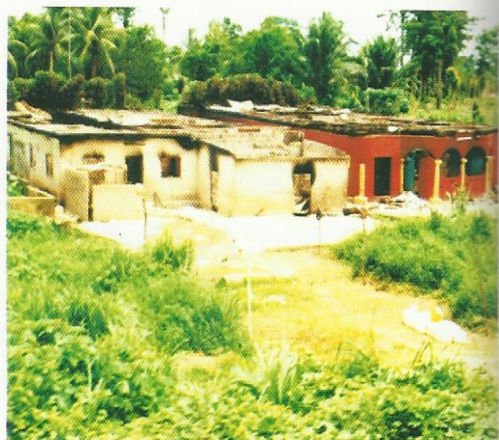
Houses & properties burnt

Fig. 10: Is the picture that captured the different scene of destructions resulting from Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo conflict in 2008 over claims and counter claims of land ownership and control of Isimkpuma motor park market in Ezillo community[29].

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[29]Field observation (2016) Ezillo community, Ebonyi state Nigeria, 3rd October.

Following the refusal of the Ezza-Ezillo people to relocate from Ezillo territory they occupied outside the originally allocated land (Egu-Achara), another round of conflict erupted on February 19 2010. This led to mass killing[30] in the occupied territory. The problem escalated to full blown war with both sides burning houses that belonged to one another. The military was deployed to the place to maintain the peace but the crisis degenerated with each side blaming the other and resorting to guerrilla attacks. On the 19th February 2010, it was another unprecedented mayhem: An IDI describes it thus:

> .... that led to bloodshed of many casualties from both Ezillo and outsiders passing by along Enugu-Abakaliki highway. This upheaval was unleashed by suspected hired militants shooting sporadically and fighting in the disputed land. Similar event happened on the 31st December 2011. While Ezillo people were celebrating the last day of 2011 and praying themselves into a new year, tragedy struck. Guerrilla fighters from different directions laid siege in Ezillo, massacred people including pregnant women, children, adults and anybody within their reach. Lives were lost and properties worth millions of naira were either vandalised or destroyed. Many houses were set ablaze including shops and vehicles.[31]

Another IDI when asked what could have been responsible for the mayhem, he puts it thus:

> This was allegedly tied to inequality in conflicting parties accessing government attention. It was alleged that the government made no effort at providing any social amenities that could attract the displaced to the new areas it allocated to victims of previous crises in Ezillo. Therefore, the series of intermittent and spontaneous violent conflict were alleged to be rooted in government`s perceived biased interventions seen in their white paper recommendations as well as the instance of the Ezillo tribes that they could no longer cohabit with the Ezzas. In all, it was alleged that like the May 2008 event, the subsequent conflicts like that of February 19, 2010 were avoidable had the government approached their resolution without biased judgement.[32]

Again, on Saturday, December 31, 2011 without prior premonition of attacks, death came knocking from different location in the area. Ezillo woke up with high expectations for the New Year 2012 that is more than the outgoing year 2011. Unknown gunmen unleashed such mayhem that is difficult to forget in a hurry. Another IDI from Ezillo in describing the crisis had this to say:

> In the nightpreceeding 1/1/12, hoodlums numbering about 20 came into Ezillo community with guns, machetes and other dangerous weapons.They

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[30]This is used to describe the house to house shoot at sight irrespective of age or sex in the midnight.
[31]IDI/ Ezillo /Female Farmer and Executive women association/ 40 years old/ 3rd July 2016
[32]IDI/ Ezillo /Male Farmer and member town union association/ 47 years old/ 13th July 2016

started killing innocent and defenceless members of the community. They also destroyed livestock before disappearing and leaving those alive to count their losses. The hoodlums allegedly went from door to door to kill their victims. As if not satisfied with this, they were said to have gone on rampage, killing everyone on sight as the people got to know about their heinous and deadly activities. At the end, over 66 members of the community including pregnant women, men and children, whose ages range between 5-14 years, were killed. Apart from the lives lost in the orgy of violence, properties worth millions of naira were also lost as the hoodlums blocked the Enugu-Abakaliki expressway for two days. This forced commuters to ply the deplorable Afikpo-Abakaliki expressway.[33]

A KII and a political office holder in Ezillo comments thus:

> I personally counted 26 corpses on ground that morning. Within 10 minutes after, more were brought in from the bush. It was a disturbing situation of horror to behold. You need to see things for yourself. I doubt whether the people can again live together with memory of this type of destruction that leaves permanent bad feeling. When you talk of reconciliation, we started it in 2008. During this time, things were not as bad as we see them today. So, only God can heal the wounds not human beings. I witnessed the Governor while on fact finding mission in the area indicting traditional rulers and politicians from both Ezillo and Ezza clan of complicity.He blaimed them for not doing enough to tell their people and wards the truth about those behind the brutal killing that took place on the last day of 2011. The Assistant Inspector-General of Police, in charge of Zone 9 Calabar, AIG Saidu Daya was on ground. He assured the people of adequate security having deployed mobile policemen from Rivers, Cross River and Akwa Ibom state to the affected villages and clans in Ezillo community to ensure that the perpetrators were brought to book[34]

Another KII and a political office holder in Ezillo comments thus:

> Report later released by the state government has it that over 150 persons were killed and properties worth several millions of naira destroyed. Suspects alleged to have been involved in the attack numbering 13 were remanded at the Abakaliki prison after being charged before and Abakaliki chief magistrate court in a four-count charge, for murder, felony, arson, attacking and killing over 60 persons and destroying property worth several millions of Naira on December 31, 2011.But for inexplicable reasons, the suspects were released from prison custody. And shortly after their release, some persons believed to be Ezza indigenes re-occupied the disputed piece of land, prompting the recent blocking of the ever -busy Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway.[35]

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[33]KII/ Elderly male/64 yr old /Opinion leader/ Ezillo/29th July 2016
[34]KII/ Female/57 yr old / Farmer/Women leader/ Ezillo/29th July 2016
[35]KII/ Male/67 yr old /Political office holder/ Ezillo/29th July 2016

The picture below in **Fig. 11** shows the human casualties of the spill over effect of May 10th 2008 and February 19, 20101 that started at Isimkpuma motor park market as noted earlier. The reprisals of these bottled animosities busted on the 31st December 2011 and claimed over 80 lives at the first count were destroyed. These are coups seen the ones not seen for example those killed in their farm or in the bush are not counted.

Furthermore, **Fig. 12**is a picture that shows the level of destruction properties in arson arising from December 31st, 2011 mayhem in Ezillo community that also claimed undocumented reported of human casualties far beyond the earlier claims. The devastation this time was said to be horrific because the method of attack was far more sophisticated than earlier attacks. Victims were taken by surprise in their farms, streams, houses, market and even playgrounds in such a commando guerrilla style. Attacks were spontaneous and intermittent. The complexities surrounding this method is a complication to the act of record keeping.

Fig. 11: Human casualties of December 31st, 2011 conflict over market ownership.[36]

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[36]Field observation (2016) Ezillo community, Ebonyi state Nigeria, 9th October, 2016.

Fig. 12: Arson from December 31st, 2011 conflict over market ownership.[37]

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[37]Field observation (2016) Ezillo community, Ebonyi state Nigeria, 7th October, 2016.

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As Ezillo boiled again, the people were suddenly taken aback. In the morning of Friday, April 17, 2015, motoristsplying the ever-busy Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway on getting to Ezillo town were forced by visibly angry youths to return to their respective take off points. The youths had earlier blocked the road – making it difficult for vehicles coming from either Enugu or Abakaliki to have unhindered passage. The bewildered motorists either returned to their bases or continued their journey by making use of bumpy routes. This is by no means a figment of imagination. Indeed, the obstruction of the road symbolized the resurgence of the infamous Ezza-Ezillo crisis. Pertinent to note here is that since Ezillo and Ezza settled to live together, there have been no other reasons why they fight than land occupation and frequent allegations and counter allegations bordering on claimed abominable violation and denigration of cultural values by both parties (Peace Committee Memo, 2015).I do not believe these conflicts do not have solution if the stakeholders realistically want one. Issues of land encroachment and flouting new yam festival rules with impunity; fishing in a sacred pond; beating up of traditional ruler; looting of cultural artefacts from sacred places and unmasking of masquerades are not beyond solution. While Ezza-Ezillo`s claim is that their host Ezillo does not see anything good about Ezza culture to be practiced in Ezillo community. But our culture is our Identity we are passionately proud of. A FGD held that:

> Beyond these two claims, however, are other systemic factors which also underline conflicts elsewhere in Nigeria. They include: dual meaning of land ownership, the determination of indigene-settler question, decline of traditional institutions, collapse of traditional structures, population pressure and expansionist tendency, inconsistency of rural development policies. In the case of Ezillo-Ezza, these factors are intertwined, helping to redefine the meaning of land with disastrous consequences for both the Ezillo and the Ezzas.[38]

This opinion suggests that there is more to this conflict than the eyes can see. This perception is in line with earlier opinions that suspected vested interests such as the political class and the local elites that were seen as not doing enough to engage issues and solution realistically. The brokered peace from 2015 peace committee was interrupted when on Friday, April 17, 2015; motorists plying the ever-busy Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway were made stranded by irate youth blocking the road. **Fig. 13** bellow shows blocked road and burnt vehicles.

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[38]FGD/Elderly Man/Retired Civil Servant/60years and above /Ezillo/ 25th August 2016

Fig. 13: Shows blocked Enugu – to- Abakaliki expressway in April 17th 2015.[39]

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[39]Field observation (2016) Ezillo community, Ebonyi state Nigeria, 11th October, 2016.

Burnt police vehicle

Fig. 14: Shows blocked Enugu-to-Abakaliki expressway and burnt vehicles in the April 17th 2015.[40]

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[40]Field observation (2016) Ezillo community, Ebonyi state Nigeria, 15th October, 2016.

The state deputy governor and governor-elect, Engineer Dave Nweze Umahi, disclosed that the road was blocked by youths of Ezillo to demonstrate the invasion by Ezza-Ezillo youths numbering about 70 over a disputed piece of land in the area. According to Umahi, who was recently 2015, elected governor, some soldiers and police officers dispatched to the areas to restore law and order were shot at and wounded while on duty.In retarliation, one Ezza youth was shot dead by security personnel before restoring normalcy in the affected area, said the governor-elect.

4.1.2 Authority Contentions Over Land in Ezillo Community

The history of migration and settlement since after the first settlers in Ezillo is the history of contention and conflict over ownership, access and use of land. Struggle for land space increase with population pressure and cut across Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo populations. The major concern of this section is the existing contentions on authority over land in Ezillo community between the Ezza-Ezillo people and their aboriginal host the people of Ezillo.

Authority contention over land can take the form of disregard or abuse of the social construction of sacredness of land itself. Violation of the laws of the land attracts heavy customary sanctions in Ezillo. According to Enuke (2015), the belief and tradition in Ezillo is that Land '*Ala'* is a gift from God '*Chukwu'* and from ancestors who have not left them. They continue to see themselves as custodians of God's resources, especially of communally owned land. Ala *'Earth'* is valued as a source of livelihood. Even though land ownership has been men's domain. For the Ezillo, like the other Igbo people, the mother-earth is '*Ala',* the greatest deity after '*Chukwu*', the heavenly creator (Osita, 2014). Ala *'Chukwu'* is as near to them as the ancestors, for they are buried in her pocket or womb. *Ala* sends the dead back again in rebirth and it is the spirit of fertility both for the family and for the land. Barren women, or mothers whose children have died, pray to Ala *'Land'* for children, and men request of it for success in trade and increase of their livestock. So,*Ala,* interpreted as spirit, help her children if they are troubled by other deities.A KII respondent has this to say:

> ..if people offend *Ala*by disregard itslaws, it will punish them and a hardened evildoer receive the final humiliation, dying awful death in with swollen stomach. Ala issymbolically sacred, represents the earth spirit, the ancestors and the living.Selling land was a taboo and unpopular in those days. Until recently, we dislike selling land because of the reverence for Ala. Our ancestors founded the *Ihu ala* (face of the earth), which became sacred for the people and was the place where major decisions, such as warfare or ritual oaths were made and strictly respected. Atleast a piece of

land for farming and habitation is an entitlement for every Ezillo man. It is not expected to be sold but shared.[41]

Ezillo cosmology is one that passionately abhor in its totality disregard for land as culprit is faced with severe sanction. Despite that, it is a unifying force; *Ala* is revered for the unfailing repercussion against those who offend it. Disregarding the pronouncement of the earth priest is met with wrath and humiliation. In buttress, the respect people have for nature and compel them to tread humbly on the land. According to Arua (1999), man is made to understand that he belongs to the land, not the land to him. At death, man rests in literal peaceinside the land (earth) which has nourished him all the days of his life. To assuage the consequences of contending with land, the eldest village head is seen as a steward or an agent to land with divine authority from land and over land. He serves both the people and goddess of *Ala* (earth). In this sense, that for rulers to please the goddess of land, he must incorporate the eldest man of the land to serve as earth priest who is the mouth piece of *Ala*in the ruling house or cabinet of the ruler. This delegated authority from the earth goddess makes the throne of traditional authority sacred. The rulers coordinate the traditional judicial processes believed to be the goddess of land seen as just as its verdict is unquestionable. The spirituality of land in Ezillo had served as a strong social control that regulated social deviance and mitigated land conflict in Ezillo. This reverence accorded to land in Igboland has made pronouncements from the earth priest efficaciously characterised by abstractive nature whose anger can impose death on its victim.This is because the deity of land is perceived to provide unquestionable justice that binds the living together morally as representatives of the dead on earth. An elderly interviewee has this to say:

> We believe that land belongs to a vast family in which many are dead, few are living and countless numbers are still unborn. We in Ezillo categorise land as spirit, geography and socio-politics. The belief in the sacredness of land further serve as social control that regulates and punish anti-social behaviour or criminal acts like murder, adultery, and incest considered as offences committed against the land. Such perpetrators can only be accepted as wholesome members of the group after offering some sacrifices to appease the land. As the corporate property of the founding ancestors, land organizes the group and serves as the basis for acquiring property; the deity of the land binds the group morally. Consummately all biological beings eventually return to the land. In Ezhiulo belief system, the universe is conceived as consisting of two worlds: the visible and the invisible. The visible world is the material world which represents the whole of man`s physical environment (including land). The invisible world is the world of spirits. The world of spirits is the home of divinities. These divinities are in

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[41]KII/Elderly man/ Earth Priest//clergy/73years /Ezza /20th August 2016

hierarchies which have at the apex the Supreme Being which in Ezhiulo is called *Chipfu Okike uwa or Chileke*, the creator of Heaven and earth, meaning God; followed by *Igwe* (Heaven), *Ali* the (Earth), and other minor divinities (Omara Ali) in Ezhiulo, Ancestors (*Ndu laru mma or Ndu icheer*), and man as a small supreme being scrambling for ownership of land he does not own is a misplacement.[42]

In Ezillo, the cultural meaning attached to land and the conventional definition of land varies. This has been at the centre of contentions leading to communal conflicts not only in Ezillo but in other parts of Igboland (Onwe, *et al*, 2015). Ezillo people consider the spirituality of land far and above other aspects of land that are believed to be governed spiritually. This is because it controls and regulates the activities of man as a living being in the society. The deity of land fosters justice, peace and social stability in society. It serves as the conscious restraint to criminality and abuse of nature. Hence, there exist in Ezillo, sacred land as land dedicated to village or town deities. What constitutes sacred land varies from one Igbo community to another. For instance, Mezie-Okoye (2016), described sacred land as *Ajo Ofia*(evil forest). It is generally reserved as the graveyard for people who died of abnormal diseases, such as, swollen stomach, leprosy, small pox, and other abhorred diseases and for throwing unwanted charms. People keep away from sacred communal land for fear of physical and psychological harm from bad spirits that are believed to inhabit it.

Invasion of sacred land for instance, is a source of contention. The same thing applies to converting market land, compound land, playground land and such like into other purposes they are not traditionally made for. Example of such conversion was experienced during colonial times. The European missionaries came invading the evil forests and burial grounds considered as sacred land reserved for the burial of abnormal deaths and earth gods. They built churches and missionary schools on these reserved fetish lands in Ezillo. Example is the building of the first church in Ezillo by the Methodist and Catholic church missionaries and the first secondary school the then St. Peters secondary school now Girls high school Ezillo, in Ezillo community. Scrambling for land in Ezillo shifted to the domain of adherence of traditional religion and the Christian worshippers (Obioha, 2008). While the former lay claim to land as sacred deity, the later lay claim to living to please Almighty God in order to make heaven after living on earth. To the Christian there is no need to idolise or claim the earth as it is transiently Gods` own.

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[42]KII/Elderly man/ Earth Priest//clergy/73years /Ezillo /10th August 2016

Generally, the belief system in Ezillo acknowledges the deity of land as tied to their traditional religion generally known as African Traditional Religion (ATR). This practice did not exclude the people from such like Christian Religion. The first church built in Ezillo as noted earlier is the Methodist church in 1930 followed by Roman Catholic Church in 1937 and Christ Apostolic Church much later. However, since the advent of Christianity in Ezillo in the 1930s, adherence to ATR has been gradually declining. To Ezhiulo people, according to Enuke (2011), God lives everywhere (*Chipfu noo lee uwa lile*) and in everything (*Chipfu noo lee iphe lile*), the gods or goddesses live in their shrines. The being in a man lives in a shrine called body. Both man and the shrine body are sacred just like other beings and deities. It was the mystery in the universe with the tremendous and fascinating forces therein that led man to believe that there are forces behind these mysteries created some sort of unquestionable divinities surrounding sacred land. Drawing from this position is the notion that contention on authority over land in Ezillo is revealed within the following hierarchies of god powers in descending order. Chipfu or Chileke that is Supreme God; Igwe and Ali (Heaven and Earth); Omaraali (goddesses such as Mkpuma Unwuelor, Ebenyi, Mkpuma Apirizia and such like); Community, village and other personal gods and spirits (such as Uzu, Ali Mbaraezhi, Idenyi and such like); Ancestral Shrines (*Ili*) and Man himself (the spirit being, man, lives in a shrine called body). Despite all these fattish levels of explanation of contention over land among Ezillo people, yet, land is seen to be everywhere as a geographical expression.

Geographically, in Ezillo, land is classified in terms of compound land, *ani obubu*; farm land and common lands. Compound land is primarily the residential area. It could be called the inner zone of land, which according to Huth (1969) is the household where people live and grow oil palms, shade crops, and other trees. Primarily women, who cultivate garden crops like vegetables, cocoa yam, corn, pepper, etc, farm the pieces of land around these residential areas. Yam and cassava are rarely cultivated on compound land because of the fear that domestic animals might destroy them (Mkpuma, 2012). Compound land is individually owned to the extent that his father bequeaths it to a man. Farmland, *Egu* or *Ugbo*, is the outer land where people farm but do not have permanent residence. This land is completely outside the compound land and is exclusively for farming. In this way, a new platform of social interaction is consummated defined by share of productive farming skills and methods. Land and power relations are strengthened by this platform and of course conflict of interest and exercise of skill power.

Classifying land socio-politically means delving into the realm of land relations and the dynamics of its transformation that response to power relations in the society. This deals with how the influence of land as a store of economic wealth reverberate political capital and vise versa. It looks at land beyond the physical environment or space to explain the relations of political and economic power as well as individual or collective control position over land wealth in socity. It tries to classify the geographical location of land or territories into political unit or socio-political entity.A KII who is also a lawyer says:

> The massive control Ezza-Ezillo people have over our land provided the required economic and political power to contest almost everything with us in Ezillo without restrain.Their high literacy level and land holdings provide the Ezza with economic power to sponsor political their ambition for political power far more than Ezillo people. The realities of this interaction have over time translated to disregard for our cherished culture as evidenced in Ezza attempt tosetablaze Ezillo masquerade.They throw the corpses of their dead relatives and women about since they do not bury the dead bodies of their unmarried persons. This is against Ezillo culture and tradition. Also,they pollute our drinking waters by pouring sacrificial objects into them. They harvest fish from sacred pond. Apart from beating our traditional ruler in the public, the Ezza periodically pursue away poor widows and their children from their residences and farm lands and take over the same. We have come to know that our land in Ezza possession is empowering them to to enforce their political and economic agenda of oppression of the Ezillo people in form of control, dominate as well as compel obedience and loyalty from Ezillo people [43]

Data suggest that these groups cannot be without social interaction that shape and inform land relations. Any form of such interaction cannot be devoid of coordinates that reflect power relations that specify subordinations and super-ordination. Massively Ezza-Ezillo people control Ezillo land that gave them economic and political advantage over their host Ezillo. The economic and political power relations between Ezza and Ezillo are schewed in favour of the Ezza.Thus, for fundermental change or development to survive in Ezillo, the Ezza interest must be strongly considered and favoured.Otherwiseit will be wrought with controversies and contestation. Their high literacy level and land holdings provide the Ezza with economic power to sponsor their political ambition for political power far more than Ezillo people. The tune of Ezillo traditional land relations was capture in the processes that provide rules and regulations guiding access and use of land in terms of settler's interest. The land acquisition, allocation and ownership processes now must accommodate external interest instead of being endogenously derived. The trajectory of these processes in Ezillo has history of antagonism,

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[43]KII/Elderly Woman/Women leader/Retired civil servant/ 66years /Ezillo/24th August 2016

protestation and conflict. Any attempt to bring the stakeholders in land relations to a common ground must involve political manoeuvres. Breakdown or abuse in these processes leading to the acquisition of land and its use are critical in the frustrations and inequality common in Ezillo land relation. This frustrations play into the hands of some politically conscious people who exploit the opportunity to invade the community disguising to own land and subvert our collective political and economic interests. Different from Ezillo cultural tenet, land acquisition to the Ezza people is to be used as political and economic tools to enforce control and dominance as well as compels obedience and loyalty.

Culture is relative[44]. Imposition of one's culture on others starts from denigration of other culture and value.Culture imposition is not part of the principles consistent with cultural relativism; rather it bred rivalry, discrimination and divisive contention. Trend of disagreement over issues of land access and use in Ezillo community is muddled up in rivalry and discrimination of cultural value for land. Abuse of cultural prescription characterise land relations and that is the root of competition and quarrel among stakes in land. Field observation show that after the initial settlers in Ezillo come generations of immigrants who came in as second settlers with cultural values that became threat to their host culture. For example, the funeral and fishing culture, masquerade and new yam festivals are samples of cultural prescription that have suffered abuse from settlers whose actions negate the tenets of the festivals. This has led sometimes to open confrontation and debate bothering on the appropriateness or otherwise of Ezillo culture value. The question of land ownership and authority to make claims concerning what is appropriate or not become contestable and controversial. The disagreements over land also took many forms, ranging from quiet mutterings, stifled anger, overt quarrels, violence and witchcraft accusations.

The Missionaries activities on land in Ezillo exacerbated the greed and subtledispossession of land in Ezillo. These activities violate cultural prescriptions of Ezillo people.For instance, land was acquired with total disregard to traditional beliefs and cultures underpinning the spirituality of Ezillo people. The traditional shrines and sacred homes were stripped of their dignities and relevance, many lost their identity and spiritualities. The sacred lands were converted to churches and markets. This explains the early emergence of disaffection and resentment toward constituted authority like the church and traditional authority blaimed for

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[44]Taiwo, O. O., 1988. Man and culture in P. O. Olusanya and 'Lai Olurode ed. Readings in introductory Sociology, John West Publications Ltd, Lagos

allowing the affront. Disputes pattern within the community then reflect sowing the seed of disaffection and discrimination between community groups is central to land conflict. These conflictual interactions cannot allow for productive land relations that ensures communal coexistence rather it accelerates social differentiation and violence (Enuke, 2010). To understand the context of this struggle is to attempt situating it into a proper historical perspective. Consequently, the two distinct changes evolved within the precolonial and colonial years as revealed in the postcolonial realities in Ezillo community as a key informant from Ezillo community aptly captures:

> Precolonial Ezillo as a transit community hosted plenty of strangers that later settled as migrant labourers and traders who work in the farm, soled their labour and farm produce for survival. At another time they pay dowry/bride wealth for woman as wife or other needed commodity. Land has no pecuniary value but was social and sacred symbol. Precolonial land relations was completely feudal slightly away from what it turned out to be during the colonial time because the state came to hold authority over land in trust for the people. Not much changed about colonial land relations in the postcolonial period. This period was marked by deepening commercial transactions in land, renting and borrowing arrangements as dominating land relation.[45]

It is against this backdrop that another KII interviewee from Ezillo posits thus:

> Referring to the precolonial Ezillo, land could not be sold to anybody. What I suspect on the part of these early Ezza settlers is a breach of culture tenets if they claim now to have bought Ezillo land with labour, it is not correct.[46]

Acculturation was accelerated easily in Ezillo due to the contact and interaction that existed between Ezillo people and people from diverse culture who are on transit across Ezillo and decided to stop over for trade or other reasons. That Ezillo is a transit town made influx of visitors and passersby rapid on daily basis. Therefore, the community host new strangers every day and get exposed to new cultural values with corruption tendency. Over time, culture lag became a serious issue of conflict in Ezillo. This reflected in the land relations that shape the quest to access land for farming and residence.Negotiation of cultural value adoption early immigrants in Ezillo such that it became a very important aspect of negotiation of farm labour services reward. Some settlers who farm for their host preferred to exchange farm labour reward for land no matter how small. To these settlers, having shelter over their head is far more important than money. The need to own a space for residence led to the need for a farmland. This pressure for safety and survival through access and use of land in Ezillo

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[45]KII/ Man/leader/Retired teacher/ 76years /Ezillo/10th July 2016
[46]IDI/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 60years /Ezillo/12th July 2016

by Ezza-Ezillo people compel many parents giving their daughters away in marriage to Ezillo suitors to demand land in place of bride wealth. A KII from Ezza posits that:

> Apart from land gift as benevolence from father to daughters going outside the family for marriage, or land exchanged for money or service rendered as reward, Ezza-Ezillo people get and inherit additional Ezillo land from marriage when it is used in exchange for dowry from Ezillo suitor marrying as bride price for an Ezza daughter. I am a product of that arrangement. Up till tomorrow, my father and brothers are still using my bride price land to farm. In return, those of us married to Ezillo men are happily blessed with Ezza-Ezillo children who are proud to be grand children to Ezza people and Ezillo people.[47]

Over time, this exchange became institutionalised as part of the people`s culture. With this in place, many Ezza parents whose daughters married in Ezillo became legitimate land owners. Infusing private ownership into communal ownership of land transformed from hitherto indigenous *feudal land relations*[48] prevailing before colonisation to *semi-feudal land relations*[49]. This practice was not without challenges. For instance, it opened up space for both families in marriage to contest land ownership particularly if the marriage is broken or either of the partner dies. This contest usually led to forbidden transfer of land for pecuniary reason by family of the wife in deviance to Ezillo culture.

The colonial authority met Ezillo society with semi-feudal land relations. Although land was communally owned, some Ezza and other migrants who settled in Ezillo were rewarded with land for farm labour services they rendered to Ezillo people. Land also was received as bride price for their daughters given away in marriage to Ezillo men had personal or family land in Ezillo that reconfigured their social statuses in the community from settlers to landowners. The colonial land reform policy reinforce the existing semi-feudal structure of land relation pushing it further into a postcolonial regimes of land transaction that paved way for a vibrant land market as we have it today. Despite the reconfiguration oflocal land relations to accommodate and empower migrants, consequently, the traditionalmeaning of land got alters having been exposed to acculturation. The implication this had on land was that it transformed the precolonial meaning of land from inalienable sacred symbol of communal identity to transferable economic store of value. The colonial regime needed people`s support and cooperation, so, did not totally abandon the indigenous feudal land relations they met on

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[47]KII/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 73years /Ezza community leader/20th August 2016

[48] This is a precolonial feudal land relation in Ezillo provided context in which control of access and use of land was in the hands of village chief and the family heads who are answerable to the council of elders.

[49] This is a colonial and postcolonial land relation that privatised the control of access and use of land at the same time recognising the authority of the landlords.

ground. This led to the dual meaning of land both as cultural symbol and as store of value (Obioha, 2008). Expectedly, this arrangement whittled down the potency of traditional authority over land. Because the people grudgingly succumb to this change, it created space for agitation and contestation. Above all, the perceived uncertainty surrounding changes in indigenous land relations generated fear, apprehension and suspicion. Following this suspicion was fear and antagonism that these white Europeans is opponents and invaders who have come to dispossess the black people of Ezillo of their land. Value attached to stranger particularly the Europeans also diminished, as they were perceived more as opponents and invaders who have come to take land from the people. Example, Ezillo is known to be accommodating to strangers and hospitable. Hear what an IDI respondent from Ezillo says:

> I can recall that before now, Ezillo hospitality culture provides that we quarter stranger on a temporal quarters communally built with mud and bamboo (thatch roof). It does not allow concrete or corrugated zinc sheet. But today, such is no longer the case as such buildings have been converted to concrete and zinc buildings. Strangers are increasingly taking over our land leaving us with less land to live and farm. Can you imagine that? This is why we are more careful with the people we accept as visitors today[50]

As a transit community, the name *Ezhiulo* as noted earlier translated to mean 'good house of accommodation and hospitality' is connected to the value Ezillo people attach to whoever a stranger may be in their midst. To quarter strangers in makeshift or temporal quarters is deliberate. This is why the community out of its benevolence collectively built mud-thatched houses for their guest disallowing them to build permanent structures. It is a form of social control against usurpation and exploitation of land and resources. The ambitious attempts by Ezza migrants to contravene this benevolence demonstrate subversion of cultural heritage. Ezillo culture frowns at this and the sanction is to banish the visitor. However, it is difficult to separate the ostracized from his family and wealth. Sometimes the offender simply steps out of the community to his town of origin and mobilises his kindred or family member to come and take over his land, property and family member while his ban last. The same thing happens when a landed or propertied Ezza-Ezillo man dies in Ezillo. An FGD participant from Ezillo has this to say:

> Our greatest problem with Ezza-Ezillo are those their kindred in their mainstream Ezza south and Ezza north LGA and others from their various colonies who flock into our community claiming they have kinship affinity with Ezza-Ezillo settlers. While some had valid inheritance claim, others have no evidence to their claims other than been a citizen of Nigeria. The

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[50]FGD/Elderly man/ Farmers/ 60years and above / Ezillo/25th August 2016

> proliferation of these claims complicates their settlement in the community. These migrants hitherto without any form of right to land resort to farm labourers who squat and now making trouble and constituting bad influence on their kins that have no problem in Ezillo.[51]

Contention is usually between the representatives of diseased Ezza labour migrants to settle in Ezillo and the indigenous Ezillo people over legitimacy claim to land. The reason been that this representatives may not be vast in knowledge of the details of the diseased or banished offender`s wealth and positions. In addition, contention arises when for instance an Ezza migrant settler in Ezillo is ostracise as punishment for the he committed against Ezillo, he goes back to his mainstream Ezza relatives.Arouse sub-ethnic sentiment to compel his relatives to come and take possession and control of his property and family.the host community considers such action as subversive and treats the delegation as invaders. The same thing is applicable when a propertied Ezza is diseased anywhere. Some people have often interpreted application of cultural sanctions in Ezillo to deter criminality among settlers to mean an injustice and discrimination. For instance, the demand in 1959 for Ezza-Ezillo people to relocate from the Ezillo land they occupy back to Egu-Echara originally allocated to them was disregarded as it was perceive to be witch hunting (Ogba, 2005).

This is a mindset that justice is negotiable. It compels some settlers to make unrealistic claims over land that pit them against their host community members. They invoke the sympathy and support of their affiliate groups to give their claim group coloration that will draw battle line between their group and the host community. Land conflict start with this kind of contention and end up in full blown war. The extensive Ezza kinship networks that transcend the mainstream communities in Ezza north and south LGA and their various colonies have contributed to inspiring pugnacious attitude in the Ezza toward any perceive opponents in conflict. In Ezza expansionist campaign, the facts of their population and might are propaganda tools used to intimidate any resistance to their land occupation.

An FGD participant from Ezillo concurred that

> Ezza migrants were taken as our tenants to settle and do their farming, which they extended into farming for Ezillo farmers requiring their service. Ezillo had no problem with that until issues of owning land and being indigene started to challenge our collective values and culture.[52]

A KII respondent from Ezza posits that:

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[51] KII/Woman/ town union Executive /63years and above /Ezillo /15th August 2016
[52]FGD/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezillo/18th August 2016

> For your information, Ezza people and culture abhor injustice. Therefore, if anyone thinks he/she can get Ezza farm labour for free that is not correct. Our word is our bond. We do not ask for what is not our own. How can you get a man to work for you and refuse him his wage? The bible said the worker deserve a wage.[53]

To Ezillo, Ezza shortchanges them through attempts to forcefully or subtly claim Ezillo land from unsuspecting victim who cannot withstand their harassment. The Ezza expansionisttendencies are brought to full bear when they intimidate and chase away underprivileged Ezillo families and occupy their land. This displacement is complicated when the victim mysteriously disappears. On the part of the Ezza, they go all out to recover debts owed them and if it is not forthcoming, the land of the debtor is taken over.

This struggle accommodates the relationship between the privileged class and the less privileged labour migrants in Ezillo. The land relation here was like master-servant relationship marked with labourer and wage reciprocal distribution.But where the labour is mistaken to be free, the Ezza do not from above response do not work for nothing. No matter how highly placed, Ezza labour is not free. This social relations arising from this arrangement is usually that of antagonism and contestations over who gets what, when and how. At the end of the day whatever the labourers earn, whether in cash or kind, is passed on to their household as inheritance when they are no more from generation to generation. An IDI respondent from Ezillo posits:

> Land inheritance is not automatic in Ezillo for landed settlers in the community. You must pass through rites of passage. Those sons whose parent have land here can only claim or inherit the land at the demise of their parent if the customary marriage rites of passage is completely adhered to. It is not available for those sons whose parent's marriage was not recognised by Ezillo culture. For instance, we have laid down customary rules when it comes to marriage and indigeneship. If you claim to have met the standard we also have a way of tracing the lineage for confirmation.[54]

Inherited land isone transferred from an original owner who is death to his living direct dependents. Inheritance is referred to as "*Alulu'ulo, Oruberu onye or Ubi ekpe"* depending on the village in question among the Ezillo people. Land may be inherited from father, mother or both family lineage or from descent source. It is from father side in a patriarcha setting and from mother side in a matrilineal setting. Also, it is lineage sourced when the piece of land inherited is originally a property that has passed through past generations, while

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[53]KII/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 73years /Ezza community leader/20th August 2016
[54]IDI/Men/ town union member /64years /Ezillo/17th August 2016

non-lineage inheritance occurs when one inherited or transfers land that was hitherto not part of his lineage. In Ezillo, children with mix parentage, Ezza and Ezillo to become an indigene of Ezillo are made to go through series of rites of passage before they can inherit their fathers property at death particularly land. Now, the rule has changed to investigating and ensuring that the man or woman married according to the tradition of Ezillo land before their offspring can be admitted into manhood cult as a bon fide Ezillo man. Otherwise, when she dies you must do posthumous marriage rites complete or that the children seize to inherit any landed property of their father. This has fuelled many crises in the community among those who cannot meet the demands and people of Ezillo reclaim of their land as community own from their dead owners. According to one of the KII respondent from Ezillo, he says:

> The aspect of the inheritance procedure of either grooming the heir into manhood for inheritance or marrying the death have all changed into one that stipulates the particular portion of land to be inherited by the beneficiaries of the deceased man. This change was not abrupt. Rather it was a gradual process reflecting the dynamic nature of society. It can, also, be attributed to changes in the traditional settlement pattern, coupled with increase in population of individual families. [55]

The major demerit of the new order of apportionment of land to heirs and inheritors is that it leads to land fragmentation that devalues the usefulness of the land over time with increase in population. The economic value of most potions of land inherited is reduced to a meagre value that cannot improve the life or status of the inheritor. Excessive division and sub-division of family inherited land take away the economic and productive value of land leaving the owner poor. The pieces land cannot be put into any meaningful use. At present, despite the customary rule there is no longer a strict practice whereby the first son(s) of a deceased man must live in the father's house or inherit his compound while the youngest son must inherit his mother's hut and the land immediately surrounding it. The prevailing practice is one where the first son usually decides to leave his father's compound for another plot of land so that his younger brother will inherit and make use of their father's abode. This happens often when the first son has acquired enough wealth to build himself another house.

Despite their farming skill, the land hungry Ezza (Isichei, 1976), also practice in Ezillo and beyond trade and artisanship. There, they are also successful. From observation, it is obvious that the Ezza-Ezillo works harder and is richer in Ezillo. There are three basic competitions among Ezza youths. One, who farms most productively, two, whose back cannot touch the

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[55]KII/Youth/youth leader/ 38years /Ezillo/27thSeptember 2016

ground in wrestling and who can organise resources to acquire foreign land and build houses wherever he is. Ezza-Ezillo boys keyed into aspiring to own land and compete among themselves as it is done in other Ezza colonies to the admiration of their host. According to Ogba (2005: 60) the relationship between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo was very cordial in the initial stages:

> The Ezillo elders found the Ezza-Ezillo people as good allies in the prosecution of war and also skilful hands in farm labour. The military capability of Ezza people was a great support that gave Ezillo people victory during the Ezillo-Mgbo wars of early 20th Century. These initially encouraged Ezillo to accommodate Ezza people who supported them and those whowere earlier and later settlers in Ezillo community. Land was given to them and several of them worked for Ezillo farmers.

A KII respondent from Ezillo has this to say

> Yes, it is possible for Ezillo people to have no problem accommodating Ezza migrants and even offer them shelter. But our culture provides that such shelter must be temporal not a permanent structures as we have them among the Ezza people at various places in Ezillo now. Farming and satisfying labour needs as well as search for greener pasture are strong factor the interpretation of Ezillo-Ezza land relations. But the truth is that land in Ezillo at the earliest point of Ezza entry into the community was neither a transferable economic good nor was it owned individually. Council of elders allocated Land and family heads in conjunction with the traditional ruler.[56]

One of the strongest defences Ezza-Ezillo had provided as responsible for their unrelenting quest to secure and occupy land in Ezillo community is that they or their parents dead or life had price for the land they occupy. This payment is usually made in exchange for land either by cash or by kind. It is against this background that Ofoke, (2000) points out that the Ezillo people could no longer force the Ezza people to work on their farms, among other things, as it was the case when they earlier interacted as master/slave relationship in Ezillo before the Ezza people used their military capability to save the community from Mgbo invasion. It is this realisation that abruptly changed the dynamics of Ezza-Ezillo relationship marked by fear and suspicion. On the part of Ezza people, Ezza-Ezillo is no longer a servant but has equal stake in the Ezillo community land recovered. Therefore, Ezza-Ezillo people are equal partners with Ezillo people in the community and should not be seen as settlers or strangers again. This was the argument behind the Ezza request for autonomous community and

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[56]FGD/Elderly man/ Farmers/ 60years and above / Ezillo/25th August 2016

increase in electoral wards to accommodate their population and political capital in Ezillo. An IDI from Ezza-Ezillo captures the demand succinctly:

> That the Ezza people in Ezillo asked for autonomous community and more wards is not a crime because their population strength demands it. They should be given more wards, communities and even traditional rulers. Therefore, to demand Izzo community is not a big crime to warrant acrimony and animosity[57]

Following the need for enlarged population as a political that require political expression, he Ezza-Ezillo demanded for Izzo autonomous community and more wards out of Ezillo community. This became basis for animosity and hatred exhibited by Ezillo people. But that was simply a political response to Ezza increasing population and need to be relevant in emerging liberal democratic dispensation in Nigeria. There was a consequent resumption of hostilities, as evident in the 1982, 1983, 1997, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2011 and 2015 violent conflicts following the Ezza still focused on having their own autonomous community and more wards from Ezillo instead of Ezillo-dominated local politics. While the Ezza-Ezillo argued that Ezillo is restricting their political relevance in Ezillo,the Ezillo people on the other hand insist that Ezza-Ezillo people disguise as Ezillo people to accummulata land, dominate politics and political appointment with their host having almost none. The youths of Ezillo alleged that the Ezza people are taking their opportunities even as migrants and will soon take over the control of Ezillo community. Enuke (2011:13) point out the issues in contention thus:

> The elders do not appear to have the last word on vital issues affecting land again as it was in the past. The discouraging docility of our elders is costing us our lives and our identity source such as our land. Consequently, the various clans in Ezillo, which were governed by the elders, are now being governed by the youths who, in some instances, do not only insist on what to do but also dictates to the elders what has to be done in the society.

The response above show disconnection between what happens and what the elders say unlike before now. It is against this backdrop that Obioha, (2008) argues that social change did not spare our rural communal culture. Instead, there is high dose of individualism as against the communal live that hitherto the rural communities are known for. Rather than the elders showing direction and wisdom to the younger ones, the younger rich ones are now directing the elders on what to do simply because of wealth.Now, it is perhaps important to show the unique attributes of elite and class concepts and why elite concept is relevant to the study.

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[57]IDI/Elderly Man/Farmers/ town union executive/60years and above /Ezillo/19thAugust 2016

However, rather than the elite see the (masses, peasant majority) as partners in progress in Ezillo, they are seen as opponents that must be compelled to surrender their sovereignty and give their loyalty to the elite class who parade as leaders. Subversion of developmental agenda and the diversion of development target are all ploys to keep the masses perpetually dependent on the elite class. The elite also create artificial uncertainty that mount to social and economic pressure on the masses. Example, this pressure created by elites has forced many peoplewho cannot cope to sale their inherited land to the land merchants at a giveaway price. Some of these land merchants also have close links to those other group described as conflict entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs are into causing conflict by either shifting land limits or boundary and grabbing land or selling same without the owner's consent. Thepeople some of who politically connected from both sides conspires with government agencies to effect their bid. These entrepreneurs of violence-mobilised people (foot soldiers) to go after the helpless landed peasant with threats and intimidation to frighten them into abandonment. They can also raise false claim against the peasant land ownership right especially where the land is strategically located. The owner is taken to the court where in most cases the cost of accessing justice will deny him justice. Participants in an FGD agreed with a discussant who says

> I am scared of the consequence of keeping much land in this community to myself o! Mhmmm... There are cases where locally powerful people instigate trouble and persecution of less privileged land owners with intention to contest in court the ownership of the owner. Cost of accessing justice compound the trouble for the less privileged to get justice. This ha put some land owners under pressure to sell land in order to fund litigation process. One man, for example, had several fields which, due to health challenges had not been cultivating the land for few years. A wealthy farmer who was the husband of a sister of the village head conspired with some people to invade, occupy and started using land without owners consent. For fear of cost and lack of contact to activate litigation process to get justice, the owner having been threatened with serious illness and the accidental death of his brother (who fell off a tree), he became convinced the man was bewitching him and he left the land for him. He was so frightened that he spoke of leaving the village and going to live with some of his mother's relatives in a different village.[58]

An FGD participant from Ezillo concurred and has this to say:
> Oh! Mhm, eeemhm..it is painful to imagine some people killed because of their land by invaders. Among the Ezillo people farming is now women thing mostly and these women are mostly widows whose husband had died in Ezillo war front. Our youths do no work other than okada and vigilante

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[58]FGD/Man/ Tertiary student / Youth group/25years and above /Ezillo/19th September 2016

services to keep Ezillo from sudden attacks. While the real owners of land are not there, the rich people take over. Some are occupied while some are sold before their owners know.[59]

AnIDI respondent from Ezillo concurred and has this to say:

> Land dispossession in Ezillo is a very serious issue. As in.., the land issue here. For me now I cannot tell where my daddy land is since he died we were driven away by fighters at a very young age. The only secondary school functioning in Ezillo today is hosting up to four other displace secondary schools. If we have no land to farm or call our own in our own land, you will agree with me that it is that serious. Government should return our authority over our land so our jobless youth can at least go to farm. Now, there is no school, no accessible land and no employment. Mhmm am afraid how people go take survive. [60]

In Ezillo, there is a wide gap between the landed and the landless. This has resulted in horizontal inequality that has placed the youth particularly at the receiving end. While government is perceived to be making only promises in one quarter, in other quarter they are seen to be biased in their intervention. Years of war and conflict have rendered many homeless and desolate. Above all, people are now living in fear and suspicion. For those who could still locate their compound or farm land, little harassment is enough to dispossess their land. Affected mostly are young men and women whom the wars have rendered orphan, widows and widowers. A KII respondent from Ezza- Ezillo had this to say:

> The measure of apprehensiveness pervading Ezillo land is visibly compelling. The government set up a joint youth committee of Ezillo and Ezza that will along with police accompany people to harvest their crops, but the Ezza refused and the conflict area was declared buffer zone. But trend of government intervention in the case create impression of un-seriousness and bias. Both Ezillo and Ezza were directed to vacate the said area, the Ezillo parked out the Ezza refused pointing out that they have nowhere to go to.[61]

The government decision on the matter appeared to have provoked the Ezza to greater resolve to not to retreat. The parties,(Ezillo-Ezza-Ezillo) continued their onslaught even on passersby including people from other state passing along the Ezillo section of the Enugu-Abakaliki High way. This aggravated onslaught made the then state commissioner of police Mr. Emmanuel Ayeni who had before then been meeting with representatives of Ezza and Ezillo to initiate a meeting with Inspector General of Police (IGP) Mr. Ogbonnaya Onovo in Abuja. The groups signed accord before the IGP to end the conflict immediately, on return to Ebonyi

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[59] FGD/Ezillo/Male Farmer and Elderly man/ 62 years old/ 25th August 2016
[60] IDI/Woman/ farmer and trader / 56years /Ezillo/20th August 2016
[61] KII/Man/Youth leader/ 36years /Ezza/13th August 2016

State, they fail apart again. The embittered youth went back to the trenches as their perceived way of taking their destiny in their hand for survival. Subsequent meetings called by the state government to implement the undertaking/resolution were shunned by (Ezillo-Ezza-Ezillo).The killing of one of the Mopol commander in Ezillo in operation, provoked the federal government sent in troops of mobil policemen led by Deputy Commissioner of Police Felix Uyana with David Ochala (CSP) as one of the unit. The mobile men succeeded in quelling the crisis then.

Landlessness may not be a problem to the few young men who have acquired good educationthat enabled them secure permanent skilled employment.However, landlessness is a major problem to majority of young men with primary or secondary O`levels education. Although population pressure intensify demand for land space, the increasing literacy level without corresponding availability of employment opportunities has further compounded demand and scarcity of landas the unemployed skilled labour search for land to farm or apply their trade instead of staying idle. These conditions have reinforced the tensed social disruption, tension and conflict among the population of Ezillo community. The desperation faced by unemployed youths trying to use land to keep busy manifested in frequent cases of generational land disputes (Oji, *et al*, 2015), as well as the increased incidence of theft, prostitution and other criminality. Unfortunately, while landlessness and hopelessness are irritably on the rise, land concentration and privatisation is observably increasing. People accumulate land and disguise it to be government acquired. Buttressing the foregoing is an IDI respondent who says

> the process of individualisation of land in Ezillo is acute. There is considerable inequality among farmers in terms of land holding here. Some people transfer their grievances to the wrong people. Well, I do not mean Ezza-Ezillo has stopped land encroachment in Ezillo, but their activities is not to me as serious as that of the State and federal authorities who come in to take at will large expanse of land in the name of community development and leave it fallow for years. This action deprives our rural peasants of their farmland. Look at Ezillo water scheme, Ezillo commercial rice farm settlement, the various mining cites across Ezillo many of them nothing profitable is happening there.[62]

Within the context of conventional and traditional approaches to resolve land conflict in Ezillo, the above data represent state acquisitions some of which have either compounded the problem or managed it. Ezillo case is one that demonstrates the excluded peasantry and

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[62]IDI/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ town union executive/66years /Ezillo/19th August 2016

enlarged inequality gap between the landed and the landless. Despite the alleged Ezza encroachment, the process of accessing and use of communal land in Ezillo is highly competitive and political. That is in the area where government does not have interest in as acquired area. Even the so called government acquired areas some of them are individually acquired using the state. That the Ezza people close to or in government occupy land and Ezillo people call it encroachment can be legally interpreted as taking possession of legitimately acquired land by privileged individuals. In buttress, drawing from Raph Miliband, (2013: 34) opinion I quote:

> "state is not a thing....it does not, as such, exist. What the *"state"* stands for is a number of institutions which together constitute its reality and which interact as parts of what may be called the state system.

Drawing from the above position therefore, government actually represents the state. Rather than support peasants through empowerment, majority of rural peasantry are subjected to structural violence that deprive them access and use of farmland. This structural demobilisation from economic mainstay leaves the peasants redundant thereby crippling the rural economy. This has great implications for communal relation and conflict management. The implication is that the social and economic pressure on idle peasants makes them vulnerable vices like political thuggery, prostitution and other crime that make the rural areas unsafe for any productive venture.

Misplacement of leadership priority is usually an idea from few individual who consider personal gains above collective gains. The reliance on leadership had often toe the direction of disappointment and betrayal as leadership considers the peasants as powerless class. This is evident in the discrimination associated with communal land allocation. Among peasant majority in Ezillo community like in some other communities in Nigeria, this lack of inclusive access and use of land is largely because the local chief, council of elders and the family heads appropriate land to satisfy their interest. So if you are not in their good books as a peasant, you will have to wait till another planting season. In all, these administrators concede to the imposed preference while taking decision as a matter of strategy.

The Ezza warriors are considered from the point of view that such breed of war mongers should not be taken for granted for security reasons.Their brevity as inherited is too strong for a nascent state like Ebonyi struggling to survive political pressure to cope with Ezza conflict. Antecedent show how this Ezza have sack towns and communities with little effort. Beside, they are the most populous group in the Ebonyi state. So, conceding to their demand could be

sometimes born out of desire to let sleeping dog lie for peace to reign for what affect Ezza will definitely affect many of their colonies outside and inside Ebonyi state. The warriors are treated exceptionally unlike an ordinary Ezillo. This concession includes arbitrary allocation of land outside their settlement. Some Ezillo elders appease the Ezza-Ezillo warrior with land in exchange to secure their support and loyalty in case of any trouble in future. Until recently, the Ezillo people still fear and defer to Ezza-Ezillo as senior brothers. Hear a KII respondent from Ezza-Ezillo, he has this to say:

> I belong to the kindred of the Ezza warriors that history says were contracted to render military service and thereafter given land to settle permanently in Ezillo. Looking at that from legal point of view, the contract represents an automatic source of Ezza legitimacy over land in Ezillo. [63]

Another interviewee from Ezza countered the claim by asking thus:

> Yes, we have seen and conquered, we have come to stay in Ezillo permanently as agreed. We have no other place to call our own but Ezillo. Nobody will be allowed to make us regret the deal with Ezillo. Therefore, Ezillo must accommodate our increase in population that is why we consider it legitimate to seek for more land. In fact, our ancestors fought to secure Ezillo from injustice of Mgbo invasion. If there is war today, between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo over land, we are fighting a just war and victory is ours.[64]

Another IDI respondent from Ezza-Ezillo has this claim as:

> The Ezza people fought side by side with the Ezillo people against Mgbo, lost their lives and properties in order to keep Ezillo where they are living today. Therefore, the Ezza people are no junior partners but equal partners and they should not be called stranger or settlers in Ezillo land. We are joint owners of land in Ezillo. [65]

The Ezza-Ezillo characteristically addresses issues concerning them and Ezillo with pugnaciously that demonstrate a kind of master slave relationship. The aggressive tendency of warriors seems to overwhelm the Ezza-Ezillo into undermining the terms of their deal with their host Ezillo. This is the crux of the matter and issue of conflict between the two. The narrative of the Ezza-Ezillo people has it that Ezza fought the enemies of the Ezillo, in the process lost their sons, and was accordingly compensated with the lands they now occupy. They noted that the implication of *imabe ogbu* (traditional tree planted to signpost permanent residence) custom perform with Ezillo was that Ezza will forever in the recovered and

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[63]KII/Man/ political office holder/40years and above /Ezza/21st August 2016
[64]KII/Elderly Man/ Trader/ community representative in Enugu/60years /Ezza/19th August 2016
[65]IDI/Men/ Lawyer and town union member/43years and above /Ezza/ 15th August 2016

occupied land in Ezillo. This explains why the Ezza know and have resolved to stand up shoulder to shoulder with Ezillo person or persons who may want to challenge Ezza.

That Ezza-Ezillo is resident in Ezillo community today is not by accident but is rooted in history. This fact of history is traced to sometimes in the 1920s. Ezillo on their part accept that they invited Ezza people for joint warfare operation. They admit that both Ezillo and Ezza agreed and got into commitment that after the war, if Ezillo emerge victorious and their occupied land recovered, both parties will share and settle on the recovered land based on specified terms that exclude coming to control or intimidate Ezillo people. Therefore, it is reasoned that the Ezza claim of losing their sons in the war front to rescue Ezillo and continue to live as a buffer in the disputed area between Mgbo and Ezillo communities does not legally and customarily justify their breach of the terms of the treaty signed by both parties. The terms did not include turning Ezillo to Ezza colony instead it include due respect for Ezillo culture and loyalty to Ezillo constituted traditional authority. An IDI respondent from Ezillo comments:

> Look, eeh! Ezza people have everything going for them in Ezillo yet they make trouble. Very well read, industrious, and hardworking as evidenced in their various establishments in Ezillo. These attributes are highly welcomed by us. However, there is nobody without a name or identity. How can a stranger come to our land to rule and dominate us? Ezillo is known for peace and accommodation. That is not a license for people to take our culture for granted. This is what Ezza delight in doing unfortunately. It is obvious that if we are not careful, we will wake up one day to see Ezza over-run Ezillo converting us into one of their colonies. Their expansionist tendency is a confirmation to this allusion. This is why our youths are neither sleeping nor schooling but all at alert and ready to defend our land. We must place them where they belong despite that they have almost taken up our legitimate opportunities both in schools and in employments. Yes, there was conditional contract as a binding legitimacy for Ezza to own land allocated to them at Egu-Echara to settle, but why are the terms of the contract not obeyed? Example is the issue of being loyal to our traditional authority, abiding by Ezillo laws including those that mapped out the dimensions and limits of the allocated land. Why is it difficult for the Ezza people to live within the bounds of the limits marked? We did not invite the Ezza people to come and control us but to remain under our control. These are the major issues. If they need additional land, it is something we can both sit down and look at together for solution. Not for them to forcefully chase weak Ezillo indigenes out from their farms and houses mysteriously and take over. [66]

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[66]IDI/ Man/ Farmers/ 60years /Ezillo/15th August 2016

Data suggest threat to Ezillo identity and pressure to outrightly control means of livelihood in Ezillo. Despite the perceived hospitality shown to Ezza as partners in progress by Ezillo people there are evidence in the data that the Ezillo people are weary, fearful and suspicious of the Ezza expansionist tendency that could mean internal domination and colonisation. This is suggested to be the reason for Ezillo youths` resolve to stand up against the suspected threat their identity and communal security atthe expense ofschooling and career. Pointing out the issues in the conflict, the data dismiss possible assumption that Ezza was intvited to take over and control their host Ezillo. It is obvious that additional land for the Ezza people from Ezillo is not as serious as the Ezza tendencies that threatened security and identity of the entire people of Ezillo as host community members gradually becomes strangers in their land.

For emphasy, the contestation arising from the indigene-settler problematic stems from the unclear conception, perception and constitutional definition of who is an indigene and a settler. What rightsand entitlements do they have constitutionally? Despite the settler label on Ezza-Ezillo, the people`s identity nationalism had led them to build churches and separate traditional leadership institutions for themselves. To them these will checkmat the excesses and dominance of the Ezillo people who regarded Ezza-Ezillo as strangers. For many years the Ezillo Community had complained that scholarships meant for their indigenes were taken by the Ezza people because of their positions in government both at the state and federal levels. This contradiction is the reason behind Otite (1999) arguement that identity mobilization acquires significance because of the struggle for access to a variety of limited resources which could include power, chieftaincy, market or land. More often than not the negative mobilization of such identities as ethnicity, religion, language, clan or race in the pursuit of access to the limited resources further fuels conflict and violence.

The Ezillo people began to see the position of the Ezzas as a threat and consequently mobilized themselves to checkmate their hegemonic disposition.The Ezillo attributes the denigration of their cultural and traditional heritage by the Ezzas as some of the causes of the dispute between them. This include: flouting of new yam festival rules –bringing new yam in to Ezillo market by the Ezzas before the cultural rites of new yam in Ezillo, looting of the peoples' artefacts, and antiquities, killing of fish in sacred ponds and rivers, desecration of the chieftaincy institution as evident in the beating of the traditional ruler of Ezillo, Eze Chima Onyibe and his wife in 2008. In 1992, the Ezillo people also alleged that the Ezza people seized Nwafor Isimkpuma market and renamed it Eke-Ezza. They also chased

innocent widows and children away from their compound and took it over. This opinionwas faulted by an interviewee from Ezza who aserts:

> Ezillo people are simply transferring aggression to the wrong persons. We came to this community before Mgbo, Ezza and Ezillo war treaty. History has it that we migrated to Ezillo as migrant labourers in search for greener pasture. This we found and settled down peacefully with our host. Our interaction is marked by I work for you; you pay me in kind or cash. Despite that we cannot deny our Ezza identity, our case is different and should be seen so. Even the white men met us here in Ezillo. Land issues had never been a problem as we either earn land or buy it from our host. We have build families here that we do not want to scatter. Some of this our children do not even know our home villages in Ezza. Wives and husbands among us are either Ezza or Ezillo. How can land separate what God has joined together, mhmmmh? Our claim of legitimacy over land is anchored on the actually lands we have legitimately acquired over the years. We have no known record of land disputable. Ezillo cannot deny us access or ownership of these plots of land because our identity here is tied to them for decades.[67]

Although it is not peculiar to Ezza people denying their identity anywhere, but by virtue of marriage and procreation, some settlers are more Ezillo than Ezza in this community. Generations of children with Ezillo identities and Ezza lineage have survived decades of Ezza settlements in Ezillo community. The Ezza farmers settled in Ezillo earlier before the coming of the invited Ezza warriors came. Ezillo community is made up of seven villages namely (in order of seniority) Amofia, Amaleze, Umuakpaa, Umuezeoke, Amuhu and Amorie; The Ezza-Ezillo people are made up of two villages namely Umuezeoka and Umuezeokoha. They also constitute about thirty percent of the remaining five villages in Ezillo. The implication of this is that the Ezza in Ezillo largely enjoy absolute majority and rights to own landbased on inheritance and procurement.Also, being the first to clear and occupy plots of land that were un occupied before their arriva in which they either acquired them in cash, kind or exchanged for marriage as bride price or exchanged for farm labour services the render to their host. There was no known record of war between this early settlers and their host.

The invited Ezza warrior came to Ezillo on a platform different from earlier Ezza settlers in Ezillo. While the former went to Ezillo invited to rescue the community from invasion under specified terms, the later went there as migrant labourers looking daily bread which they found and settled down. In buttress, Ugbo, *et al*, (2008) noted that before the invited Ezza warrior's arrival, the people of Ezillo had been living in peace with the Ezza migrant

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[67]IDI/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ town union executive/60years and above /Ezza/19th August 2016

labourers who were living in the Ezillo community as farming and serving the community as farm labourers. It was said that the invited Ezza warriors came and conspired with the earlier ones to intensify land dispossession and displacement in the remote villages of Ezillo. For example Egu-Echara land recovered from Mgbo was allocated to the invited warriors. They abandoned it and pushed inward Ezillo community aggressively displacing people in the guise of looking for their brother (the Ezza labourer who were settled earlier). Ugbo, et al., (2008) further noted that there was conspiracy of silence from Ishielu local government and Ebonyi state against the Ezza provocative expansionist occupation of Ezillo land. It was trivialised into mean brotherly quarrel. Today, that state discriminatory is become a habit because government did little to give Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo the attention it deserved. An IDI respondent from Ezillo has this to say:

> One other very serious issue of land in Ezillo is that since government discovered several mining cites in Ezillo, land has suddenly become hard to access particularly among the peasant farmers who mostly depend on it for farm. As rule of law is thrown to the wind, to get land to farm even from the chief, council of elders or the family becomes struggle for the fittest. Absence of inclusive policy on access and use of land is unfortunate. Competition for land has shifted from among peasant farmers to political elites and business people. The contest cut across Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo elites. You need to price a plot of land in the remote part of Ezillo and hear the price. It is scaring the rate at which these rich people buy the land now. Many cases of incursion into private land in Ezillo are in the court now. Sometime the landed rich will hire thugs to fight themselves in cases where one land is sold to more than one person. It is more now that government has taken over many part of Ezillo from Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo owners.[68]

The discovery of solid minerals like bauxite, limestone, manganese, igneous rock, and many others, has opened gateways to Ezillo for local and foreign investor. The most recent investor came from The Republic of China to acquire the highest stake foremost southeast cement industry that went moribund due to lack of funding. NigerCem in Nkalagu one of the co-owners of the mining cite with Ezillo. Consequent upon this and other similar developments in Ezillo land are priced very high now. It is now left for only the rich who can afford to buy land at any cost. This change is also an attraction for indigenous people of Ezillo to sale off inherited family land to strangers and damn the consequence of landlessness.

Ironically, most of this elites representing Ezillo interest in the struggle for available land resources are Ezza-Ezillo more educated, and more spread population wide. Contestation for

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[68]IDI/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ Town union executive/60years /Ezillo/19th August 2016

this resource arose from its potential for royalty, rent and other accruable from state and investor alike. The derivation and employment opportunities and resource producing area privilages are targets that spine up contestation for central stake in the ownership of these resource filled strips of Ezillo land in the community.

Finally, the end of authority contentions over land in Ezillo will not be so soon as unfolding developments are not pointing to that. While land fragmentation continues to raise dust of poverty and landlessness, the dual meaning of land continues to pitch the buyers of land against sellers. Invasion and dispossession is ripe just as communal structure of the rural community faces the challenges of high dose of individualism.The Elites continue to contend with those deprived of family heritage, only for the traditional authority be faced with indicting allegation and counter allegation of nepotism and self-centeredness by peasant who may one day push their grievances further into revolution targeting their perceived oppressor-the family heads, the village heads, the community opinion leaders and the Eze-ogo cabinet and the throne itself. Given the underlying possibilities, privileges and opportunities for royalty, rent and employment derivable from land resource particularly now that government is looking at diversification into solid mineral exploration and development, contentions for suspected land with such resources will increase. The quest to take ownership position in the resource filled Ezillo land will continue to be a conflict trigger or driver until the authority contentions over land ownership is finally resolved.

4.1.3 Ezillo Land Conflict and Identity

Historical kinship identity in Abakaliki Division or northeast Igboland (NEI) became source of conflict during and after colonialism different from what it was before colonialism in the area. This affected Ezza inter-group relations particularly as its identity was reified above others significantly in the area by the colonial recognition it received. NEI is an area formally known and identified as Ezza area of influence and dominance from the precolonial to even the postcolonial periods. Gerontocratic culture-government of the elders and hoeing are popular and peculiar culture in this area. As such, land is very essential survival, status and religion. The voices of other groups in the area were not hard complaining of Ezza domination until after colonisation. History and culture homogeneity based on shared ancestral connection held the groups together. The efficacy of this bonding was described to be fading away steadily following colonial disengagement. Obioha, (2008) identified increasing individualisation that accompanied colonisation into post colonialism as potent

reason for the decline in this ancestral and extended family bonding. In buttress, an interviewee in Ezillo says

> In line with the gerontocratic culture of the area, and the fact of Ezza been the eldest son of the area`s progenitor Ekumenyi Ezekuna, respect and popularity of the Ezza to his brothers Izzi, Ikwo, Ohaukwu, Mgbo and Ezillo was not unquestionable. One thing that bonded NEI together was their belief in Chukwu Igwe and Chukwu Ala meaning 'GOD in heaven and god of the land'. Their share of common ancestral origin follows this. Within this context, Ezza people were said to be the Okpara (eldest son) of Ezekuna Ekumaenyi the progenitor of NEI. As Okpara, the culture demand that they lead and others follow in NEI. The Ezza people had made and are still marking remarkable marks in farming and warfare that distinguished them as a dominant sub-ethnic Igbo race. [69]

The precolonial and colonial identity configuration in Ezillo was a mutual recognition of the bond of shared ancestral lineage was strongly upheld and that sustained a kind of master servant relationship between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo. Therefore, the classification Ezillo then was in terms of the NEI people without any particular identity predominantly mobilised. The achievements of the Ezza people were considered the achievement of all NEI people (Isichei, 1976). The entire NEI was famous for warfare services and perennial farming of cereal (example rice) and tuber cropping such as yam, cocoyam, water yam and cassava. Cultivation of these crops involves hoeing and energy to till the soil and makes mounds. Besides being warriors of note, Ezza people are famous in this kind of farming. Other groups in the area identified with the predominant value in NEI and Ezillo is part of NEI. The initial contact Ezza people had with the Ezillo people was before colonialism in NEI in the late nineteen century as migrant labourers. The social structure of the contact was informed by the notion of indigene and settler. Things like common ancestry and kinship tie; pride and safety played crucial part in the reception, settlement and adoption of Ezza values and farming methods in Ezillo community. Identities do not by themselves lead to conflicts. It turns on conflict only when mobilization around identities occurs or they are politicized that they constitute the bases for conflicts. But not much of this mobilisation took place to that created tension in the case of Ezillo and Ezza in the precolonial period. Instead customary land tenure and the sacredness of land were sources of strong social bonding that transcends community life unlike in the following colonial period. An IDI respondent from Ezza-Ezillo says

> During colonial era other identities within and around the north east Igboland (NEI) were overshadowed by the dominance of Ezza identity. This

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[69]FGD/Elderly man/ Farmers/ 60years and above / Ezillo/25th August 2016

construction evolved from the colonial perception of the people of Ezza before they were conquered. Having been encountered first, it was clear that the strongest resistance to British control of NEI came from the Ezza people. After Ezza military prowess was discovered and conquered by the British forces, the Ezza were conscripted in their number to serve in the colonial military expeditions in Igboland. Ezza people`s outstanding performance in war front earned for them service in colonial government, scholarships and education gave the Ezza an advantage over other groups in the area. This increased access to western education and prominent position in the colonial administration for the Ezza people unlike the Ezillo. As such more colonial decisions tend to favour the Ezza people more than the others like Ezillo. In this sense, they conceded more vital position to them than any other groups. [70]

From the responses above, Ezza is considered and treated as senior brother by virtue of its seniority position in the hierarchy of the sons of Ekumaenyi Ezekuna the founder of NEI. This position paved way for an asymmetrical power relationship from the oldest son to the youngest. This structure continues to reflect in Ezza interaction with other members of his ancestral lineage until date. Covertly, this historic identity structure has implication on Ezza relationship with Ezillo as revealed in the conclusion to invite Ezza to broker peace between Ezillo and Mgbo who are younger brothers to Ezza in their ancestral hierarchy. As much as exert superior power of control and sanction over his ancestral brother he also share its farming and warfare skills with them and ensure no external aggressor intimidates or humiliates any part of NEI. This Ezza ancestral status also reflects in his esteem projection before other groups he relates with outside NEI. Most groups outside NEI interacting with Ezza often conclude that Ezza is subtly bossy and crafty. This may not be very correct when considered from the point of Ezza experience and reality. His socialisation is to see himself as a responsible big brother who should control other groups in the area as younger brothers. This conclusion connects colonial recognition of this assumption by the Ezza.

Colonial regime entrenched discriminatory practices and ethnic inequalities through its divide and rule policy that further amplified indigene-settler divide and it was continued by post-independence administrations (Obioha, 2008). Largely, the postcolonial regime pursued the divisive colonial social exclusion structures when it embraced the federal character, state of origin, and quota systems. These structures have not made any democratic sense difference from the contentious exploitation and conflict that characterised colonial regime. The oldest political local administrative structure is the native authority in Ezillo. It defines non-indigene as either strangers or settlers. This definition determines who gets what and how based on the

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[70]IDI/Men/ Lawyer and town union member/43years and above /Ezza/ 15th August 2016

social exclusion and inclusion of "us and them", "we and they", "theirs and ours". The first phase of Ezza contact with Ezillo was traditionally captured as interaction between farm/land owner (master) and farm labourer (servant) this was the setting before colonisation got to Ezillo community in 1905. An archival account of who Ezza people are records that:

> Ezza people are unsung warriors of Igboland with history of brevity and gallantry in warfare. Pre-colonial warfare across Igbo communities with their neighbours is not complete without mentioning the input of the Ezza warriors. They trade on their hoeing skill and military capability. Others interested in their services engage them as mercenaries for a price usually potion of land for settlement. These settlements across Iboland later become Ezza colonies.Example of these colonies are in many places like the Agala Idoma, Tiv, Ukelle, Item, Ada, Obegu, Amagunze, Edda, Abriba, Effium, Okpoto, as well as Ezillo. It would be recalled that the rise of European imperialism witnessed massive opposition, revolt and armed opposition among the people of Igboland in general and Ezza in particular. In that era of colonialism, the Ezza people rose up in their numbers to challenge the presence of the Europeans in North-East Igboland. While the Ezza people were traditionally normadic, the wars of resistance with the British colonial lords pushed many of their townsmen to resettle in new Ezza colonies, outside their ancestral homeland. Ezza Ezillo is one of these new areas of Ezza settlements, outside their ancestral home, which are generally referred to as Ezza Diaspora. It is inthose new settlements (Ezza Diaspora) that inter-communal conflicts became intermittent and recurrent.[71]

The entire northeastern Igbo land was synonymous to Ezza identity. This was because the Ezza people had made and were marking remarkable marks in farming and warfare that distinguished them as a dominant sub-ethnic Igbo race from others in this area.The role of kinship in keeping the bond from land relation that sustain common identity in Ezillo prior the British colonial regime cannot be overemphasised. Also, the colonial structure of concessions that saw the Ezza identity evolving into dominant identity across NEI including Ezillo during colonial regime is worthy of note. But in all of these, the Ezza hunger for land and quest to expand its territory was boosted by colonialism. In view of the radical transformation of traditional pattern of governance particularly as concern land access and use, Ezillo people started asking questions of identity and other concerns. For instance, the imposition persons not of Ezillo extraction to serve in Ezillo as Warrant Officer and the trend of communal land dispossession by colonial regime were considered threatening and unfair to the indigenous people and their identity. The people began to raise issues of land, identity and who is a settlers and indigenes in Ezillo (Ogba-Iyam, 2005). The British regime was not ready to compromise its interest for any parochial or primordial interest. To this end, it

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[71]NAE, File: 387, 3/1/29, Ezza Land Disputes

assembled people from diverse direction with diverse orientation are structured to administer foreign culture in foreign land.

It is against this backdrop that identity is mobilised in Ezillo along sub-ethnic strings across indigene and settler line to contest authority over Ezillo communal land. Colonial land policy though did not totally abrogate customary communal ownership of land but weakened it by negating its major ternate of inalienability. The colonial state personalised land in a manner that delegitimized communal authority over land. Due to the centrality of land to identity, the colonial action activated sub-ethnic consciousness and division along primordial lines. This escalated contentions over land between 'autochthons' and 'migrants' hence the identity label of indigene and non-indigene categories that later evolved determinants of inclusion and exclusion in access to, ownership and use of land in Ezillo. An IDI respondent from Ezza-Ezillo says:

> Presently, the Ezza people in any part of NEI feel passionately that their 'primordial' identity is nothing less than indigene because together people of this area share descent from Ekumanyi Ezekuna. This is against the notion of indigeneship claimed by their host like Ezillo. Ezza believe they are co-owners of all parts of NEI and so have responsibility to join active with others to develop the area for common good. But others do not see them the same way. This clash of civilisation is a singular contradiction that triggers conflict of interest in places like Ezillo community.[72]

From the response above, it can be seen that the Ezza really wanted passionately a commonwealth of NEI and oneness to demonstrate the power of common ancestral descent. This was actually the dream of their ancestors and part of the positive ideas behind the acceptance colonial imposition of Ezza identity on other NEI groups. But time is changing and civilisation is evolving that affected the communist principles. Though if reasoned otherwise, one could blame the perceive crisis of civilisation in NEI that led to the segregation and discrimination among brother in the area to imperial capitalist idea of the colonialist. The same capitalist who preached commonwealth of NEI also circumvent the groups interest by creating division through divide and rule system of land policy.

However, while demand for indigenous land rights to reflect the identity of real owners of land in Ezillo is distorted by events of land acquisition by private individuals. Some of who are strangers whose interest in land ownership right is to acquire local identity for political and economic needs. The misinterpretation of these claims and counter claims by both Ezillo

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[72]IDI/Men/ town union Executive /44years /Ezza/11th August 2016

and Ezza that transverse history and reality is actually responsible for conflict. The underlying factor of historical attachment of identity to land and the reconstruction of this identity into Ezza and Ezillo at the same time exacerbate the conflict. This is obvious in the conduct of most Ezza politicians who claim Ezillo identity at convenient to further their political ambition simply because they have one or two plots of land they bought in Ezillo. This has become contestable simply because settlers using Ezillo community identity to contest and political office or position deprive the principal identity, the indigenous people of Ezillo their rightful political positions. Another interviewee from Ezillo has this to say:

> both at home and in Ezillo, the concrete ground of the dry season does not deter Ezza from wielding their giant hoes which no other Igbo group can use effectively, and piling the ground into enormous yam mounds of a cubic yard or of soil. The Ezza identity until date is considered the symbol of northeast Igbo identity. Having performed herculean feats of industry on their own farms, it is traditional for Ezza to travel with pride as migrant labourers to work on the farms of others. Feared by other Igbo people for their feat in warfare, the history of Ezza expansion is really the history of displacement and assimilation of rival groups that preceds internal colonisation. In these ways, the Ezza constantly enlarge its territorial geographical sphere of influence and demographic strenght[73]

Another interviewee from Ezza says:

> We, the Ezza people stand for justice, fairness and truth. We have never fought any or in any unjust war. We believe in what is good for the gees is also good for the gander. It is our insistence on justice that unjust interpreted to be pride, mischievous and crafty. Ezza man does not believe in working for free for any man. We agree, we work then you pay the agreed wage. You want to take our labour for free, mhm! We will not accept it. [74]

From the findings and responses above, the history of Ezza inter-group relations is the history of expansion and colonization. There either invade your land or are hired to fight and invade opponents. Hard work and resilience no doubt from the responses is a very important component of Ezza life and culture as exhibits in all works of life even in their current dispersed state. As many Ezza are outside Ezzaman some are in areas considered and controlled as colonies, they are still distinguished with resilience, doggedness and commitment to hard work. Mercenary was and is still part of Ezza culture as reflected in the various experiences they had with other groups even outside their territorial areas into non-Igbo areas. Their acclaimed stand for justice is one taken with mix feeling about its correctness. For instance, how do you believe in justice when you participate in warfare to

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[73]FGD/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezillo/18th August 2016
[74]IDI/Man/ town union Executive /63years and above /Ezza/15th August 2016

dislodge someone else's enemy that is not your own? They argument led to these interviewee from Ezza who response is that:

> Ezza is progressive and fights any obstacle to progress even for his enemy. But do not fight uninvited. As all invitations for war are scrutinized by elders who are descendants of gallantry in our history. They consider first the justice in the war, is it for humanity or for individuality? They consider the cost; will it advance Ezza and its client interest? Warfare is a trade in Ezzaman and it is synonymous to Ezza identity. [75]

It is obvious from the aggressive pursuit of goal accomplishment Ezza is known for, unlike other groups around them, that their penchant for justice remains uncompromised. Their dexterity taken for granted can be expensive. For instance, after hiring them as labourers if you decline paying for the labour, your property usually land will be hijacked forcefully. Your land as pay back after you have forgotten what happened. Another respondent from Ezillo says:

> Justice in the context of Ezza people is rudely and aggressively pursued. That is not conventional in a democratic free world. Where is tolerance and love then? Toleration is vital in social interaction that is not mechanical. Again, Ezza is cunning and subtle about their justice[76]

The response above reveals subtlety and cunning. It suggests that victims can even lose a whole estate to such trick particularly if the initiator is late by the payback time. Such trick can be dangerous where there is no evidence to disproof the claims of the claimant. Coupled with war mongering, the other members of the NEI groups tend to be scared of being identified as Ezza. They resist any classification that does not consider each group by the merit of its conduct and value despite the ancestral kinship bond. Like noted earlier, ezza has a chauvinistic attitude toward its identity which many NEI do not have. They believe in the sanctity and oneness of Ezza nation.

In fact both Ezza and Ezillo have each built up an enduring narrative on conflict and identity in the community. In my opinion, the Ezza invited to support Ezillo in their war against Mgbo that were given a potion of land to settle not only invited more Ezza people from mainstream Ezza nation`s communities outside Ezillo but also fraternised with their kins that earlier settled in Ezillo as migrant labourers. While the invited Ezza warriors were given by Ezillo people permanent settlements with legitimacy to land in Ezillo, the uninvited Ezza who were either settled earlier or came in later as farm labourers or anything have no legitimacy to

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[75]FGD/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezillo/18th August 2016
[76]KII/Man/ Youth leader/34years /Ezillo/2ndAugust 2016

Ezillo land. Rather, they identified with their kins who own land legitimately to acquire more land hence also, claiming legitimate owners of land in the community. This Ezza attitude deliberately concentrates Ezillo land in the hands of the Ezza settlers at the same time increasingly rending the Ezillo people landless. The most attractive response to this process has been recurring intermittent violent conflict between land possessors and the dispossessed. It is against this backdrop that the people of Ezillo continue to loss more and more of their land to Ezza people thus, laying the background for conflict of interests in land and identity conflict.

The sort for their relatives earlier settled in Ezillo by Ezza warriors who were allocated legitimately Ezillo land to permanently inhabit suggests this. The sources of concern about this to Ezillo were in the conspiracy of these relatives to acquire and occupy Ezillo land secretly chasing their owners away mysteriously. A discussant from Ezillo says:

> Secretly the old and new Ezza settlers are at it again. Now, false claim of inheritance has graduated to mysteriously chasing poor Ezillo indigenes in the remote villages out of their land and occupying them. The earlier settler changes their status from farm labourers to become settled warriors owning land here and there.[77]

Another from Ezza says:

> Ezza has no land occupied in Ezillo that they did not worked for. We either exchange land with money in form of cash or unredeemed loan given to Ezillo. Others were got from our hard work domestically, in the farm or service delivery. Why are Ezillo people policing us this way?[78]

Based on the above response, the import of social constructionist perspective is illuminated that the identity of the earlier Ezza farm labourers who migrated to Ezillo before their invited kinsmen recreate their identity by acquiring Ezillo land using the identity of the invited Ezza. As this transformation continue, it populate the Ezza group with entitlement to land depopulate the ones without land rights and deplete space available for Ezillo use. Right to land in Ezillo is evidence of Ezillo identity. Land is inherited as either testate or intestate. An owner of land or any person interested in it disposes of his property by exchange or will. If there is no will or any expression of how property should be distributed at death, the property is devolves to the diseased heirs. The problem of establishing who the heir is in respect to land depends on which system of law is invoked. In the case of non-natives, the applicable

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[77]FGD/Man/ Tertiary student / Youth group/20years and above /Ezillo/19th July 2016
[78]FGD/Elderly man/ Farmers/ 60years and above / Ezza /12th August 2016

law is English law with statutory modifications. As regards natives, the applicable law is customary law except where the application of customary law is ousted. The application of customary law of succession is controversial and complicated because no single oneapplies to the entire country. An interviewee from Ezza buttress, she says

> We are Ezza first before being Ezza-Ezillo and co-owners of Ezillo community. The treaty must be followed. Our inheritance cannot be compromised. We must carry it on to the next generation of Ezza-Ezillo the way we received it. We also have and share indigenous right to land with the so call indigenes of Ezillo community. Although inheritance right without will and with will sometime clash due to duality in tenural laws, much of conflicts here have been the choice of laws to follow. If land means identity, then we also have Ezillo identity. Whatever land ownership means to an Ezillo person is also what it means to the Ezza person. The land we are talking about is Ezillo land and Ezza land in Ezillo. We therefore have equal stake with Ezillo people in this community. Anybody denying this is looking for trouble. [79]

Identity is based on inheritance. That Ezza-Ezillo people are claiming indigenes in Ezillo are because of their inheritance they people insist must not be tampered with. Inheritance under customary law is largely intestate succession and applies only to the estate of a person subject the law. The usual point of conflict regarding either testate or intestate is how to reconcile the two possibilities provided by legal pluralism in land relations regulation in Nigeria. The Ezza consider owning more land as a strategy to dispel Ezillo superiority claims over land ownership and affinity to it. This position is supported by the response above that also reveals the discrimination Ezza considered them victim in Ezillo. The response underscores the centrality of land to identity mobilisation as strategy to be part of the local decision making process in the community. In addition, there are issues of credibility in marriage and inheritance based identity claims. These issues arose from the recognition of only those children born by Ezillo parents as indigene of Ezillo others are considered settlers. Through inter-group marriage, several generations of people with Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo parents have emerged as very strong voice in the push for their full entitlements as indigenes of Ezillo. A KII respondent from Ezillo says

> Yes, land can be exchanged for dowry when Ezillo man is marrying Ezza lady or given as gift to a deserving Ezillo daughter been married by an Ezzaman by her parents in Ezillo. However, that does not make the suitor an indigene but an in-law of Ezillo community. Look, Ezillo identity transcends just land transfer, long stay or ownership of land in this

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[79]FGD/Elderly man/ Farmers/ 60years and above / Ezza /12th August 2016

community. It involves consanguine affinity with our ancestral land. Indigeneship is symbolically sacred thing not physical or material.[80]

Another IDI respondent from Ezillo posits:

Land inheritance is partrilineal and not automatic. It is not available for those sons whose parent's marriage was not recognised by Ezillo culture. It is not available for those whose mother is from Ezillo and father from elsewhere. For instance, we have laid down customary rules when it comes to marriage indigeneship. If claim to have met the standard we also have a way of tracing the lineage for confirmation.[81]

Yet, another FGD participant from Ezza argues that:

There is no part in the world where indigeneity by intermarriage and birth is not recognised. Ezillo is simple not realistic by threatening our indigeneity in Ezillo despite our inheritance. That Ezza is colonising Ezillo is unfounded. We are only after our interest and possessions in terms of land, properties and inheritance. That inheritance is not automatic is not flawless. Much as that argument stands for some cases, it does not hold water in some other cases. For instance, where Ezillo woman is married to Ezza man or where Ezza woman is married to Ezillo man. It is expected that in either of the situation the child from that marriage will want to claim double identity. When this happens, it results to some measure of identity crisis. Some of this conflict arose from this kind of scenario[82]

An IDI respondent from Ezza says

In a partrilineal Ezillo community, land and identity are inseparable social factors. That is why Ezza-Ezillo is insisting on our inherited land right as basis for indigeneship. We trace our indigenous identity to land ownership and inheritance. Even when stranger acquires land, the land retains in our culture the identity of its root source. That lineage originally owns the land. So, it is that identity new owner will identify with as a tenant. While our culture recognises not the tenant but the original owners of land, attempt by tenant to access land-based cultural entitlements are not recognised. Example the tenant cannot mobilise free indigenous peasant farm workforce but must pay for it. This is why tenants who bought land from Ezillo people are required to annual tenancy stipend as a form of royalty or homage payment to their property owner. [83]

The identity in Ezza and Ezillo from the responses is traced to the father that is patriarchy not to the mother. Inheritance rule is traced along father lineage. The tradition of Ezillo with respect to inheritance is patrilineage. In view of this position, only those people verified to

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[80]KII/Man/ Youth leader/34years /Ezillo/2nd August 2016
[81]IDI/Men/ town union member /64years /Ezillo/17th August 2016
[82]FGD/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezillo/ 12thAugust 2016
[83]KII/ EzilloMale lawyer and Youth leader/ 45 years old/ 21th July 2016

have Ezillo father living in Ezillo can be ascribed to b indigenes. They are entitled to be recognised and called Ezillo people.

There is this fraudulent identity issue that is a stranger living in Ezillo and impregnate girl or Ezillo man impregnating girl outside Ezillo community and expecting any male child from that arrangement to be recognised as Ezillo man for inheritance purpose. Inheritance in Ezillo without completing Ezillo marriage rites for either girl or boy is not recognised. Our culture recognises this as forced marriage. We do not identify with such children as ours until their mother or father does completely the traditionally prescribed marriage rites. But if that our forced daughter dies the husband will be force to marry her at death otherwise the children remain without inheritance. The real reason for the conflict as it affect identity is based on the construction and reconstruction of the in-group and out-group phenomenon in Ezza and Ezillo land relation that question the principal identity of the autochthones. The feeling of cultural identity insecurity is a major trigger of conflict in the relationship.

This succession crisis is heightened by the lack of role of women in traditional inheritance plan. In both Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo groups, women inherit no land. A discussant concurred, says

> Traditionally, under Ezillo culture, a woman is regarded as part of a man's property and so, in a patrilineal society, upon the demise of a man, his relatives while inheriting his property also inherit his wife. Attempts by women to own and control land are considered by men as taboo. [84]

Another discussant from Ezza says

> Men consider women involvement in land inheritance as capable of increasing women tendency to contest men authority over women. It is also argued that women by nature are too fragile and emotional to contest land issues with men. So,women are not allowed to control land or exercise customary ownership rightsbecause they are themselves are considered and treated as transient family asset and cannot, therefore, own properties; land belongs to the family. The argument against women owning land stem from their transient nature making the have more than one family land interests at marriage unlike the male that has only one family land interest to protect. Women, traditionally, are not regarded as family members after marriage.[85]

The above data suggest that allowing women tocontrol or exercise customary land ownership rights will increase conflict of status and role that will undermind men the leading position men occupy in the family system. Also, the data argues that since wives belong to the family

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[84]IDI/Woman/ Politician and town union member /61years /Ezillo/18th July 2016
[85]IDI/Woman/ town union Executive /57years /Ezillo/18th July 2016

as transient asset and land belongs to the family as static asset, Women, traditionally, are not regarded as family members after marriage but will have more than one family land interests unlike vthe male. This suggests that social stability and order will be achieved more with men controlling land than women doing that.According to Awa, (1985), in patrilineal society, two main patterns of succession are found, viz succession by all the surviving issues jointly, and succession by a sole heir. In Ezillo community, however, all sons inherit land as family property starting from eldest son. The father as the head of the familyowns land as trustee. The oldest son alone inherits his father's residential house (obi) but not the rest of the real estate (Onwuzuruigbo, 2013). Where a man dies intestate, the prevalent pattern of succession among the Igbo practising patrilineal system is by all surviving sons of the intestate jointly. Daughters do not inherit land from their parents.

These reasons, apart from being subjective smirk of ignorance of women capacity to on their own acquire land either while in their father`s or husband family. With great women of great accomplishments springing up here and there, the cultural limitation placed on women is gradually being broken. Besides, there is no evidence to show that few women who are privileged to own land in the urban areas do not respect their husbands. All their arguments are geared towards covering their determined and long-standing discrimination against women. According to Eke (1972), gender discrimination in inheritance system is a violation of human rights and linked to asset stripping, poverty traps, intergenerational and trans-generational transmission of poverty. Joint acquisition of land by both spouses to give women some rights to land is not recognised under the custom. Men vehemently oppose joint ownership with their wives as they claim that a wife will be tempted to kill the husband to take over the property.

Women, therefore, whether married, unmarried, or widowed are discriminated against on land inheritance issues. Within their lineage, they are deemed to have no right because they are expected to marry out and benefit from their husband's property; when they get married, they are considered strangers who have no inheritance right. Patrilineal inheritanceculture excludes women geneology as line of inheritance. This has serious implications on the development prospects of womenfolk.This has endangered the potentials of women and made them vulnerable to attacks and humiliation in the event of death of their husbands. The male members of their husbands` family subject them to slavery and inhuman treatments once turned widow.

The Nigerian civil marriage is modelled after British law and this law is very clear on the widow and her children's rights to share the property of the deceased, including land. Despite the clarity of the marriage laws, the rights of the widows are often not upheld in regular courts and almost never upheld in traditional courts. The regular courts often make their decisions based on customary laws thereby compounding the problem of women.

Identity mobilisation is high in Ezillo along indigene/settler lines and this affects Ezza-Ezillo in particular who are competing with Ezillo over limited land and land resources using indigeneity identity claims. Attempts at define anddifferentiate first comers in a settlement from subsequent settlers is controvertial in Nigerian context because the constitution is silence on the issues. Unlike indigene and settler, the constitution defined citizens asthose who are full membersa Nigerian community by birth or naturalisation. Citizens have rights and duties attached to their status by the constitution. However, if we consider the concept of indigene for instance, it has been acknowledged that the idea of "indigeneity" is universally problematic (Onwe, *et al,* 2015). It draws on the perception of group of people who first settled in an area where they perceive the land and other opportunities belong to them. But settlers are perceived as those who migrated into a settlement and settle there after the first settler in that community. The constitution made these perceptions problematic because it does not recognise them with entitlements, rights and duties. Regular migration of people into already existing settlements has consistently threatened first settlers in the area. The new arrivals create a kind of culture shock and culture lag that if not handled carefully could result to conflict of value ensuing from .competition over space and economic resources.

Sometimes, indigene and settler status could be negotiated and socially constructed depending on the level of assimilation permitted. This reality is usually determined by the consummation of intergroup marriage and cooperation in form of trade or political alliance. Despite colonial policies of indirect rule undermined the identity foundation of intergroup relations in Nigeria was achieved by reifyingethnic differences to ease administration.Consequently, there existed imposed differing systems of government on different groups within a single place that reinforced creation of new identities (Ogbogbo, *et al.,* 2012). The disputants on opposing sides of the fights suffer deep physical and psychological trauma. So people live in fear and suspicion day and night. Some parts of Ezillo community mostly affected are deserted and the inhabitants relocated to become strangers elsewhere. The conflict also has bred survivalist, us-versus-them mindsets and destructive behaviour patterns.In Ezillo, drug addiction, prostitution, human trafficking,

gangsterism and arm robbery are fast becoming common values. A KII respondent a clergy from Ezza says:

> Migration from one village to another is common in Ezillo just as like cross-border migration from the community. It is easy for villagers to go in and out of the community to commit crime as retaliation for previous crime suffered or as means of survival. This has lead to the escalation of trasnborder crimes like drug addiction, prostitution, human trafficking, gangsterism and arm robbery [86]

Another KII respondent a clergy from Ezillo says:

> Gradually, the issue of contest between Ezillo and Ezza people has shifted from inadequate distribution of land, access to and use of land to bottle up animosity, hate and prejudice. Suspicion and fearis common feature in Ezillo-Ezza interaction. A family or village head, opinion leader or even a traditional ruler who bangs the door against settlers could be a greedy speculator, but might just as easily feel that prejudice is his only shot at guarding himself, his kin, and his ways of life against extinction. Such feelings can run deep enough to fight and die for. [87]

Before now, the contentious issue is inadequate distribution of land, access to and use of land as shown by the data but now, the issue is gradually evolving into bottle up animosity. This is characterised by, hate and prejudice. Suspicion and fear is common feature in Ezillo-Ezza interaction. Unrestricted movement of people within and from Ezillo has made possible the proliferation of crime and speculation of light weapons that escalate conflict reality and possibility in Ezillo as suggested by the data above. Cross-border migration from the community is the bridge that connects external criminal gangs and networks. This has lead to the escalation of trasnborder crimes like drug addiction, prostitution, human trafficking, gangsterism and arm robbery.Animosity, hate, stereotypes and fear are common feature in Ezillo because no one in the community freely trusts anybody due to high level uncertainty. Violent entrepreneurs have worsen the situation as their activities potray sabotage that exploit people`s frustration for economic gain. This according to data is possibly because some privileged people in position of authority compromise the interest of their people by conniving with trouble makers to escalate animosity, hate, stereotypes and fear. This worsens the frustration and desperation of the underprivileged ones. However, they can also help victims cope with loss and injustice, or manage the fear, anger, and confusion that accompany them to a large extent but with self first. The privileged ones who bar the door against settlers could be very greedy speculator that lives on taking advantage of others as

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[86]KII/Man/ Clergy/40years and above /Ezza/21st August 2016
[87]KII/Clergy and lawyer/Ezillo/49 years/ 28th July 2016

self-protection and survival. This group of people endanger strangers or settlers in the community.

Best (2005) argues that in some parts of Africa, most of the ethnic groups are largely mobile and expansionist in nature with tendencies to overshadow others groups they come in contact with. This has lead to identity issues in such as one in Ezillo. He cites the impact of the Tiv, who are a majority group in North-Central Nigeria, over the Jukun in Wukari and the Hausa/Fulani over the Kataf in Zangon Kataf as cases in point. However, it can be underlined, in contradiction to Best's position, that in a place like Kano, even though the Ibo and Yoruba groups are national majority groups, they are in minority in the Hausa-dominated Kano city. Thus, there have been conflicts along the indigene-settler divide between these three groups in the city. So the point is not the question of dominance of one group by another because of the superiority of its population. Rather a more plausible explanation lies in the failure of the Nigerian state to web its numerous ethnic nationalities in the nation building project.

According to Osaghe and Suberu, (2005), the issue of indigene/settler been problematic istraced to and infuriated by power and property relation. There is fierce contest among the members of the elite group to acquire political power, popularity and at the same time control grass root politics through land accumulation through expropriation.The playing politics of indigene-settler divide serve the elite interest because it create a divide and rule structure in the rural areas to be able to control the divergent interests at that level. Different groupings are formed using surrogate leaders to create easy connection and networks that feeds the elite interest. This explains why, at the rebirth of democracy in 1999, ethnic nationalism also regenerated in the forms of hitherto invisible ethnic-based organizations such as the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa People's Congress (APC), Igbo People's Congress (IPC) and Ijaw Youth Council (IYC). For the past ten years, these organizations have turn out to be umbrellas for ethnic mobilization to the detriment of national cohesion and integration. Again the existence of these organizations has reinvigorated the citizenship crisis because Nigerians tend to identify themselves first as members of these ethno-oriented organizations before they give consideration to their national status. Ethnic identities have therefore gained more ascendancy than national identity. This negative development risks jeopardizing Nigeria's quest for national integration (Alubo, 2004). More so, these centrifugal identities built around religion, ethnic groupings, 'indigeneity', 'settlership', 'nativity', 'migrants', 'non-indigenes' 'southerner', 'northerner' etc have collectively sharpened the dividing line between Nigerians

thus making cohesive nationhood a more convoluted task. An interviewee from Ezza has this to says:

> Labelling of opponent as indigene or settler does not produce development but undue competition and discrimination which we in Ezillo do not need. Let the there be plain ground for everyone to play and give us development. Lets de-emphasis what divides us and emphasis what unites us please. [88]

Another interviewee from Ezillo says

> All Ezillo is saying is not that people should not express themselves but within the limit of the norms and culture of the land. Divisive tendencies result from categories like indigene or settler identity classification. It got to stop. We are all one having inter-married and born children with no place to call home but Ezillo. Preaching hate now using indigene or settler label is dangerous.[89]

The case of Ezillo is one that rather than tap the resources of diversity if any between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo as two gifted groups making greater impact in the field of warfare, craft, farm, politics, they engage in discrimination driven indigene/settler squabble that has cost both sides fortune. They teamed up to dislodge Mgbo and that is evidence that they can further that kind of collaboration to another higher level of development. As in Ezillo specifically, worst conflicts in Nigeria have been partly traced to indigenes/settler issues. These conflicts may be growing deadlier and more numerous with time. Yet, many are still been referred to as settlers even when in reality they are not. An interviewee Ezza says

> In the recent past, affinity to landas source of identity is tied to indigene/settler thing that have gained wide currency and greater political significance, especially in contestations over land in Ezillo, are those of 'indigenes', 'non-indigenes', 'migrants', and 'settlers'. These categories have ethnic, sub-ethnic, origins, and have evolved an entrenched, system of discriminatory practices in which non-indigenes, migrants and settlers are denied equal access to common resource, rights and privileges of a locality or community, town or state, to which 'sons and daughters of the soil' have first or exclusionary access.[90]

A KII respondent from Ezillo says

> Despite the division the identification may create, indigene/settler divide in Ezillo is indeed responsible for many troubles and conflict. It started gaining salience when Ezza-Ezillo will not take orders from Ezillo their host traditional authorities. Instead, they create impression that they own the community even more than they own the owners. The State, local

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[88]KII/ Ezza /Male Political Scientist/Lawyer and political office holder/ 59 years old/ 4th August 2016
[89]KII/Clergy and lawyer/Ezillo/49 years/ 28th July 2016
[90]IDI/Men/ town union Executive /44years /Ezza/11th August 2016

governments and most importantly the traditional authority incapacity to checkmating these excesses has exacerbated mobilisation and confrontation along the line of indigene/settler divide in Ezillo. While the legitimating institutions have exclusive legal power to pick who is an indigene, it remains for the people ratify the legitimacy customarily. Abuse of the label can foster deep socioeconomic inequalities, given that indigenes enjoy preferential access to land, schools, development spending, and public jobs. These inequalities feed into violence, although righting inequality may not be sufficient to end violence in every case.[91]

In corollary, the in-group/out-group dichotomy associated with indigene/settler divide informed and shaped the context of contestation threatening community development. This is in line with the position of Ogbogbo, *et al*, (2012) who opines that the problem of identity conflicts such as the one arising from settler/indigene divide is part of the incompleted project of nationhood in most African states including Nigeria. Indigene/settler divide sustains segregation and inequality in the distribution of valuable resources that provoke violent conflicts all over the country. This categorisation and classification has deep historical roots in colonial patterns of inter-group relations and deepened discriminatory practices and ethnic inequalities entrenched by both the colonial regime and continued by post-independence administrations. These have cumulatively provoked various forms of self-perception and agitation by different groups. It has also given impetus to such conflicts like Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo, Agulere-Umuleri, Ife-Modakeke Tiv-Jukun and such like.

Closely related to indigene/settler identities is the issue of elites and peasant group identities visa vising the state activities as related to Ezillo. Also important however, is the consideration of the state the elite identity reaches the peasants and civil society identities with particular reference to how conflict permeates and is permeated by conflict of interests in land relation that result into power relation that shape and inform access and use of land in Ezillo community. The intolerance and struggle of the elite groups across Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo identities targeted at dislodging the peasant group identity reveals rivalry between them as captured in the response of an interviewee from Ezillo

> The elite target is to keep the peasants in perpetual dependence and landlessness. The system of the state tends to favour the elites than the peasants. For instance is customary land laws expected to affect the peasants more is usually undermined by the statutory land laws of the state deliberately when it comes to management and administration of land law.[92]

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[91]KII/ Ezillo / Male lawyer and Youth leader/ 45 years old/ 21th July 2016
[92]KII/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 70years /Ezillo community leader/16th August 2016

An interviewee from Ezza says

> Our big men are not assisting the poor peasant to access farming facilities. Instead, they access them and by diverting, impute targeted at the peasant to the market for their personal interest. The elite connive with those elites in power to short-change the peasants in the allocation farmland every farming season. They take the before considering anybody.[93]

The above responses are a reflection of the attitude, activities and action of their youth groups. The youth look up to their elites as role model. This make it easy for elite to mobilise their youths into mass action in defence their collective interest especially in land. A particular instance was the conflict that ensued as an Ezza rent collector demanded for rent from an Ezillo phone business operator in the market considered by Ezza as his or her own market. They struggled to assert their ownership of Isimkpuma land that doubled as a motor park and a popular market. This culminated to the 2008 clash between Ezillo youths and Ezza youth who had claimed ownership of the land and were demanding that an Ezillo telephone booth operator pay rent. On May 20, 2008, the Ezillo telephone operator refused to pay rent to Ezza tax collector claiming that the land belongs to Ezillo. Ezza-Ezillo youths mobilized and stormed the market to collect the rent. The disruption of business for the telephone operator attracted Ezillo youths who also mobilised and engage the Ezza in Ezillo community destroying properties and many lives.

Generally, the influence and effectiveness of elites vary in power wielding and decision-making. Also, the elites have varying controlling interests and stake in land holding. In this connection, the degree of elite influence and effectiveness depends largely on the resources it controls. They struggle within themselves and with the peasants is to convert part of the communal land to their personal property and appropriating rents from land leased on behalf of the community to the state. This is not without diverting and misappropriating some of these funds. Using the instrumentality of town union, the elite foist their interest against the collective interest of the society. Civil society organisations from the 1930s and 1940s, town unions became prominent features of state and society relations. In the process of articulating development initiatives, they became active participants in the conflicts that often plagued their communities. Sustaining the tempo of the conflicts appeared uppermost in the agenda of the unions and guided their responses to the frequent altercations between their communities. They mobilized funds required to procure the services of legal experts to prosecute court

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[93]IDI/Men/ Lawyer and town union member/43years and above /Ezza/ 15th August 2016

cases, protest against even the most trivial decisions or inconsequential actions taken by government officials or rival community particularly during the colonial period.

The intra and inter-elite competition for resources is captured within the context of primitive accumulation of valued land resource for self-aggrandisement. It is therefore, expedient to analyze the involvement of the elites in the conflicts from two perspectives: intra-elite struggle for resources among Ezillo elites and inter-elite competition between elites of Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo. The intra-elite struggle involved the antagonism within the elites within either Ezillo or Ezza-Ezillo. Whereas the inter-elite competition between elite of one group and those of others. Members ofelite groupmore or less parasite on the common wealth and struggle for resources of the community of their identity to shore up its weak material base (Ake, 1981; 1985; 2001). The division and competition among Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo elite groups left without common sentiment thatgalvanise group consciousness and nationalism.As polarized groups, they became tools of distabilisation and complicated the conflicts on two fronts. In one front, Ezillo engaged Ezza in physical combat and court litigation. At another front Ezillo elites were at war with itself on the land and in court.

The major fallout of this development dismantles the influence of the traditional powers in order to empower personalities within the elites to control the collective wealth of nation. This was more pronounced where centralized traditional structures were forced on erstwhile republican communities. More often than not, the traditional instruments for exercising social control such as the masquerade institutions and clan headed structures of control were weakened. The modern State structures were instituted and functioned by force using colonial design institutions of control such as the native police and the native courts. Vaughan (1991) said, in the attempt to mobilize mass support, the emerging ethno-regional political classes' co- opted the traditional rulers who were closest to the grass roots in furthering their interests in the post-independent period. The traditional rulers became key instruments in the mobilization of primordial sentiments thus fanning identity politics. Politics interfaces all aspects of social life, justice, basic human rights, citizenship/ identity (Oji, *et al.,* 2014). Speaking on the above issue, a KII respondent from Ezza says

> It is hard to neglect the contributions of the elite as an identity that feed on and is fed by Ezillo conflicts in the past and the present. The activities of the youth groups are reflections of the example shown by the elite who are considered to be role models. This is why the elite easily command the loyalty of the youths. The youths are vulnerable to the political and economic manipulation and mobilisation. They benefit so much from the

conflicts. I think that is why they (elites) could not stop the war from the colonial rule up until now. The elite undoing sometimes is the unhealthy rivalry common amongst them[94]

Another KII respondent from Ezillo slightly disagreed with the above opinion says

> Where a man works is where he eats. The elites fight themselves sometimes but not as extent of division and hatred found among the peasants exist among the elites. The elites are supposedly opinion leaders of Ezillo community and community group town unions who also have need for land to take care of their children and families. They may have extracted some benefits from the people but I do not think they deliberately kept the conflicts on because of the benefits. Elites have common agenda in Ezillo unlike the peasnts[95]

It is discouraging that factions of elites engaged in unhealthy rivalry and struggle for control of the Ezillo land using their various state connections to intimidate and exploit the peasant population. They (elite) seat on rents from land leases and monies contributed by Ezillo community for the execution of self help development projects and the prosecution of land disputes in the court. The impression created is that they (elite) have the interest of the masses at heart but in reality, they are self-seeking and motivated by their desire to appropriate the land and rents. Neither Ezillo nor Ezza-Ezillo wants to give up land in their possession. The Ezillo do not want to also compromise their indigenous right to land just as Ezza do not want to be seen as settlers but indigenes in Ezillo. No identity wants to neither lose nor get lost in the struggles and clashes of interests. However, Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo town unions since the beginning of the dispute play active roles in promoting the conflicts. This they do by vigorously championing the cause of their identity group interest at the expense of their opponents. They levy the people and collect money for the struggle; they make decisions on what actions to take concerning the dispute and ensure that the conflict continues.

An FGD participant slightly disagreed with the above opinion says

> Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo town union's leadership constitute the elites who serve as the intermediaries between the peasants, civil societies and the state in terms of pursuing to legalise and legitimise the communal landholding and interest in land within the community.[96]

Another FGD participant from Ezza says

> The State has also been involved in identity creation, activation. The State controls the economic resources in the society and the fierce contest for

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[94]KII/Elderly Man/ Trader/ community representative in Abakaliki/60years /Ezza/19th August 2016
[95]KII/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 73years /Ezillo community leader/20th August 2016
[96]FGD/Elderly man/ Farmers/ 60years and above / Ezza /12th August 2016

State control and the control of state resources have resulted in the mobilisation of ethnic, sub-ethnic, youth, labour, communal and gender identities. While the State resorts to politics of its legitimation, those excluded from access to State resources, resort to identity politics to contest this exclusion. [97]

The data above is in line with Jega (2002) contention that the state is projected as the critical variable in identity transformation, and the resurgence of identity politics.As the state creates and activates identity, the national interest is threatened to serve personal interest particularly in local resource allocation. Power relations reflecting control of economic resources in the society and the fierce contest for State control including power resources have resulted in the mobilisation of ethnic, sub-ethnic, youth, labour, communal and gender identities. This has given vent to identity politics to avoid or protest exclusion from collective wealth as scenerior playing out in Ezillo community. Given this situation, elite contestation for political power to capture the state is characterized by cutthroat competition in which sentiment is mobilized; ethno-communal and class identities are negatively massaged and manipulated so as to achieve selfish objectives. The role of the elite group in the mobilization of identity consciousness has its root in the colonial State. This is in furtherance of colonial policy of divide and rule. An interviewee from Ezza-Ezillo says

> It is disheartening to be discriminated against in one's own community. The so called Ezillo indigenes still call us Ezza people and visitor who leech on Ezillo endowments. Meanwhile our forefathers are from Ezillo. All our plots of land have become family properties because of fear that if given to us we will bring in Ezza people. We have no other identity than Ezza-Ezillo. We in this mess will fight it to end. [98]

Another interviewee from Ezillo says

> We are not denying our indigenes their rights particularly to land. Leadership in Ezillo knows who is from Ezillo. You cannot become and indigene of Ezillo by mere acquiring land from Ezillo. Your Ezillo identity is established by birth through recognised marriage process. All these fraudulent claims of being indigene have been investigated to be fraud. The general atmosphere of mistrust and violent conflicts in Ezillo is a reason to be more careful. [99]

The construction of clan identity in Ezillo community by both Ezillo and Ezza people is increasingly been fostered as the game changer in the struggle to convert settler`sto indigene`s identity. This is done to guarantee inclusion in the allocation of federal, state and

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[97]FGD/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezza/ 12th August 2016
[98]IDI/Men/ Lawyer and town union member/43years and above /Ezza/ 15th August 2016
[99]KII/ Ezillo/Male /Lawyer and political office holder/ 59 years old/ 4th August 2016

local government jobs and ascension to positions in political offices. This form of identity is therefore becoming increasingly mobilized in the struggle for power and socioeconomic positions among settlers in Ezillo. Over the years, identity-based differences have provided the basis for conflict and violence. It is against this backdrop that identity is mobilised in Ezillo along sub-ethnic strings across indigene and settler line to contest authority over Ezillo communal land is sustained. An interviewee from Ezillo says

> Incessant violent conflict from identity-based differences within Ezillo hasbecome largely the dimension associated with land disposition. This has heightened social tension, disruption of family and communal life, general atmosphere of mistrust.[100]

Data suggest that the identity-based tension depicts animosity and antagonism common with inter-group relations in Ezillo. Ibeanu and Onu, (2001) and Omotola, (2008) posit that group rivalry can engender identity crises capable of emphasising group differences more than group similarities. The case of Ezillo is one that conflict from Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo differences has lead to animosity from normal exclusion in land relations. Lack orinadequate distribution, access to and use have yielded contestation around identity claims particularly by the Ezza-Ezillo people. They based their land entitlement claims on marriage and inheritance. To reconcile this, the traditional institution plays leading role in Ezillo community land relations and development process on the account of the vast land resource it controls. The implication is that leadership position becomes a coveted price to be won at all cost by the various class fractions that create divisions in the society. An interviewee from Ezza says

> While canvassing for votes and seeking public office, the political elites engage in utterances and action that mobilise sub-ethnic differences rather than similarities. These tendenciesprovide congenial atmosphere for the negative manipulation of these sub-ethnic identities and youthful exhaubirant to cause mayhem. [101]

In buttress to the above response Afoke, (2000) posits that the mobilisation of identity cards and violence that characterise electoral politics has a historical rootdating back in the 1950 colonial regional structure initiative. This suggests that sub-ethnic rivalry in Ezillo community has historical basis.Then, the fight to control political power in Ezillo and indeed Ishielu Division between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo was overstretched into violence in which actors engaged were mostly youths.The highlight of the conflict includes the use of gun

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[100]IDI/Men/ town union member /64years /Ezillo/17th August 2016
[101]KII/Woman/ political office holder and a lawyer/46years /Ezza/20th July 2016.

which was not only common, but also used were masquerades and traditional singers.However, during festivities it is obvious that these characters are still divided along party lines that often lead to conflict during the celebration of cultural festivities. This rivalry between Ezillo and Ezza harbitually resurfaced in the politics of the second Republic (1979/1983). A significant number of those from Ezillo who were strong opponents of the popular Ezza-Ezillo man Ofia Nwali camp aligned forces with his opponents from neighbouring communities, Nkalaha and Mgbo. The Second Republic dimension of sub-ethnic party politics in Ezillo land extended political mobilization of sub-ethnic identities to a new level. An interviewee from Ezillo has this to say

> In all the youth played and has been playing significant role Ezillo local identity-based violent conflict in the sense that the elites mobilise them through politicization of their identity. The classification of youth into Indigene/settlers divide is a popular strategy in use by politician creates disaffection and sub-ethnic sympathy for mobilization. Our youths are politically vibrant and dependable in securing our common identity[102]

Another interviewee from Ezza-Ezillo says

> Once the issues of indigene and settler is used as a background campaign slogan, the Ezza-Ezillo resort into identity solidarity with other Ezza people in and outside Ezillo. Since Ezza numerical strength is not comparable to that of Ezillo, politically, that stands as a minus for Ezillo contender. Beyond money and land as economic factors, is the youth factor as a strong instrument of identity and political mobilization of unemployed youth. Whether it is peace or wartime, they are useful[103]

The response above reveals the noticeable role the youth played in politics and in fermenting violence conflict in Ezillo land significantly comparable to other factors. This is in line with the position of the traditional rulers in Ezillo who blaimed youth used as instrument of violence to the manipulation by some powerful community leaders (Enuke, 2015), although the constructionist view remain valid here as politician reconstruct identity to advance their political ambition. One would think that unemployment alone serve as incentive for youth restlessness, the above data invalidate unemployment as the only basis for youth involvement in violent conflict indicting the political elite use of the youth. Another sturning revealation from finding suggestsconnection between illiteracy, youth and violent conflict. According to an interviewee from Ezza, she says

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[102]IDI/ Youth leader/ Farmers/ 44years /Ezillo/15th August 2016
[103]KII/Man/ Clergy/40years and above /Ezza/21st August 2016;

Since most of the youths including those that had been arrested in connection with thuggery either dropped out of schools or/and are unemployed. Unemployed and hungry people easily find themselves cheap instrument s of violence in the hands of politicians because of level of desperation and frustration. Illiteracy is another vital incentive to violen conflict tendency. Unlike literate minds, iliterates are easy to convince and attracted into crime because of lack of knowledge of the implication of resorting to crime. An average youth generally try placing the value orientation of the youth today and those of the past who are now elders and quickly conclude that the elders have failed them. This generational differences and inability of some youths to come to term with it has often created disaffection and lose of confidence in the elders who should be looked up to for counselling. Many youths blame their lack of employment, literacy, infrastructural facilities on the elders who did not do the needful o usher in human and physical development. The growing youth activism in most communities including Ezillo are evidences of youth resolve to topple the old for the new, hence the formation of youth movements and pressure groups as well as youth wings of political parties. [104]

The strong link between unemployment and youth violence is supported by the views of many of the respondents who argue that violent conflict in Ezillo was at its lowest ebb between 1980 - 1985 when the Nkalagu/NigerCem cement industry was at its production peak providing employment many particularly from Ezillo community. The numerouse land disputes involving Ezillo and Ezza people have left most farming land idle for many years denying hitherto big local farmers of their means of livelihood and sending their children out of school so much that Ezillo record very number of school drop out. This has affectecd literacy level in the community and thrown potential scholars into vulnerable state of hopelessness.The politicians use some of these dropouts to tackle political opponents. Also, Conflict in all its ramifications have inbuilt mechanism of destruction of infrastructure and other human and physical development. Obviously, no development can take place except the place is peaceful. The phenomenon of unemployment has been worsened by the negative impact of the structural adjustment programme and other key elements of theeconomic reform policies. However, not to be ignored is the increasing polarization between the elders and the youth in Ezillo, with the latter blaming the woes of the land on the former, and insisting on having a greater say in the leadership arrangement of the society.

4.1.4 Supremacy contests and Ezillo conflict

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[104]KII/Youth leader / 34years /Ezza community opinion leader/20th August 2016

The colonial policy of divide and rule influence division into ethnic affiliations and distinctiveness into majority and minority categories (Onwuzuruigbo, 2013). This process soon became a major determinant for the access and use of land, access to power, economic chances and development project in the society. In rural areas such as Ezillo community, this structure is replicated in a manner that within the community there is still struggle between perceived major and minor sub-ethnic groups. While Ezillo is claiming to be indigenes or autochthons whose authority over land must not be challenged in Ezillo community, they are still a significant minority compared to Ezza-Ezillo who is considered as latter settlers in Ezillo community. So, the contention is how to reconcile the superiority attributed to Ezillo as indigenous owners of vast expanse of land in Ezillo and the intimidating demographic strength of the Ezza-Ezillo settlers in the community. This supremacy contention has lingered up till date with Ezza-Ezillo periodically pushing and fighting to pressurise Ezillo and the government to concede additional land space from Ezillo to Ezza-Ezillo. This led to conflict that attracted government attention. The then civilian governor of Ebonyi state intervened by setting up in 2008 a panel of inquiry that came up with resolve that additional plots of land be given to the Ezza-Ezillo settlers to accommodate their increasing population in Ezillo. This was done to avoid humanitarian crisis in Ezillo. In 2009, land area of 279.304Ha southward was allocated in addition to original land area of 38.364Ha. Ezza now, legitimately got a total of 317.668Ha of Ezillo land as shown in **fig 5** Map above.

The import of this concession is that having land space is good but not good enough because it has not enough people to occupy compare to more settlers occupying the space. However, land space is not enough criteria for supremacy in this context over the people (Ezza-Ezillo) who has the more population to occupy the land. Therefore, numerical strength has become an important aspect of Ezza-Ezillo dominance over Ezillo their host.

This condition continued to a point where there hardly exist in Ezillo clan without Ezza settlers almost outnumbering the host. Presently, Ezza people own two villages in Ezillo with almost half of the total population of the remaining five villages are Ezza. Population pressure and increasing influx of more migrants into the allocated area compelled Ezza into shifting the limit of original land allocated inward Ezillo. An interviewee from Ezillo

> The preponderant of Ezza-Ezillo population compared to Ezillo population is intimidating and reflects the overall majority and dominant group in the community despite their settler status. To the indigenous Ezillo people, the superior population of Ezza is evidence of Ezillo accommodation,

hospitality and land fertility that is able to sustain such large influx of Ezza people who are largely farmers. The hosting of Ezza people is not without side effects. Ezillo people see the declining availability and accessibility of fertile land for local use as disturbing. However, demographically in minority, Ezillo people are entitled to own and access what belongs to them in their community, LGA and the state. The fact that some Ezza settler is legitimate owners land in Ezillo with more literacy level has placed them in advantage position more than their host. These disparities have often fuelled supremacy struggle and contestation in the community. This is basically because the Ezza leverages on their more favourable economic and political positions to influence the expropriation of more land resource at the expense of autochthones.[105]

Another interviewee from Ezza says

We have had things in common with Ezza people even before Ishielu LGA and the Ebonyi state were created. Our population is our strength. However we need each other in Ezillo. While Ezillo provides the land in Ezza-Ezillo should provide the manpower. We both share our strength to overcome our limitations. There is very strong link between Ezza-Ezillo and Ezza outside Ezillo. Unlike the Ezillo people, the Ezza have mobilised forces within and outside Ezillo to support their political aspirations of their people using Ezillo community as affiliation platform. This has produced Ezza-Ezillo personalities Senator Julius Ali Ucha, Joseph Amagha, Clement Nwode, and late Dr. Ofia Nwali among others. As good as all these accomplishments are, the defect is that Ezza-Ezillo considers their accomplishments in Ezillo as vestige for domineering attitude that demonstrate domination tendency. Naturally Ezillo attempt to resist domination is a direct response to underrating Ezillo people by Ezza people. This again creates space for supremacy struggle.[106]

In the view of the above responses, Ezza-Ezillo is proud on its superior population and skill distribution across the population. Ezillo on the other hand is proud of the large expanse of land its territory is endowed with. However, despite the strength vast land and territory, Ezillo has less population than Ezza-Ezillo that totally depends on the Ezillo to feed its population in Ezillo. Consequently, population and land are mobilised to underpin identity differences that generate supremacy conflict. The above responses show that the two major premises (population and land) reflect supremacy contention along inferiority and superiority lines. This has strong effect in determining whom access and use of such values as land, power, decision making. Another interviewee from Ezza says

The so called known limits about Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo land exchange contract are manmade not divine. Our superior population compared to

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[105]KII/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 70years /Ezillo community leader/16th August 2016
[106]IDI/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ town union executive/60years and above /Ezillo/19th August 2016

Ezillo is by accident, it must be given consideration and not constrain. We are constrained by divine limit only. Ezillo cannot stop Ezza-Ezillo from procreation, which is divine mandate. Asking us to remain in one place is a curse. Population pressure is not manmade but God made we should not be envied.[107]

In the view of the above responses, the two major premises reflected include the majority and minority factors as evidenced in the wide gap in population between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo. This is followed be the pressure from Ezza-Ezillo to be given space and treatment befitting their large population to avoid humanitarian crisis as they have nowhere else to go to than Ezillo. Rather than politicise the importance of numerical strength to community development, Ezillo is expected by Ezza to accord it's require recognition in the community decision making process. By so doing culture of inclusiveness in leadership will be entrenched. An interviewee from Ezza-Ezillo says

Based on our population and available land space and the need for political relevance, we, Ezza-Ezillo group demand for the creation of Izzo autonomous community from Ezillo community and more electoral wards therein. This demand granted will enable Ezza-Ezillo maximize the usefulness of her population for human and community development.

The disparity characterised population weakness and strength between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezza is reflected in economic, political and social (literacy level particularly) gap between Ezza and Ezillo. This has unequivocally entrenched supremacy struggle with Ezza-Ezillo people everywhere. Similarly, the perception of intimidating population pressure arising from the influx of Ezza people into Ezillo to settle has created apparent sense of majority and minority. It is within this context that the superiority and inferiority factors got established as a strong conflict driver in Ezillo community till today. Though the Ezza reified inequality structure is largely in their favour, the Ezillo on the other hand are insisting on autochthonous right to access and control resources accruable to their particularly land, power and decision making. The Ezillo argument is that settlers (Ezza) will not come and rule over the land of Ezillo heritage. Ezza insist that beyond having equal stake in land ownership in Ezillo due mainly to the military service Ezza rendered to Ezillo, as Nigerian citizens they have got the right to settle productively, own and develop land anywhere in Nigeria. They argue further, that politics, wealth and literacy are not exclusive factors but open for all to explore according to disposition and capacity.

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[107]FGD/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezza/ 12th August 2016

This Ezza-Ezillo push for internal autonomy in an autonomous community is disguised ploy to assert their political dominance over Ezillo. Granting Ezza-Ezillo autonomous community will translate to having two traditional chieftancy institutions in Ezillo community where that of the Ezza and the Ezillo will compete for loyalty from subjects. This social arrangement further reflects majority and minority struggle going on in Ezillo community. The dominant identity overtly superimposed its identity on other groups in the community. The Ezza-Ezillo people have superiority orientation anchored on ancestral kinship. This connotation was reified by the recognition it got from the colonial regime that made Ezza identity the mainstream identity of the NEI. Ezza also has demonstrated their superiority through its displayed capabilities in warfare and mercenary trade with others it has helped to conquer their enamies upon invitation like Ezillo and Mgbo. As such, other ethnic or sub-ethnic groups are regarded in derogatory terms. So, population strength, use of violence/force dexterity in farming and extensive network and strategic placement of Ezza people in sensitive government positions have embolden the Ezza people and consolidated their superiority orientation above other groups. This is evident in the responses below. Another Ezza-Ezillo says

> Our relationship with Ezillo date back precolonial days. It is time we maximize the political, social and economic usefulness of our skills and population potential to advance our common goals in Ezillo free from Ezillo restriction. If we fight instead of unit for common goals as our collective ancestral history has it as kinsmen, we need Izzo autonomous community here to be free from discrimination and humiliation We were told of the story of how our legendary ancestor Ezekuna was the progenitor of all the people from Ebonyi north and south senatorial districts comprising Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo, Ohaukwu, and Ezillo among other groups. This oral account made us belief we are one and people that share common ancestral lineage and destiny. Besides, Ezza and Ezillo have intermarried themselves so much that separation will be difficult. It is to the advantage of both sides to let peace reign[108]

Another interviewee from Ezillo says

> It is however, constitute spite and a threat to Ezillo identity and autonomy. That cannot be possible. We resist it with the last drop of our blood. It reveals their expansionist tendency and suggests intention to displace the people of Ezillo. The antecedents of Ezzaman leave not much to desire when it comes to internal colonisation and domination. This is reflected in Ezza interactions elsewhere outside Ezillo like Obuegu, Okpoto, and Effium

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[108]KII/Elderly Man/ Trader/ community representative in Enugu/60years /Ezza/19th August 2016

in Ebonyi state and Ezzaegu in Enugu state among other communities the Ezza have as colonies in the state and even beyond.[109]

Respondents from Ezza-Ezillo say

> To overrun Ezillo will not take Ezza-Ezillo one week if that is our goal. In fact, the Ezillo has forgotten so quickly that if they evict our farmers working for their Ezillo land owners, their community will experience famine. The same thing applies to our traders and politicians. Take away Ezza from Ezillo, the community will be empty of personality and competence. Ezza presence in Ezillo has not only secured the community in a way Ezza military capability but also attracted a lot of development project through Ezza-Ezillo born great intellectuals, politician and business men and women of influence such as Senator Julius Ali Ucha, Joseph Amagha, Clement Nwode, late Dr. Ofia Nwali among others [110]

These responses above represent the average perception of an Ezza-Ezillo man that his group is a dominant majority group. This has negative impact on their relationship with Ezillo people considered to be in minority by establishing a construct or structure of superiority and inferiority association. In response the Ezillo takes in this inferiority image created to recreate their identity to reflect their perceived identity as projected by Ezza-Ezillo. This is how perception creates and recreates reality and identity. This mindset on both side reinforce supremacy struggle to resist, recreate and reify identity in terms of reality. Land contestations, sighing of development projects, political and economic chances are built on the premise that Ezza population is superior to that of Ezillo. This mindset fuels a feeling of domination and subordination, pride, humiliation, enslavement and isolation between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo. When a subordinate demonstrates positive qualities believed to be more characteristic of dominants, the individual is defined by dominants as an anomaly. The dominant group is seen as the norm for humanity. Evans (1996) also asserts that inequitable social relations are seen as the model for "normal human relationships. Hence the Ezillo describe their relationship with the Ezza as thus;

> Ezillo people have no boundary with Ezza people. Our identity affiliation is traced to Amofia Mgbo in Ohaukwu LGA not to Ezza. There is need to end this unequal relationship with Ezza. We cannot afford to be slaves in our own land with Ezza lordship. They are wicked and brutal. Nobody can intimidate us anymore once we are free from Ezza people[111]

Another from Ezza says

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[109]IDI/Woman/ Politician and town union member /61years /Ezillo/18[th]July 2016
[110]KII/Man/ political office holder/40years and above /Ezza/21st August 2016
[111]KII/ Ezillo/Male /Lawyer and political office holder/ 59 years old/ 4th August 2016

Ezillo cannot pull out of the commonwealth of the old Abakaliki Division otherwise known as northeast Igboland. It got to be enough of this humiliation from Ezillo that relegate Ezza in their midst to the background despite their seniority position in the ancestral family structure of Ekumenyi Ezekuna[112].

Yet, another from Ezillo says

How can you explain a comment from Ezza people at the heat of Ezillo conflict that Ezillo cannot stand a truck load of Ezza warrior if they (Ezza) want to silence us (Ezillo) that it will not take them a week to chase us away from Ezillo land? The Ezza feel bigger than God and are only interested in what they will own or take from Ezillo not what they will give to Ezillo.This unwarranted threat to Ezillo identity and culture got to stop. We are doing everything possible to stop it. This includes proper orientation of our little kids from childhood that they are different from Ezza-Ezillo. The intensification of indigenous cultural awareness in Ezillo is yielding result that can be proven from the increasing rate of youthful involvement in the various wars to stop Ezza from having their way in Ezillo community.[113]

The colonial structure of the old Abakaliki Division superimposed Ezza Identity is going through serious challenges in Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo social relation going by the responses above. Ezza people are seemed to be seen as using ancestral platform to colonise many communities during and after colonial era. The aftermath of that colonial experience was for the Ezza people look down on other groups as less human being than them. This has resulted in avoidable supremacy contest between them and other groups. In fact it is issue of supremacy that fuels this crisis in Ezillo in my opinion. It is a standing argument in Ezillo that if Ezza is not feeling too big to be under their host Ezillo rules and custom, why will they request to be given autonomous community within an autonomous community Ezillo?

Responding to Ezza identity imposition, the Ezillo recreate their identity by historically tracing their identity to Amofia Mgbo which however is a much larger sub-ethnic group in the senatorial district who were hitherto dominant in their own ranks and blaming the colonialists for their subordinate relationship with the Ezza–Ezillo people. Ezillo insist on being distinct from Ezza by chosen to construct their identity alone a neighbouring Mgbo identity away from Ezza. They also portray the Ezza as a selfish people who have colonised many weak communities and put spell on their identities. Decrying the contentious narrative from Ezza against Ezillo particularly as regard their invitation and settlement in Ezillo, this reveals the place of perception in the construction of significant others groups and reconstruction of

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[112]KII/Woman/ political office holder/45years and above /Ezza/21st August 2016
[113]IDI/ Man/ Farmers/ 60years /Ezillo/15th August 2016

identity.Yes, the contract is a binding legitimacy to land allocated in favour of the Ezza-Ezillo, but there were also conditions attached to the contract. Example, dimensions and limit of the allocated land were marked. Why is it difficult for the Ezza people to live within the bounds of the limits marked? Ezillo insist they did not invite Ezza-Ezillo to come and control them but to remain under Ezillo control. It is generally not acceptable for Ezza to still take Ezillo to be a younger brother under its control in Ezillo. The use of force to make demands from Ezillo is also not acceptable. These seem to be critical issues that are like beer parlour discussion in Ezillo.

Shared ancestral bond in a homogenous society ought to serve as restraint and social control against any form of conflict, rivalry or disaffection but in the case of Ezillo, it is different. Supremacy-based identity struggle and competition for such a society over access to and use of land acquires more significance for interrogation and brings to question the place of traditional authority in exercising its power and status to resolving such conflict. This is in line with scholarly position that only negative mobilization of identities to reflect inferior, superior, dominance, dominated notions is conflictual (Otite and Albert, 1999; Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). What this suggests is that to assert ones identity is not problematic but recognising it to be better than others is where the trouble starts. An interviewee from Ezillo has this to say

> The claim supremacy of the Ezza-Ezillo over Ezillo is based on the following major premises: ancestral kinship, colonial legacy, population, political relevance and influence. These are aspects of Ezza as a nation that are envious to its neighbours and opponents that confronts Ezillo values and interaction with Ezza-Ezillo in our midst. Ezillo people are often treated like inferior and subordinate to Ezza-Ezillo in Ezillo community.[114]

An FGD participant says

> Ezza are faithful and reliable to the core. Their core values are honesty, fearlessness and trustworthy both in the public and in the private. Majority of us are farmers and brave hunters. We do not put our eyes on what does not belong to us and we are open to competition and correction. After God is our culture and work. They enjoy greater part of us. We are loyal to our God, tradition and not lazy in our occupation. Our ones as an Ezza nation is not negotiable. The god of our ancestor symbolised by land is awesome. He vindicates the innocent and punishes the offender whether young or old; small or big.[115]

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[114]KII/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 70years /Ezillo community leader/16th August 2016
[115]FGD/Elderly man/ Farmers/ 60years and above / Ezza /12th August 2016

An FGD participant says

> the Ezillo to us are unfair people particularly to us. We gave up our mighty men of valour in war to rescue Ezillo from Mgbo. The land they compensated us with including the ones we bought from they are jealous now and want to collect them back. Is that not heartlessness. They show Ezza ungratefulness and unfairness to us. Meanwhile we treat them as our brothers. They turn round to treat us as foes.[116]

Historical account has it that Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo, Ohaukwu, Mgbo and Ezillo are among the descendants of the legendary progenitor Ekumaenyi Ezekuna, the founder of Abakaliki/northeast Igboland. Ezza is the oldest of the children and going by the gerontocratic culture of this area, his exercise leadership responsibility over his younger brothers and kins. The divide and rule policy imported from colonial Britain influence division and distinctiveness into majority and minority; superior and inferior categories. This perception soon became a major determinant for the access and use of land, access to power, economic chances and development directions and preference in colonial up to post colonial societies in Nigeria, Igboland and Ezillo in particular. In Ezillo the colonial imposition of Ezza identity on the rest of NEI complicated supremacy-based identity differences in the area including Ezillo. This difference reflects at various levels of social interaction with Ezza. Be it in politics, economy, or social arena. Example Ezza people perception of themselves as superior is such that they want their interest come first while others follow.

Identity mobilised along supremacy line possesses attributes that make bearers of it susceptible to mobilization, as it becomes a rallying force and organizing principles for social actions and suspicion (Castells, 1997). However, as Jega (2009), contends, identity consciousness in itself and its varied forms – superior, inferior, dominant or dominated ethnic or communal classifications are not major problems in homogenous societies, but become problematic when it become the determinant for socio-political action and competitive struggle for access to and use of scarce resources by various rival groups. Consequently, identity superiority could be a mental construct or a social construction of actors. A growing attachment to sub-ethnic identities along inferiority/superiority or dominant/dominated line has resulted in violent conflicts and strained relationships. This is dichotomy observed to reflect in Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo interaction in Ezillo community.

However, dominant group, by definition, set the parameters within which the subordinates or dominated operate. The dominant group is perceived to hold the power and authority in

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[116]FGD/Elderly Men/ Politician/60years and above /Ezza/12th August 2016

society relative to the subordinates and determines how that power and authority may be acceptably used. Whether it is reflected in determining who gets the best jobs, whose history will be taught in school, or whose relationships will be validated by society, the dominant group has the greatest influence in determining the structure of the society. The relationship of the dominants to the subordinates is often one in which the targeted group is labeled as defective or substandard in significant ways. For example, Ezza people generally, have historically been characterized as the unsung warriors of the Igbo race and their women have been viewed as more emotionally stable than others in the face of challenges such as war (Isichei, 1976). This suggest that dominant group assigns roles to the subordinate that reflect the latter's devalued status, reserving the most highly valued roles in the society for themselves. Subordinates are usually said to be innately incapable of performing the preferred roles. To the extent that those in the target group internalize the images that the dominant group reflects back to them, they may find it difficult to believe in their own ability. In the same way the Ezza eulogises their cultural practices and relationship with Ezillo that also reflect superiority, disparaging and derogatory impression of

In this seeming situation of unequal power, a subordinate group has to focus on survival. It becomes very important for subordinates to become highly attuned to the dominants as a way of protecting themselves. For example, the Ezillo adjust their social expectations and prescriptions to accommodate the social peculiarities of Ezza people who will not do same. Being able to anticipate and avoid the Ezza-Ezillo rage is important to peace and survival. Survival sometimes means not responding to oppressive behaviour directly. To do so could result in physical harm to oneself, even death. Because of the risks inherent in unequal relationships, subordinates often develop covert ways of resisting or undermining the power of the dominant group. As Evans, points out, popular culture is full of folktales, jokes, and stories about how the subordinate - whether the woman, the peasant, or the sharecropper - outwitted the "boss." Evans (1995) Ibeanu and Onu, (2001) identifies one form of resistance he called "not learning". Targeted students who are too often seen by their dominant teachers as "others" demonstrate this: Also, an interviewee from Ezza has this to say

> Ancestral supremacy based on historical account accentuate Ezza identity and superiority despite the supremacy conflict it generates subsequently, Ezza exercise of superior tendency is culturally situated in their reified identity and skill beyond others group within the territorial jurisdiction NEI. This historic account got boosted by colonial formal recognition of Ezza

identity as used to identify the people Abakaliki Division/NEI, this order facing challenge in Ezillo is unfortunate[117]

Since it is culturally expected that all descendants of Ezekuna must as a matter of cultural obligation be subservient to their eldest kindred. Ezza on his part show direction, take the lead while his other kins follow sequentially according to seniority in age. It in the light of this that the common descent provided for unquestionable homogeneity that leading to Ezillo forbidding shedding of blood with Mgbo their closest kin in time of trouble. Instead, Ezillo decided to bring in the Ezza as mercinaries and mediators as the eldest clan the old Abakaliki Division in northeast Igboland.

However, apart classifying Ezza people as the unsung warriors of northeast Igboland, the colonial regime imposed Ezza identity on other groups in the area. Also, it was a state policy then to recognise only Ezza identity as means of classifying Abakaliki area/northeast Igboland now known as Ebonyi north and central senatorial zones of Ebonyi state Nigeria (Anyanwu, 2005A). The quest by Ezza to institutionalise their colonial reified identity supremacy legacy in Ezza inter-group relation across NEI and beyond after colonialism has pitched them in a supremacy contest against other significant identity groups in the area and beyond. An interviewee from Ezillo has this to say

> The preponderant of Ezza-Ezillo population compare to Ezillo population is intimidating and reflects the overall majority and dominant group in the community despite their settler status. To the indigenous Ezillo people, the superior numerical strength of the Ezza widely spread is a social, political and economic capital to the Ezza people.[118]

Though demographically in minority compare to Ezza, Ezillo people believe that they are entitled to own and access what belongs to them in their community, LGA and the state. This right is threatened by increasing influx of Ezza farmers and land investor who are buying up valuable land and displacing landless Ezillo into being tenants in their own land. The hosting of Ezza people is not without side effects. Very important of these effects is the declining availability of fertile land for Ezillo people to farm as more farmers are jostling to farm on limited and fragmented fertile land. The fact that some Ezza settlers are legitimate owners of land in Ezillo coupled with their high literacy rate compare to Ezillo has placed them in a superior advantage position more than their host. These disparities have often fuelled supremacy struggle and contestation in the community. This is basically because the Ezza

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[117]KII/Man/ town union Executive /63years and above /Ezza/15th August 2016
[118]KII/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 70years /Ezillo community leader/16th August 2016

leverages on their strength economically, socially and politically to secure more land and consolidate the superior positions over other groups the area. An interviewee from Ezillo in affirmation says

> Ezza-Ezillo has expansionist and domination tendencies no doubt. Unlike the Ezillo people, the Ezza sentiment has been mobilised into ascending to political office using Ezillo as platform. This has produce Ezza-Ezillo personalities like late Dr. Ofia Nwali, Senator Julius Ali Ucha, Joseph Amagha, Clement Nwode, among others. As good as all these accomplishments are, the defect is that Ezza-Ezillo considers their accomplishments in Ezillo as vestige for dominance and superiority. This again creates space for supremacy struggle.[119]

Ezza-Ezillo demand for the creation of Izzo autonomous community from Ezillo community is a display of identity supremacy. This confirms the allusion from the response above. The people of Ezillo considered the demand despite the benefits Ezza-Ezillo have so far got from Ezillo politically and otherwise as illuminated above. The expansionist and domineering tendencies brought to bear and suggests intention to displace the people of Ezillo. Leaning on Isichei, (1976), the antecedents of Ezzaman leave not much to desire when it comes to internal colonisation and domination. This is reflected in Ezza interactions elsewhere outside Ezillo like Obuegu, Okpoto, and Effium in Ebonyi state and Ezzaegu in Enugu state among other communities the Ezza have as colonies in the state and even beyond. Consequently, as the struggle to dislodge supremacy social structure through social construction intensify, so also is the struggle by the Ezza to institutionalise their supremacy structure unending. Another interviewee from Ezillo says

> There are valid natural basis of distinction between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo that can otherwise constitute supremacy factors attributable to Ezillo people that make them claim superior to Ezza-Ezillo people. For example, the Ezillo settled first in Ezillo community, they have indigenous right to independent cultural territory, have unrestricted vast arable land; they have Ezillo as their own autonomous community,[120]

On one hand, the concept of "settler", particularly in Nigeriancontext is surrounded withcontroversy drawn from constitutional gap in providing clear definition of who an indigene, settler and citizen is with respect to land and other related resource endowment. Subsequent contentions have been about who is entitled to have what, where and when. On other hand, settler in the context means that Ezillo people are the first known locals that ever

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[119]IDI/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ town union executive/60years and above /Ezillo/19th August 2016
[120]KII/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 70years /Ezillo community leader/16th August 2016

lived in Ezillo territory. This fact of history is not contestable not even to the Ezza people. Despite earlier wars against invasion with Agbaja Otokpa and the war against the Mgbo as noted earlier, no newcomers ever dislodged Ezillo to claim Ezillo territory as locals. In this sense, Ezillo supremacy to contenders like Ezza is indisputable. The entire land mass of Ezillo covering about 872 km² of land area is an envious attraction to others group with the challenge land scarcity. Consequently, despite several attempts to forcefully occupy and claim Ezillo territory or give it another name outside Ezillo, the people of Ezillo have stoutly weathered the storms. Thus their legitimacy to the culture and territory is still indisputably sacrosanct thereby ensuring Ezillo superior sovereignty and legitimacy to Ezillo culture and territory irrespective of what claim Ezza-Ezillo is making. In contrast, an interviewee from Ezza says

> We are not restricting anyone but must not be restricted by any one. The Ezza-Ezillo have toiled so hard to come this far. We therefore refuse to be stampeded backward or into laziness. Our hard work and resilience has worked for us to be on top in the entire development indices in Ezillo, it is God not man. The domination campaign ongoing is not our interest because our work will speak for us. Let us be more objective, there is dignity in labour. We are ready to partner with our Ezillo brothers for the development our community. [121]

The response above suggests that there is a kind of envy-based rivalry that as basis for segregation and discrimination against Ezza-Ezillo from Ezillo people. Despite the pretense about absence of envy in Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo land relations, the reality is that the former never expected Ezzaman transformation from migrant farm labourer to land lords in Ezillo. There seem to be fear against of internal colonisation on the part of Ezillo. This notion informs the animosity and social construction of imagined social reality that reflect supremacy dichotomy as defense. The Ezza-Ezillo people no doubt have a perception of high self-esteem that often translate into superiority complex. The in-group and out-group distinctiveness that this mindset of Ezza and 'others' create may be seen by others groups in derogatory terms. In line with this allusion is what an interviewee from Ezillo says

> Inequality and discrimination is everywhere now. This is due to fear and suspicion. Social transformation of Ezza farmers and farm labourers to land owners and employers of farm labour in Ezillo contributed to the inequality extension in the community. Indigenes will naturally not be comfortable

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[121]KII/Man/ Man/Clergy/Earth priest/65years /Ezza/ 17th August 2016

working for those who hitherto were considered labourers. Landless and joblessness is a big challenge here.[122]

Another discussant from Ezza-Ezillo says

We are progressives. We believe in progress. I should think that Ezillo people are rather jealous of the progress of Ezza-Ezillo in their community. Otherwise tell me why they will not want collaborate with our people for common good instead it is one day one trouble. We are unstoppable. Whatever happens we are moving on. [123]

In a situation of unequal power, a subordinate group has to focus on survival. It becomes very important for subordinates to become highly attuned to the dominants as a way of protecting themselves. For example, the Ezillo adjust their social expectations and prescriptions to accommodate the social peculiarities of Ezza people who will not do same. Being able to anticipate and avoid the Ezza-Ezillo rage is important to peace and survival. Survival sometimes means not responding to oppressive behaviour directly. To do so could result in physical harm to oneself, even death. Because of the risks inherent in unequal relationships, subordinates often develop covert ways of resisting or undermining the power of the dominant group. As Evans points out, popular culture is full of folktales, jokes, and stories about how the subordinate - whether the woman, the peasant, or the sharecropper - outwitted the "boss." Evanss (1996) Ibeanu and Mbah, (2011) identifies one form of resistance he called "not learning". This is demonstrated by targeted students who are too often seen by their dominant teachers as "others":

In Ezillo community, deference to such primordial affinities associated with land and identity have its place in the socio-political space of the grass-root struggle for power and socio-economic resources in the community. The contradictions and dissents arising from placing and explaining the fundamentals of these ties have tremendous influenced the need to forge a common front and voice to contest oppression and discrimination. It further reinforces demands for rightful place as a community stakeholder. These needs and demands evolved into concepts like settlers, migrants, indigenes, and non-indigenes. These are concepts associated with an entrenched system of discriminatory practices involving denial and exclusion from common resource, rights and privileges. This system produces and sustains a hierarchical, unequal, and ranked system of indigenship that has provoked violent conflicts all over the country (Ogbogbo, *et al*, 2012). Ogbogbo, *et al*, (2012) further opines that:

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[122]KII/ Ezillo / Male lawyer and Youth leader/ 45 years old/ 23th July 2016
[123]KII/ Ezza/Male Retiree and town union executive / 58 years old/ 9th July 2016

the supremacy crisis is usually the end product of this divisive structure of exclusion and denials based on settler/indigene divide. This problem relate to the foundational in Nigerian federalism that seem to reify ethnic chauvinism against national identity like citizenship. (28).

No doubt the importance of indigeneship cannot be negotiated but that identity need to be available and accessible to all according to place of birth not according to place of origin alone. This contradiction of denials and exclusions based on indigene/settler was not resolved by Nigerian constitution. This is a fundamental error that has led to conflicts claiming thousands of lives and properties across Nigerian communities including Ezillo. These identities are increasingly used to exclude those labelled "others" from the political arena and have served to maintain elites' power. Group migration and local politics have an obvious effect on the degree of conflict between indigene and settler and therefore the political salience of indigene depends greatly on the specific socio-political context of a given scenario. Furthermore, the liberalization and opening of the political arena in Nigeria has served to fuel tensions between indigene and settler because these groups are perceived as a political threat to local populations and elites. The local dominant group do not want any rival. A KII respondent says

> Domination in any form is breed by oppression and false identity. The case of Ezza-Ezillo and their host Ezillo is an example of unequal relationship characterised by intended domination, discrimination, oppression and its consequent supremacy struggle for limited land and recognition. Rather than healthy competition thriving between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo, their concerns are to entrench a structure of identity superiority and inferiority that accelerate domination and subordination. This is fundamental to the various struggles that have claimed several lives of both parties. It is unfortunate especially considering the lots both will gain working together.[124]

The Ezillo on one hand demand is that they deserve to be accorded due recognition and respect for the culture of the land as the host community by settlers such as the Ezza. But the Ezza on the other hand argue that they deserve recognition and respect from Ezillo for who Ezza lost their warriors joining Ezillo to defeat Mgbo and secure Ezillo land. Ezza believe that without supporting Ezillo their entire community would have been wiped off by the rampaging Mgbo. On this basis, the Ezza considers Ezillo as who depended on the Ezza farmers for farm labour before the war and depended on the Ezza warrior to win a war, therefore, Ezillo is a dependent identity. Also, the Ezillo insist that having paid for Ezza farm

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[124]KII/Law Enforcement Officer/ 43years /Ezillo/11thJuly 2016

labour and military services, Ezza must let Ezillo be. The Ezza contend that the land Ezillo exchanged for Ezza military service legitimises Ezza claim of joint ownership of Ezillo community. It is against this backdrop that conflict in Ezillo continues to linger despite several interventions.

Since the colonial days, conflicts between Ezillo and Ezza clans in Ezillo community have attracted attentions from the government at different point in search for solution. The setting up of native courts in Ishielu hosting Ezillo and the arrest and prosecution of culprits arrested for been responsible for the first conflict between Ezillo and Ezza clans from 1934-55 by the colonial administration mark the beginning of government judicial intervention in Ezillo conflict.The matter was brought to an Abakaliki colonial customary court in 1955 when the court ruled in favour of Ezillo, mandating the Ezza to move to Egu-Echara. Despite the Ezza appeal that followed, the matter before an Abakaliki under colonial district master, Mr. Gunning, the earlier judgment was affirmed in favour of the Ezillo. Notwithstanding, the Ezza remained in the disputed territories till May 2008 when the conflict turn again into full-blown war. As a result, a peace committee was set up by the Ebonyi State Government to find out the distant and the instant causes of the conflict for policy.This was headed by the traditional ruler of Ezzamgbo, Eze Chibueze Agbo.Ezza rejected this intervention claiming that government was biased by appointing a pro Ezillo personality to head the committee.

At the end, it was recommended that Ezza should relocate to the original land given to them by Ezillo people in Egu-Echara in obedience to the traditional treaty marked by 'Imaba Ogbu'. On the 2ndof October, 2009 the report was adopted (Mkpuma, 2012).Vowing not to leave their houses and cash crops, the Ezza protested that they had been short-changed. The consequence of the protest was the deployment by the then Inspector General of Police, Ogbonnaya Onovo of large scale police operation in the area to flush out militants who were killing innocent users of Abakaliki-Enugu expressway at will. This was after a detatchment of the military from 82 division Enugu was withdrawn in 2010. According to Mkpuma (2012:3) 34 persons, including women were captured when a combined team of men of the Ebonyi State Police command and those of the Force Headquarters, Abuja, stormed six suspected clans hosting the warring militants. Police helicopters combined with over 1500 team of mobile policemen from various mobile units across the country were deployed.Expectedly, the police combed the suspecting clans and sacked the remaining suspects from the disputed land compelling all residents of the area to vacate. At the end, a huge casualty figure was recorded. More than 400 lives lost their lives, 16 policemen and three soldiers also died in the

hands of the hoodlums who resorted to gorilla warfare attacking passerbyes on the expressway where they ambushed the security officials.The exercise led to the suppression of the communal unrest until the December 31, 2011 attacks that reopened the old wounds (Mkpuma, 2012:5).

While some people blamed the unresolved issue of Ezza demand for Izzo autonomous community caved out from Ezillo community, others blame perceived Ezza-Ezillo encroachment into Ezillo land without owners consent. Significant other also blames the crises to Ezza domination campaign and Ezillo resistance. Ezza-Ezillo request for political autonomy in their host community was considered as a disregard and disrespectful to the people of Ezillo who vehemently refused it to accede. The Ezillo hold the belief that their ancestor and founder, the legendary Ebenyi Ali and his team first settled in Ezillo and was never conquered on Ezillo land until it was bequeathed to them to bequeath from generation to generation. Furthermore, the first group of Ezza settlers in Ezillo who were mostly farmers and farm labourers were often requested according to our culture to pay homage to our traditional ruler as their masters and king (Enuke, 2015). After the war fought against Mgbo by the combined forces Ezillo and Ezza, the Ezza were settled in Ezillo and integrated into mainstream Ezillo political and economic culture. Our traditional political system started recognising the Ezza people as part of us. But that is not enough excuse to demand for autonomous community from Ezillo which imply having another king parallel to a seating king. This request if granted will open additional frontier for supremacy struggle between the kings.

In addition, the claim of Ezza-Ezillo to own land in Ezillo is anchored on the land reward and permanent settlement they got from Ezillo people for rendering military service that supported Ezillo to conquer Mgbo in the 1920s. The contract that precedes this reward provided for total and permanent integration of the Ezza warrior into mainstream Ezillo society hence, the legitimacy claim transcending land to political and economic sphere in Ezillo community. These social arrangements accounted for the source of traditional power and sovereignty the Ezza is seeking to have in Ezillo. The Ezza-Ezillo is claiming legitimacy to land and power as equal partnership with Ezillo on account of contractual agreement, population and historical antecedence.

> Yes, it is correct to say that in addition to two villages (Amaukpa and Umuezoke) dominated by Ezza-Ezillo, the remaining villages in Ezillo have Ezza-Ezillo people constitute almost constituting half of their population.

These villages in Ezillo in descending order according to seniority: Amofia; Amaleze; Umuakpaa; Amaukpa; Umuezoke; Amuhu and Amorie the youngest village. However, the population strength of Ezza-Ezillo in Ezillo community and beyond informs claims to superiority.[125]

The historical and contemporary social structure associated with the mainstream Ezza people dwelling as home in Ezza south and Ezza north LGA of Ebonyi State created social inequality in the state with the Ezza constituting the most populous sub-ethnic Igbo group, most travelled having colonies to their name, with high literacy level, adventurous, and as Isichei, (1976) puts it 'the unsung warriors of north east Igbo'. With these intimidating credentials, the Ezza called themselves 'Ezza nation' parade quality high level technical, intellectual, and military capabilities. Expectedly, the Ezza people over the years have built a power upper class structure that negotiates Ezza interest in national, state and local economic and political issues. These think thanks of Ezza people go to any length while interacting with other groups to ensure Ezza nation assume a superordinate position and all other ethnic groups including Ezillo being their subjects including their colonies.

> there is established power relation dialectics characterised by perceived supra ordinate and subordinate groups with loud voice always seeking to be heard in Ezillo community. They called these voices in local parlance *olu ndu bekee le olu ndu omenali* translated to mean western (educated) group and traditional people. He went further to explain that these groups of people are preoccupied with struggle for supremacy tied to land ownership and control in Ezillo. There is also an embedded sense of superiority associated with the people of Ezza that they carry about in their relationship with others. This is the sense of 'we and others'. These two factors for generations have contributed significantly to conflicts than other factors. The quest for more land is to them an expression of dominance[126]

Yet, another interviewee has this to say:

> It is real and correct to see Ezza and Ezillo conflict in the picture of a conflict between a bully boy and a bullied boy. Ezza nation as they call themselves live with this perception of 'we and others' in everywhere they find themselves. The others to them are inferior while they are superior. It worked for them in Effium, Okpoto, Ntezi, Nkalagu, Ezzaegu, Ezzamgbo and such like where the Ezza people in the past have overrun and taken over. Now, for decades they have been trying to overrun Ezillo like others. In, fact their plan and slogan is that the entire Ishielu LGA where Ezillo belong must become their (Ezza) third LGAs in Ebonyi state having capture most of their towns and villages as mentioned earlier. The intimidating, suppressive and repressive tendencies of the bully against the bullied describe the experience of Ezillo people in the hands of the Ezza-Ezillo.

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[125]KII/ Ezillo /Male Retiree and political office holder /53 years old/ 10th July 2016
[126]FGD/Elderly woman/Farmer/60years and above /Ezillo/ 25th July 2016

Ezza has not stopped seen Ezillo as a naughty small boy who bits more than he can chew. Ezza consider themselves a big boy preferred to be called Ezza nation in Ebonyi state where they have half the state population. They alone have two LGAs (Ezza North and Ezza South LGAs) and 50 percent of two others, (Ishielu and Abakaliki LGAs). Comparing this statistics, Ezillo is actually a small boy fighting a just war of survival against oppressive tendencies.[127]

However, while the Ezillo are busy engaging in local politics to address the claims of Ezza-Ezillo people in their midst, the Ezza-Ezillo is bringing to bear the political and economic clout of the mainstream Ezza nation to negotiate dominant political and even economic positions in Ezillo at the national and state level politics. This has influence and determined in no small way local public opinion and decision making process in the context of democracy being a game of numbers. Consequently, national and state elections often end up favouring Ezza-Ezillo candidates who contest using Ezillo identity as a platform. They include the likes of Dr. Ofia Nwali, Mr. Igwe Nwankwegu, Senator (Barr.) Julius Ali Ucha, Joseph Amagha, Clement Nwode among others. These results have aggravated sentiment on the part of Ezillo people claiming short-changed by settlers. The social and political arrangement has translated the emergence of clienteles' structure of patronage and network between the least politically connected Ezillo politician and the highly connected Ezza-Ezillo politicians. The economic opportunities provided by political positioning and power favour the Ezza-Ezillo more than the Ezillo people. It is against this backdrop that Ezza-Ezillo considers themselves as a dominant and superior partner to their Ezillo brothers.

Knowing that lack of sufficient land may questions the true identity they claim, the Ezza-Ezillo insist on being indigene of Ezillo with all entitlement, rights and freedom to aspire to any position in the land. This kind of arrangement negate Ezillo`s interpretation of Ezza identity and reveals rivalry which culminate into protestation and resistance on several occasions leading to conflict to settle the score. This kind of social structure and land disputes require theories of conflict that factor in power relations in their interpretation. There is social and political exclusion in Ezillo and this has presented sense of inequality in the area tilted towards the advantage of the Ezza-Ezillo. They lamented the way they paid homage to the Ezza-Ezillo. According to the IDI respondent who says

We have to seek permission and political connection from Ezza-Ezillo to access their political patrons before we can advance our political ambition at the state and national level. The same thing is gradually getting to a more

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[127]KII/ Ezillo /Male Retiree, Opinion leader and town union executive /61 years old/ 10th July 2016

critical issue of land use and access. Most viable lands in Ezillo are either sold to Ezza-Ezillo political and economic elites or are in contestation between Ezillo and Ezza. To get any piece of land to build our houses and to farm is now a serious issue. How do you explain that settlers have suddenly become landlords that the real landlords (Ezillo) will have to go give a hind leg of any game we catch in the bush and some portion of farm produce when farming season comes to an end instead of the reverse? We feel that this social and political injustice against us should stop whether peacefully or forcefully. There is unanimous expression of social inequality in Ezillo by all the respondents including Elites and the peasants.[128]

The responses correspond to the standpoint of Oji, et al, (2014) that Ezza-Ezillo landlords and political patrons gained advantage from the subjects due to the homage they pay to him as articulated by the respondents. The Ezza-Ezillo respondent says. The land we occupy belonged to the Ezza-Ezillo legitimately. All other ethnic groups on our land must pay homage to our land owners. The psycho-cultural theory espouses that conflict will breakout between two opposing groups if one of the groups is denied their basic needs on the basis of their identity by other opposing groups. The conflict will be protracted without having a solution if the denied needs are basic or fundamental in nature which the group must have.

Furthermore, identity supremacy competition accelerates identity transformation through social narrative. Effort to entrench dominant identity illuminate contentious narratives' transformation based on the belief that the human agency can disrupt those dominant master narratives that overwhelm individuals through larger structures invested with power, by renegotiating, deconstructing and externalizing their main premises. Deciphering narratives as socio-historical constructs that incorporate the root causes of conflict can open up the possibilities for acceptance of more complex, and thereby more inclusive narratives, that can subsequently influence change of exclusive identities and pave the way for positive peace (Mitchell, 2000). Looking at dehumanising contentious narratives in Ezillo context, it is apparent that Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo are still repeating their dehumanising interpretation of their contentious narrative that foster inferiority and superiority complex. A KII respondent from Ezza posits that:

> While Ezillo is obsessed with the indigeneity identity the Ezza obsessed with charisma and accomplishment in Ezillo community as the basis to remain above Ezillo people. Hence, the supremacy struggle continues. The activities of town union association among Ezillo people and Ezza-Ezillo people are fundamental in championing and amplifying transformation and reification identity boosting narratives. The associations enact and re-enact

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[128]IDI/ Man/ Farmers/ 60years /Ezillo/15th August 2016

narratives as rituals, festivals and symbols that strengthen primordial bond and attachment reminding members of their group of their obligation to preserve and protect their communal identities and foster communal boundaries and prejudices.[129]

A KII respondent from Ezza-Ezillo says

In the recent past, town unions and association are major players in the reification of group identity in Ezillo. The primordial identities that have gained wide currency and greater political significance, especially in contestations over citizenship, are those of 'indigenes', 'non-indigenes', 'migrants', and 'settlers'. These categories have ethnic, sub-ethnic, origins, and have evolved from an entrenched system of discriminatory practices in which non-indigenes, migrants and settlers are denied equal access to common resource, rights and privileges of a locality or community, town or state, to which 'sons and daughters of the soil' have first or exclusionary access. The system produces and sustains a hierarchical, unequal, and ranked system of identification based on indigene and settler classification. Although these identities have grown in significance over time they have deep historical roots in pre-colonial patterns of inter-group relations, and the discriminatory practices and ethnic inequalities entrenched by both the colonial and postcolonial regimes that gave rise to aggravated national question. These have cumulatively provoked various forms of supremacy struggle for limited local and national resources. It has also given impetus to such conflicts like Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo, Agulere-Umuleri, Ife-Modakeke Tiv-Jukun and such like.[130]

The above respondent`s underscore the fact that the mindset is critical to identity construction as seen in the narrative above concerning 'indigenes', 'non-indigenes', 'migrants', and 'settlers' identities. The construction of disparaging mindset here is aimed at reifying the meanings they have made in the course of interaction with the other groups. The dominant identity deconstructs others as minority groups who respond with the notion of an enslaved, subjected and dominated identity. This construct are aimed at further entrenching the dominance of the dominant group members and relegation the others into minority dominated other group members. The activities of community group associations in Ezillo have fundamental impact on the transformation and reification identity narratives in favour of group identity. Through enacting and re-enacting narratives as rituals, festivals and symbols primordial bond and attachment is strengthened. This reminds members of their group of their obligation to preserve and protect their communal identities and foster communal boundaries. This also deconstructs erroneous perception of self identity and the identity of

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[129]KII/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 73years /Ezza community leader/20th August 2016
[130]KII/ EzilloMale lawyer and Youth leader/ 45 years old/ 21th July 2016

others. The average Ezzaman mindset is captured in the response bellow. A discussant from Ezillo, she says

> The war between Ezillo and Ezza people is like the fight between a bully and the bullied in primary or secondary school days. We know that Ezillo is not and cannot be a match to Ezza no matter how you consider it. They, Ezza besides having several colonies, they have the largest population in Ebonyi state with two local governments and constitute more than half of the population of many local governments in the sate including our own Ishielu. There is evidence that Ezza does not go to war anywhere without carrying themselves along from wherever they may be. Then consider such population and support from within and outside Ezillo compare to Ezillo population and support. [131]

These responses above represent the average perception of an Ezza-Ezillo man that his group is not only a dominant majority but also the anointed leaders of other groups within NEI. This has negative impact on Ezza relationship with their host Ezillo people. This is because apart from Ezillo being considered a minority group compare to Ezza, they are part of the descendants of Ezekuna children with Ezza as the eldest. The present generation of Ezillo considers this ancestral history as a social construction to favour the dominance of Ezza people over other groups. In earlier response, the Ezillo takes in this inferiority image created to recreate their identity to reflect their perceived identity as projected by Ezza-Ezillo. This is how perception creates and recreates reality, meaning and identity. This mindset on both side reinforce supremacy structure and to resistance to it.

The response above captures the mindset of and Ezzaman. This mindset fuels a feeling of rivalry, domination and discrimination between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo. Ingenuity is measured in terms of the dominant actor. From the family to the school socialisation is structured to reflect Ezza as big brother and others including Ezillo as younger brothers. This is institutionalisation succession process that has kept Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo in supremacy contest to overcome inferiority complex on the side of Ezillo. On the side of the Ezza, the contest is to consolidate and entrench their historical supremacy over their kindred. Ezza is too big to be compared with Ezillo for goodness sake. We are not and had never been equal. The issue of domination expansion and domination come in where people are contesting supremacy. In this case Ezza is not practically and ideologically a match to Ezillo. They, Ezillo are our younger brothers. Rather than Ezillo accepted responsibility for suppressing

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[131]IDI/Elderly Man/ Transporter/ town union member/60years /Ezillo/19th August 2016

our development effort in the community, they accuse us of suppressing and dominating them.

4.1.5 Social networks that sustain the conflict

Findings on social network that sustain conflict reveals that Ezza-Ezillo and their host have used their social capital differentials to further, project and propagate their communal identity interests and relevance in Ezillo land relations. There is ambivalence of competition for supremacy of social and political capital. Using network nodes, members of each group engage and mobilise conflict in their quest to secure access and use of land. Sometimes the media is used as a propaganda instrument. At another time, the following instruments are used: money (exchange), structure (normative structure) or institution (security agencies). The healthy dimension of social networks in all is the tendency for improvement but the negative aspect is rivalry and clash of interest particularly in land relations. Common among these networks nodes are land merchants and conflict entrepreneurs; local peasants and elites groups; town union groups and women group; patrons and their clients; traditional authority and landless peasants. An interviewee from Ezza has this to say

> To consolidate the accomplishments of the Ezza group whether earlier settled as migrant labourers or later invited, one thing is common that is Ezza group interest. The network between the Ezza migrant farm labourers and those Ezza warriors invited into Ezillo is considered the most effective connection that emboldened Ezza-Ezillo resolve to seek the entrenchment of Ezza interest in owning more land in Ezillo. This considered the only way to demonstrate supremacy and commitment to continue been in charge of the historic territory of Ekumenyi Ezekuna kindred territory in the state.[132]

From the above response, it is obvious that the mission of Ezza in Ezillo community is to capture Ezillo as one of the territories in the diaspora under their control. The Ezillo realizing this goal are observed to be doing everything possible not to compromise any more their land for the purpose of pleasing Ezza-Ezillo. These efforts include forming alliance with land merchants home and outside to block further sale of sensitive valuable Ezillo land to Ezza people. In swift reaction to this resolve, the Ezza also mobilise into contesting perceived withdrawal of their land ownership rights past and present using the force of law and sometimes brute force. This many times has trigger crisis of different form and shape. This strategy has in 2009 for instance after prolonged war and government intervention earned Ezza some additional plots of land in Ezillo, which the government used to settle the crisis.

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[132] IDI/Men/ town union Executive /44years /Ezza/11th August 2016

For instance actors in that 2008 conflict cannot be far from conflict entrepreneurs conniving with the local and outside land merchants to ferment trouble for personal interest.

There are varying degrees of land tenure that facilitate social networks in Ezillo community. These tenures also foretell the importance of land as a sacred symbol of identity and wealth as well as underscore the efficacy of social networks in land relations. The most important of them here are freehold/private titles, communal/traditional systems, public land, and squatting. In addition, various social fundamentals inform inter-group networks and network nodes such as class, gender, power, authority, social groups, and social structures such as patronage. With a very large expanse of mostly fertile land, Ezillo land is well positioned for investors because it is a transit community receives strangers on daily basis having an international highway bisecting to other states and regions. For instance the road leads to south-south Cross river state to Cameroon; north-central Benue state to Niger Republic. The demand for land in Ezillo is high. These has affected the value and price of land in the community, a situation that has not only increased conflict of interests in land relations that constrained access to and use of land.

Kagwanji (2009:4) asserts that across eastern Nigeria (specifically Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo; Aguleri and Umuleri; and Uzo-Uwani) the question of Ego and supremacy question in the use and ownership of, and access to increasingly scarce valuable land has been at the centre of festering conflicts between sub-ethnic groups in the region. At the community, household and individual levels, a range of factors influence whom accesses and controls land resources. These relate to one's bargaining position, which influences the level of success or failure in acquiring land. The external factors are broader economic and political forces, quantity and quality of land available, and the local economy and culture. These largely influence market prices and the amount and quality of land available. The internal factors are demographic aspects (such as gender, age, household status and lineage), economic status and social networks. Still another KII respondent in Ezza has this to say

> The Ezza people in Ezillo has very strong network with various indigenous groups and personalities that facilitate their continuous acquisition of land in Ezillo. These include the youth groups provide them with information on whose inherited land is up for sale. The women group provide information on which widow children want to sale their fathers land; the family and village heads provide the link to the land idle and in conflict of ownership that is up for sale to resolve the conflict. To this end the wealthy among the Ezza land merchants have evolved into patrons with various clients who scout for saleable land in Ezillo. In fact the truth is that Ezillo people are not

comfortable with the rate at which Ezillo sale off their communal land to people from outside Ezillo, as it is obviously becoming threat to Ezillo identity, safety and culture, they collectively agreed to hand over a very large portion of one of the most economically viable land that the community hitherto use as community rice farmland to the government of Ebonyi state for a hold before Ezza buys them off. So, rather than allow Ezza people to subtly acquire that remaining potion the community agreed that Ezillo land is more secured in government hand than in Ezza hand. The land is now government owned commercial rice layout. [133]

An interviewee from Ezza-Ezillo says

Ownership of land in Ezillo is fundamental to our business and occupation in Ezillo. We need more indigenous land to sustain our claim to indigeneship here. We cannot be tenants and still claim ownership of land and identity rights in Ezillo. Our effort is to buy as much land from Ezillo willing sellers as possible. [134]

As source of wealth, land value is determined by the location and fertility. People attitude to valuable land is different from their attitude to less valuable land. There is high interest on valuable land anywhere. Increasingly, peoples demand for choice land is pitting lower class peasant against upper class peasants; the landed powerful against the landless powerless; widows against their disease husbands family; jobless youth groups against village and family heads; patrons against their clients; land owners and land buyers. Everybody tend to want to have fertile valuable land. The politics of gaining valuable land cannot be overemphasised. This has pit the reach and the poor, community and individual, community peasantry and government, public and private, the weak and the strong, the powerful and the powerless against each other in deadly conflicts that have turned into full-blown war of interest. The indigenous peasants considered government takeover of their rice farm under the guise of securing it from Ezza invasion as a fraud calculated by the politicians and those in the corridor of power to make the already poor peasants poorer and landless, hence, the pressure from within Ezillo to restore the peoples land. The need to reduce the perceived risk of not having stake in the ownership of profitable land resource has made social network with stakeholders in land relations expedient. The Ezza people are increasingly resort to network with politicians in order to access the government reserved rice farmland under public private partnership. This is working out largely considering the intimidating stake Ezza people have in Ebonyi State government as the most populous sub-ethnic group in the state with more

[133]KII/Man/ Man/Clergy/Earth priest/65years /Ezza/ 17th August 2016
[134]KII/ Ezza/Male Retiree and town union executive / 58 years old/ 9th July 2016

local government areas than any other group. An IDI respondent in Ezillo has this to say. A KII respondent in Ezillo has this to say

> Historically, Ezillo has had always constituted a high powered network of indigene mandated to secure community land and recover any lost Ezillo land in the wrong hands of strangers. How effective these groups have been is a subject of debate. While some argued that these groups locally charged to monitor and secure access and use of community land have compromised their mandate and turned into network that facilitate the invasion of community land by cartel of land merchant with whom they liaise with to dispossess peasants of their farmland in Ezillo. However, in Ezillo, autonomous community is made up of seven villages; Amauji-mkpuru consisting of Amaleze, Umuakpaa, Amukpa and Umuozoke villages; and Amaozanu community made up of Amaofia, Amauhu and Amaorie villages. In terms of seniority, the villages are arranged as follows: Amofia, Amaleze, Umuakpaa, Amukpa, Umuezoke, Amuhu and Amorie. The root of social network that exist among the seven village heads in Ezillo is derived from their share of common ancestral father said to be a hunter who took off from Ndu-oga, Amofia-Mgbo with Ebenyi Ali or Oga Ali as their leader. No decision concerning Ezillo land within Ezillo territory can be taken without the input of each family and village head ratified by traditional Eze-in-council. However, greed and self often lead to the imposition decisions and choice to take based on nepotistic or seniority rather than democracy. This has caused serious quarrel and sustained conflict of interest and polarised Eze-in-council in Ezillo till date. The aggregation of social interaction that inform land relations provide several social network nodes aimed at securing stake, acquiring stake or increasing stakes in land ownership. The structure of network nodes is such that are usually embedded with levels of unequal power relations that often crystallises into interest and power struggle and competition. The struggle to secure group and personal interests in valuable land make social network constitute rural conflict driver in Ezillo.[135]

An IDI respondent from Ezza has this to say:

> We Ezza people are pained that Ezillo people who should take us in the way we took them as brothers prefer to socialise even their recent generations who are never involved in any conflict with Ezza people nor witnessed one to conclude that we are therir enamies. The attitude of their traditional institution is also not helping matters. They come out decisions that affect us as inhabitaants of the community without our consent and input. Yet, they expect us to be law abiding by celebrating their culture at the expense of our own. Our identity and culture is not negotiable. If Ezillo feel that we are displacing them in anything, let them work harder and come out better. We merit any opportunity we go for and are given by merit.[136]

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[135]KII/DPO/Law enforcement agent/Ezillo/14th July 2016
[136]IDI/ Youth leader/ Farmers/ 36years /Ezza/15th August 2016

The chieftaincy institution which remains a key player not only in local administration but also in national life generates disputes and debates owing to its perceived bias role in rural land relations. The dispute and debate has been whether those who are called chiefs in the name of Eze, village heads, family heads and other opinion leaders should have any formal role in political affairs. Nigerian constitution recognise their position as custodian of their people`s culture, tradition and identity. They operate outside the formal structures of modern state power but the state still uses them to support legitimacy (Arowosegbe, 2016). It was discovered that while the 1963 Constitution created a Legislative Chamber in each of the regions for chiefs, the 1979, 1989 and 1995 Constitutions did not provide anymeaningful political roles for traditional rulers. The chieftaincy institution is readily accessible to the people and the government use them as conduits for disseminating information.

The chieftaincy institution constitutes an important element galvanise grassroot support to provides meaningful political participation and indeed, the Federal and State Governments emphasize their importance by appointing some of them to prominent political roles (Egwu, 1998). The frequent interference in chieftaincy affairs takes place through appointment, demotion, deposition and banishment as well as revocation and adjustment of traditional land boundaries to favour entrenched interests. As a result of this interference, there have also been several clashes between State Governors and traditional rulers leaving a trail of heightened tension in many states and communities (Adejumobi, 2002). Interference also arise in the creation of new traditional thrones by State Governors e.g. the Benue State Government created several new second-class chiefs in 1997 and at the Federal level, the National Council of Traditional Rulers was created comprising of (Aiyede, 2009) graded rulers from the country to serve as a consultative assembly to reach the grass root.

Inter-group and personal quest to undo the other in accessing and owning valuable land in Ezillo has deepens networks of social engagements and conflict between vested interests and entrenched interests in Ezillo land. Ezza people are in the forefront of this engagement because according to (Enuke, 2015), the more they use, access and own land in Ezillo the more their stake in power and influence in local decision making process. The Ezza are mobilised into networks structures such as traditional and kinship authority; land merchants-vendors and rural youths; patrons-clients and conflict entrepreneurs; elites and peasantry; men and women town union. These structures as domesticated into indigenous networks get infiltrated and dominated by the Ezzas. The often loss of indigenous content and savour of these structures is due to the infiltration that tends to distort group targets placing settler's

priorities against indigenous ones. Considering bellow, each of these structures will illuminate the impact they make in sustaining conflict and fostering conflict environment. To this end, the traditional and kinship authorities in land relation in Ezillo cannot be overemphasised. Also, the network between the duos cannot be underrated when it comes to land acquisition process in Ezillo community. A KII respondent in Ezillo has this to say

> Constituting these social network nodes under consideration are: traditional and kinship authority; land merchants-vendors and rural youths; patrons-clients and conflict entrepreneurs; elites and peasantry; men and women town union. These land-based relationships in Ezillo context display certain common cultural features that suggest social differentiation and unequal power relations along landedness and landlessness. I think that the trouble shooters in land relations involving Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo are their family and village heads who are contesting identity supremacy and vexed issues of settlers having less valuable land than the indigenous owners. On one hand, the Ezillo depend on indigenous right to inherit land most of which may not be valuable due to multiple division and fragmentation unlike the Ezza who buy choice land or exchange it for money. On the other hand the so called settlers insisting not to be regarded as settlers but as indigenes based on their perceived equal stake in land ownership in Ezillo community outside the Ezza mainstream community. While the Ezza work for Ezillo in farms to earn property and some were invited to render military service to earn land some others still increased Ezza stake in the ownership of Ezillo land by local networking that end up in acquisition of more land in exchange for money or dowry. The disparity in the ownership of choice land between the land buyers and land owners translated into value means that those with more valuable land have higher stake in land than those who hardly buy Ezillo land but depend indigenous right to land through inheritance.[137]

An IDI respondent from Ezillo has this to say

> Kinship in the Ezillo is partrilineal; that is, descent, succession and inheritance run through the partriline. Marriage is overwhelmingly patrilocal, so that women marry into a village and use the land belonging to their husbands' families. However, quite a number of marriages continue to occur within a village or between neighbouring villages that attract and involve Ezillo and Ezza families, so that many men hitherto Ezza settlers now live in Ezillo as Ezza-Ezillo kin. In a couple of cases, the brother became ill or developed unexplained symptoms and accused the relatives of bewitching him.[138]

An IDI respondent in Ezza has this to say

> It is like a taboo among the Ezza people in Ezillo to sell any land they got from Ezillo unlike the Ezillo people some of who sell to Ezza and other inherited land for one reason or the other. It takes Ezza consistent network

[137]KII/IPO/Law enforcement agent/Ezillo/14th July 2016
[138]IDI/Men/ town union member /64years /Ezillo/17th August 2016

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with Ezillo kinships and traditional village heads to attract those willing to sell their land. Ezza buy land even if it involves borrowing or inviting their brothers outside the community to pay for land. This has led to concentration of valuable land in hands of the Ezza most of who already owned land and are continuously buying more using their traditional and kinship networks in Ezillo. The realisation of how much of Ezillo land is under Ezza control is a major conflict driver that activate rivalry and contestation. The Ezza get embolden by their overwhelming control of very strategic and valuable Ezillo land. [139]

There is also conflict in inheritance secession from one generation to another as the inheritor struggle to place their children in their place in land ownership. Most family heads are not favourably disposed to following due process in land allocation. They reallocate idle land that their owners refuse to use claiming no permanent ownership. Rather than follow inheritance succession from father to sons, it is argued that since male children are not equally distributed, it is first come first served leaving no land idle.

The rivalry between the family, village heads and the members of Eze-in-council that work with the traditional authority head the Eze in Ezillo generate friction often expressed openly. The disparity embedded in private titles and communal holds that the local traditional systems regulating land relations are bias in its processes that lead to disaffection among the community sub-group particularly such groups like Ezza people who are considered as settlers. The permeation of the system by this settler is seen as subversive to the interest and culture of Ezillo people. While Ezillo depend on community land and land inheritance, the community leadership collides with strangers to sell communal choice land leaving the real owners to landlessness. While Ezillo kinship only provides for fragmented valueless land, the Ezza people have plots of Ezillo land in choice places.

The family, village and community are arenas of political manipulations and power play in Ezillo. These spaces provide opportunities for their heads to entrench personal interest beyond common one in quest to derive personal value from the process of communal land allocation. The biases and exclusion of members of the same kindred from family inheritance has played into the hands of third party who come in to settle dispute and also to buy land in dispute (Oji, *et al*, 2014). Another IDI respondent from Ezillo has this to say

> Kinship in Ezillo is partrilineal; that is, descent, succession and inheritance run through the partriline. Marriage is overwhelmingly patrilocal, so that women marry into a village and use the land belonging to their husbands'

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[139]IDI/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 73years /Ezza community leader/20th August 2016

families. However, quite a number of marriages continue to occur within a village or between neighbouring villages that attract and involve Ezillo and Ezza families, so that many men hitherto Ezza settlers now live in Ezillo as Ezza-Ezillo kin. In a couple of cases, the brother became ill or developed unexplained symptoms and accused the relatives of bewitching him.[140]

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> the history of Ezillo and Ezza families show that, in each generation, after initial settlement in the village, there have been disputes among extended family relatives over land. In each generation, sub-groups of the patrilineal group have left, usuallybecause of competition and conflict over family fields. Split or fission of kinship groups is inevitable and well known. There is no longer unused land on which new villages can establish themselves. [141]

An FGD participant from Ezillo has this to say

> There is public demonstration of division of families in both Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo families in such a manner that suggest esoteric manipulation for land dispossession. The division is obvious in such ritual moments as funerals when different sections of the family do not share the same 'medicines' seems to take place between cousins. In one case, a brother was accused to have caused the death of his causing in order to use his fields. In other cases, the disputes were constant and several of the men gave upthe fields and made do with their wives' fields. In another case where Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo evolve through marriage generations of kinship relationship, there are allegations of relative using the family land using charm to inflict harm or bewitch kin to get him rid off to dispossess his potion of land. Some kins are scared of their desperate kindred when it comes to claiming family land entitlement by inheritance. Others moved out of the family compound to stay permanently in their mother's village or buy land resettle in a neutral village or community. [142]

Another FGD respondent from Ezillo has this to say

> Ownership and control of land are often associated with influence in decision-making and power to affect outcomes. Owning and controlling rural land largely depend on established network link to influential decision makers with power that affect outcomes. The traditional authority system

[140]IDI/ Youth leader/ Farmers/ 45years /Ezillo/15th August 2016
[141]IDI/Men/ town union member /64years /Ezillo/17th August 2016
[142]FGD/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezillo/ 12thAugust 2016

comprising the Eze, members of Eze-in-council are custodians of influence and power over land acquisition process in Ezillo. Networking traditional authority system can be quite challenging within the context of avoiding exploitation and oppression. Issues of access and distribution are important in the context of land and people's power relationships with it. Social security and livelihood are threatened because vast majority of the rural population are landless and vulnerable resulting in conflicts over land.[143]

Except you are in the good books of the traditional heads involving their chains of network, you are likely to get no allocation or a very small allocation of land. Their authority over community, village and family land have made them before their subjects look like den gods. Network at this level is more structured into contract of exchange and servitude. The struggles over authority certainly also exist within chiefs' families: virtually all the village headmen in Ezillo are embroiled in such long-standing disputes with their cousins. However, the lack of options for establishing a new village means that the disputes over the chief's office are over the existing village. The broader implication, however, is that conflicts over land are now much more widespread throughout the population. Secondly, as suggested above, splits now take place not only between cousins but also between brothers. This suggests a deeper reach into the heart of the patrilineage and deepening, more wounding, divisions.

Conflict between brothers and cousins appears endemic in cases where married brothers use land belonging to their family relatives. However, the widely accepted cultural norm of only sons inheriting land because daughters 'leave' to live in their husbands` villages is easy to invoke in these disputes. Less culturally accepted are disputes between 'sisters', that is, sisters in the English sense as well as cousins - the daughters and granddaughters of sisters. It was the pervasiveness of these disputes and their role in splitting patrilineage resulting into class formation is instructive. The increasing rate of kinship infested landlessness among youths and adult men/kindred present illumination to the ways in which social differentiation is taking place across generations, and the role of uneven and disputed access to land in that process. Young married men and their households, single men, some adult men and widows of all ages are the two groups most severely hit by land shortages and outright landlessness in Ezillo community.

The family, village and community are arenas of political manipulations and power play in Ezillo. These spaces provide opportunities for their heads to entrench personal interest beyond

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[143]FGD/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 62years and above /Ezillo/ 12th August 2016

common one in quest to derive personal value from the process of communal land allocation. The biases and exclusion of members of the same kindred from family inheritance has played into the hands of third party who come in to settle dispute and to buy land in dispute. The same third part according to (Enuke, 2015; Oji, *et al*, 2014; Onwe, *et al,* 2015) subtly ignite the fire of rivalry in many cases using diabolic means to put victims into legal, social and economic pressure that will require solution from the engagement of the kindred or sell of family or village land. When this purpose is achieved, they appear to provide solution to the crises and that leads to the arranging through their network a proxy land buyer to buy off the land. Onwe, *et al,* (2015) confirm that Ezza people get involve into many things in their quest to acquire choice land in Ezillo from their owners including victimisation and prosecution.

Also, another FGD participant from Ezillo in contrast argues that:

> Considering the implication of the historical antecedents of an average Ezza it is risky to see and recognise him as an indigene in this community. Look, we only invited them to render military service not to come and be indigenes. Concerning those Ezza people born in Ezillo, the Nigerian constitution never recognised place of birth as enough basis for indigeneship. So, someone cannot compel this community to recognise him as indigene when the parents are not from here. Ezza are simply attempting to impose their identity on us that we will not take.[144]

An IDI respondent from Ezillo has this to say:

> We are on daily basis seeing Ezza segregate us from their cultural processes as expression of superiority. If we do not put our feet on the ground to reject this pressure for oneness with our people, they will end up discrimination us in all things. We must stand up against sharing our identity with Ezza to avoid enslavement. What actually aggravate the conflict is Ezza taking up Ezillo social, political and economic chances at the state and national levels claiming Ezillo identity and at the same time Ezza identity. Ezza people in this community have ruined it. Example our youths who are equally qualified to take up available social, political and economic chances from the LGA, state and national arena are displaced by our visitor Ezza claiming our identity. It is too bad and we cannot allow it to continue. The major reason is that when the so call Ezza takes up this position, they forget the community that gave them the platform. Then they will remember their mainstream community.[145]

According to Ugbo, (2008) the networks that facilitate the sell and purchase of land in Ezillo is like a cartel that evolves from inside Ezillo families and villages. This cartel link up with land merchants outside and inside Ezillo to even sale people land without their consent. They

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[144]FGD/Ezillo/Elderly Woman/Farmer / 62 years old/ 1st August 2016
[145]IDI/Woman/ Politician and town union member /61years /Ezillo/18thJuly 2016

finance litigation and prosecution where the justice system is involved from the family, village, community or even conventional justice system. Those involved in this cartel network land business are wealthy land merchants, land vendors, land speculators, local land vendors, some family and village heads among others. The local arm of this cartel is constituted as indigenous movement of real estate business people. Most jobless youth join the movement and networks with certain individuals, family and village heads to scout for disposable landed properties well positioned. Sometimes they shift boundary and make trouble aimed at dispossessing mostly perceived economically powerless of their land. The cartel of land buyers and local sellers engage real land owners in court litigations or in town union organisations within the community for arbitration.

Town union members and its executives engage the disputants using indigenous culturally prescribed practice. The source of conflict in either the arbitration or court system options of peace process is usually in the shift of boundary and lack of documentation from the original owners to support the original dimensions of the land. An IDI respondent from Ezillo has this to say

> The land merchants in and outside Ezillo have devised several methods of creating conflicts using local land vendors and speculators who disguise estate agents inside Ezillo. This include shift of boundary to alter land dimensions, litigation using fictitious claims and details, documentation of land using fictitious details and some go as far as to threaten or eliminate original owners of land through diabolic means while others capitalise on desperation and helplessness of land owners to provide solicited or unsolicited help in exchange for their land. Similarly, desperations arising from the loss of parents and the need to continue with life, the loss of husband and the need for survival and the case of indebtedness or joblessness put together have compelled people of Ezillo into the option of disposing their landholdings at any rate. [146]

Yet, another IDI respondent from Ezza has this to say

> While awareness is made to show desperation and need for survival, Ezza are the usual people to consult concerning sale of land. Through their link with land merchants in and outside Ezillo transaction is concluded. Sometimes there is collaboration that involves local land vendors and speculators that facilitate questionable transactions that dispossess original landowners of their land with or without their consent. These cases misrepresent Ezza legitimate land business in Ezillo.[147]

Still, another IDI respondent from Ezza has this to say

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[146]IDI/ Male /Retired teacher/Opinion leader/ Ezillo/60 yr old /16th August 2016
[147]IDI/Man/ town union Executive /63years and above /Ezza/15th August 2016

> The youth no matter how you look at the issue of land flight and land racketeering can predominantly be located within the threshold of youth unemployment and their devising of survival strategy by involving in the sale and purchase of local communal land. Some of them do dubious land transaction as vexation of their grievance with the community and society that foster the structure social and economic exclusion. [148]

The responses above suggest that a lot of mischief is perpetuated by the network of land merchants in and outside Ezillo in collaboration with those local land vendors and land speculators. They disguise as interventionist in crisis and end up costing their intervention into land value. Sustaining conflict more is the boundary shift, falsification of document of land without owners consent and the manipulation of court and arbitration process of peace process. The conflict is life-long so long the original landowner lives. This so because this desperate owner today may become wealthy and influential in future and will want to reclaim his or his family`s dispossessed land. In addition, the activities of the networks involving land merchants in and outside Ezillo in collaboration with those local land vendors and land speculators foster inequalities and distorting land markets. The presence of high value natural resources can increase land value, but it can also decrease it as people loose ownership and access rights without proper compensation. Very often, the land is also degraded because of resource exploitation, notably because of pollution. Cash accumulated by local/national entrepreneurs through high value resources exploitation is often reinvested locally through land purchases (agricultural land or urban/peri-urban land), thus affecting indirectly land markets and uses. While this can contribute to broad developmental gains, it can also result in land ownership inequalities and losses of livelihoods.

Beyond the activities of land merchants from in and outside Ezillo that induce conflicts using local land vendors and speculators and vulnerable youth groups, is a network of patron-client and conflict entrepreneurs that survives on conflict. The perceived youth situation of social and economic exclusion in Ezillo has not only kept Ezillo youths venerable to land expropriation network but also exposed them to other networks of patron-client and conflict entrepreneurs. This is far more dangerous in the sense that they are actually engaged in fermenting trouble under the sponsorship of a patron whose lots are bettered by conflict environment. In addition, another FGD participant from Ezillo has this to say

> The volatility of Ezillo today is due to the activities of the some disgruntled element in and outside Ezillo thickly connected to rich politician who sponsored violence to make political point, harass political opponents or

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[148] IDI/Woman leader/Farmer /55years /Ezza/ 11th July 2016

intimate venerable landowners to disown their land. Unfortunately, some our youths have become tools in the hand of these conflict entrepreneurs.[149]

The activities of political patrons involve mobilizing support for their clients for political gains. This in Ezillo extends to sometimes illegal shifting of land boundary of their opponents or victim they know have no capacity for resistance or out rightly grabbing land without the consent of the owners. These activities are not done my the patrons but by their clients on the patron`s directive. Some other time the patron through a structure of political reward operate militant clients who are used to dislodge political opponents (Omobowale, *et al,* 2012). After the purpose is achieved, the interests are rewarded for their services through appointment or employment in government organization that recognize the patron.

In Nigeria, especially the rural areas like Ezillo, land conflicts often arise between the youth and their community leadership particularly the village and family heads are perceived to have entrenched interest in the land relations that regulate land use and access. Due to the conflict some youths have been excluded from both the traditional socialization processes and often do not share the traditional values of their communities. There is limited acknowledgement of the youth's needs and the issues they face and due to their age they are often not allowed to present their claims. Feeling excluded and discriminated against; they often take violent actions to resolve land issues without regard for traditional values and established norms of their elders and ancestors. It is not possible to amicably resolve land conflicts in Ezillo and for people to peacefully coexist unless attention is given to the justice and fairness of the process for all parties involved as well as the outcome of the resolution of the land conflicts. An FGD participant from Ezza has this to say

> Land-related conflicts increasingly occur within Ezillo community because of population growth in favour of Ezza, boundary alteration and social differentiation. As populations grow, the number of people laying claim to the same communal land increases, and as social differentiation occurs, demands of members of the community over land cease to be similar in terms of both use and space. Moreover, the demands and differences progressively overwhelm traditional mechanisms that managed access to land in olden days. When the community was smaller and more homogenous, with everyone involved in the same activities on land mainly for subsistence purposes, it was relatively easy for elders and the traditional mechanisms to manage access to land and control its use. However, with

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[149]FGD/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezillo/12[th]July 2016

population growth and differentiation, Ezillo have become much more complex and individual demands varied.[150]

Another FGD participant from Ezillo has this to say

> In the context of Ezillo, these factors of population growth and social differentiation are further complicated by the long history of conflict and marginalisation claims different groups make against local authority concerning land related inclusion. This complication has further extended the vulnerable` propensity to undermine governance, rules and political legitimacy. In addition, the volatility of Ezillo today is due to the activities of the some disgruntled element in and outside Ezillo thickly connected to rich politician who sponsored violence to make political point, harass political opponents or intimidate venerable landowners to disown their land. Unfortunately, some our youths have become tools in the hand of these conflict entrepreneurs.[151]

Population growth, boundary alteration and social differentiation and marginalisation have provided basis for the disadvantaged to express anger by resorting to subversive activities including involving in subversive groups in form of cult, cartel among others. A patron making them operate a patron-client network funds most of these groups. These networks covertly engineer social conflict as a tool to advance their personal interests using their clients otherwise called foot soldiers (Arowosegbe, 2011). Conflicts occur within community pitting individuals and families against each other; between village heads and family heads; landed peasants and landless peasant over livelihood issues and shared land resource between communities and government agencies, particularly over protected areas and mining concessions; between communities over administrative boundaries; and more recently over large-scale land acquisitions.The most common causes of conflict over communal land are disputes over boundaries and land grabbing following political manipulations using land as incentive and reward for political support common among political patrons and their clientele networks (Omobowale, 2008). In addition, some business and political interests tied to mercenary groups or army personnel mobilised to cause conflict for a purpose. After the purpose is achieved, the interests are rewarded for their services through resource exploitation contracts as part of power sharing agreements, or incentives towards conflict termination with negotiation in favour of the patron.

Unlike the patron-client and conflict entrepreneurs' network, the network of elites and the local peasantry involves the landed and the landless peasants operating in and outside Ezillo

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[150]FGD/Elderly man/ Farmers/ 63years and above / Ezza /12th August 2016
[151]FGD/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezillo/12thJuly 2016

community. This network sustains conflict by been open to both exogenous and endogenous factors of conflict. While the landed peasant class invokes their authority as property ownerswith power to hire and fire peasant labourers working in his farm, the landless peasants despite working and surviving at the mercy of their property owner and employers invoke and appropriate the fundamental human right provision to seek redress for any infraction. The exogenous factors of conflict in the collaboration between farm workers and property owners are located within the context of external influence on the conduct and attitude of the landed and the landless peasants. Somehow, this network has relevance in the activities of patron-client and conflict entrepreneurs' network to the extent that there is usually connivance between the peasant property owners and political patrons to mobilise landlords farm labourers for mass action in support of the patrons. This inter-network collaboration conceived within the community is endogenous factor with capacity to generating conflict. Some of the major conflict has resulted from disagreements from networks between landed and landless peasant class interaction within structurally entrenched horizontal inequality exacerbating asymmetric structure of power relationship. An IDI respondent from Ezillo has this to say

> Because of the network between the invited Ezza warriors and the previously Ezza migrant farm labourers most of who have transformed to landlords and landed peasants employing some Ezillo farm labourers in Ezillo, the Ezza people were emboldened to take position of supremacy and foist it on their Ezillo host. This major issue sustain Ezillo conflict. It is so because Ezillo insist that their community is not for sale and so are revoking and rejecting land deals with Ezza by implication of their action. In addition, socialisation and communication within kin groups and homes present a normative picture of Ezza people as farm labourers and inferior subject to Ezillo people as farmland owners. Since the initial contact between Ezza and Ezillo was based on migrant farm labourer (the Ezza) and farm owners or landlords (the Ezillo), both parties are socialised to have the normative expectation that Ezza farmers are labourer that must be subservient to the Ezillo in whose farms Ezza people work. This mindset continued despite that some Ezza people have graduated through their accumulated farm-to-farm owners and property owners. The Ezza resistance to the old mentality of indigenous property owner that breed quarrel and fight[152]

An FGD participant from Ezza has this to say

> In the second phase of Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo contact, social interaction changed into service provider and service consumer that had Ezza providing service while Ezillo is supported to win war against Mgbo invasion. While

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[152]IDI/Man/ town union Executive /63years and above /Ezza/15th August 2016

the Ezza settled in Ezillo after military service delivery are socialised to consider as normative been equals to Ezillo in land authority over land and superior in might to secure the border land of the Ezillo people, the Ezillo are socialised not to take equal partnership from Ezza in Ezillo land ownership. This issue of equal stake demand from Ezza drew a supremacy line between them, which up until now are still central to the cause of conflict between in Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo relationship.[153]

Social change is ubiquitous and affects network nodes. The social transformation that accompanies this change is what affected the status of the Ezza migrant farm labourers. The network of this group with their kins who are latter settlers in Ezillo transformed their course of history from Ezza migrant labourers to Ezza landowners. Also, from Ezza land owners to Ezza-Ezillo identity. After years of hard work and supposedly diligence in service under tutelage or lordship of Ezillo property owners and master that precede colonialism, the serf status of Ezza transformed from servants to master while the masters status of Ezillo property owner gradually transformed to serf-servant or farm labourers. Now Ezza people are property owners and employers of some Ezillo in their farms in Ezillo. This transformation coupled with the accomplishment and reward with that invited Ezza warriors got boosted their status and ego in Ezillo to the extent that the Ezza is contesting supremacy with the indigenous Ezillo people. This is reflected in the peasantry transformation in Ezillo that created conflict space as earlier stated sustaining intermittent conflict in the community.

These two group Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo see it as normal the conflict of interest in their midst that has survived local, state and national interventions. One of the major conflict drivers is the social transformation that transformed Ezza status from mere subservient migrant farm labourer to Ezillo property owners to landed peasant who are increasingly becoming lords with some Ezillo people constituting farm labourers subservient to their Ezza property owners in Ezillo. This reversal of history creates resentments and resurgence of contestations. Furthermore, after the invitation of Ezza warriors to render military service, the invited Ezza were compensated with land further extending Ezza rights to land in Ezillo.

The Ezza people were settled in Ezillo as equal stakeholders in land ownership in Ezillo. The attitude of Ezza in this context changed from been under the control of Ezillo to attempt by Ezza to assert itself and claim legitimacy in Ezillo. This context reconfigured land relationship between the Ezza and Ezillo. The supremacy contest that this reconfiguration has thrown up informs the conflict. To this end, the Ezillo people are socialised to consider land

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[153]FGD/Ezza/Elderly Woman/Farmer / 62 years old/ 1st August 2016

relations with Ezza-Ezillo as one in perpetual conflict of interest as normative since Ezza is not ready to remain subservient to their host Ezillo. As these social perceptions are transferred to non-kin contexts, the patron/client aspects are more easily identified. The emphasis on asymmetry in personal relationships leads to rivalries between individuals who do not agree with each other's claims to equality or superiority. There are instruments for defusing the tension and conflict when such disagreements arise. These include state politics, the media and religion examined as determinants of the ways in which these asymmetrical power relationships roles are enacted.

Drawing from inter-elites network using the landed and landless peasantry as operational arm, the political elites in and outside Ezillo use the enticement of political office or appointment and employment to woo the vulnerable youths into political action as patrons. This system is also hierarchically structured to reflect asymmetric power relations and horizontal inequality. The actors within this category are usually the big boss to the landed and landless peasants who approach political power through the political elites. The political elite mastermind structural violence that entrench their interest at the national, state and local levels of politics. At the local level, they use their political influence to mobilise the peasants into mass actions that consolidate their power and grass root support base. These characters incite political confusion and when the conflict intensifies, there are involved in bringing solution to the crises. From this point, these actors provide subtle solutions that advance their own interest more that those of the majority interests. There gain political relevance from local conflict that they incite and use it to further political campaign. KII respondent says

> Political elite networks in and outside Ezillo is captured within different political ideological bends. However, the activities of the actors in relation to rural Ezillo politics are the same. While these political actors engage various shades of violent strategies to undo their opponents, they use coercion to dispossess opponents and peasant of land that are seen to be strategically located. Most of them are owners of that land by the roadsides. Some use it to build filling stations others uses it to build hotels or party offices. Unfortunately, their question is not where their members come from. Many of them are from Ezza living in and outside Ezillo but highly influential[154]

Another KII respondent says

> Rebellion against political elites in Ezillo is not new. Aggrieved victims of their action have ambushed many of them several times. Some of their

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houses burnt but their activities remain very effective in provoking rural conflict. These politicians have permanent interest for power but not permanent friend. Therefore, when they finish fighting to get power they become friend and victims of their fight will continue to treat their wounds. [155]

Yet, another KII respondent says

Not only that victims of political elite oppression protest by setting on fire properties of the politician and their accomplice, they also connive with age grades to lay siege on villagers suspected to be relations of the politicians. [156]

The responds above indicate that inter-patron`s network and supremacy struggle is a major cause of conflict that question its reconstructions of land relations by fiddle with the historical facts on land ownership. The fact is turned into narrative in favour of a patronage system to attract followers and direct clients. This construction is reifying hitherto and obscured identity as having solution to land question. Taking advantage of lack of historical documentation of land inheritance and ownership in Ezillo community, very rich patrons politically connected and influential network with their clients to raise allegation against their landed opponents with intention to manipulate the system of justice to favour their interest in opponent claimed landed property. Asymmetrical power relations form the cornerstone of networks among landed and landless Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo elites. Socialisation right from home indicates a normative conflict of interest in land relation between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo with inbuilt expectation. In terms of demography and literacy, Ezza-Ezillo compared to Ezillo has superior statistical strength (Enuke, 2015).

The rural support bases of political elites are always after each other in arms thereby militarising the entire community particularly before, during or after elections. There is hardly any conflict in Ezillo without the input of political elites within and outside Ezillo. That land relation is politicised in Ezillo is the handiwork of political elites. That the widows and orphans entitled land is under dispute can be traced to politicians. They are also into real estate and illegal land procurement. This network structure is so powerful and detribalised that when it senses threat can fund descent voices and mobilise insurgents to cause some trouble from where they make another business. In wartime, the flow of drug, mercenaries, guns and fighters is facilitated by this structure. That land rights for many rural dwellers are

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[155]IDI/ Youth leader/ Farmers/ 60years /Ezillo/15th August 2016
[156]KII/Man/ Youth leader/34years /Ezillo/2ndAugust 2016

becoming increasingly insecure and unclear add further to tensions, while the impact of conflict on local land tenure and management are a further aggravating factor.

Disputes and conflicts about land occur at all levels – for example, between individuals such as village and family heads serving as local land administrators, peasant farmers, the state and indigenous people who operate from outside the community to bring external investors. The above evidence shows that competition and conflict over land are increasing because of a confluence of factors. Many rural-based families need to draw more from their land even in the face of declining inputs; entrenched and pensioned-off civil servants and other workers look to family and other land as source of food and/or cash cropping; governments and environmentalists seek to demarcate reserve areas for development project; internal and external groups intensify their exploitation of valuable land resources form/in/under the land (minerals, trees, wildlife, crops and water (Peters, 2004: 286).

Finally, the activities of the conflict entrepreneurs highlight the role of states as exploiters of local land resource using institutional framework through the elite networks. The categories of persons and structures involved in this network include the landed uneducated local elites and the landless educated elite. While the former is acquainted with customary land tenure through where he has sizeable landholding as either opinion leader or village head, the later has got formal education, political and economic position. The conflict of interest that spines from the network of these stakeholders in land relations is likened to Vilferedo Paretos, (1932) theory of the circulation of elites. This presents a dialectical structure of relationship between the governing elite and non-governing elite who are always locked in campaign of calumny against each other in other to discredit governance to justify need for change. While the power of the local uneducated landed elite lies on the wealth and the traditional authority ownership of land resource provides, the educated landless elite rely on the political and rational administrative authority education can provide. An IDI respondent from Ezillo has this to say

> The Ezillo considers Ezza-Ezillo people as non-kin. They network among themselves within their own domain and outside Ezillo, they are very powerful, but their domain in Ezillo is geographically small. They are surrounded by men who are far more powerful than they are. Yet these men have far more power, status and authority than one would predict from the number of their clients or the economic resources over which they have direct control. The power they can command directly is not impressive, but the extent to which they can make use of the power of others has rendered them very powerful in having their way into getting land from people in

Ezillo. This they do by instigating conflict among the landed uneducated elites. The educated elite do these using instruments like legal framework (raising allegation on issues of statutory land ownership process default, turn round to covertly fund, and manipulate litigation to favour their interest. An individual's elite power is the quality and number of his clients or patrons in a patronage dominated culture)[157]

Asymmetrical power relations form the cornerstone of networks among landed and landless Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo elites. Socialisation right from home indicate a normative conflict of interest in land relation between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo with inbuilt expectation. In terms of demography and literacy, Ezza-Ezillo compared to Ezillo has superior statistical strength (Enuke, 2015). Therefore, the interdependence relationship between the educated landless elite and the uneducated landed elite is embedded with normative expectations of power and conflict. The ways in which power is expressed particularly in this relationship are not separable from the culture in which it exists. Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo culture encourages collective action over individual action. They encourage people to think of the strength and position of their group as if it were a direct reflection of their individual strength and position. All members of a group (however, the group may be defined) bask in the glory of any other member of that group. This cultural pattern has meant that Ezillo people have developed a culture of intervention in which problems are solved through the involvement of allies. In this wise, the landless elite depend on the landed elite strongly to acquire community land. Yet, another IDI respondent from Ezillo has this to say

> Age grades now serve as refuge to their jobless members who directly depend on hunting and farming band networks to ache a living. But since these collaborative occupations are seasonal in nature, the boys have to be redundant for the pick season to come. Most youths in Ezillo town members of the number of school leavers who cannot find job in Ezillo has worsened the landlessness among these groups. The desperation of the young men is manifested in frequent cases of generational land disputes between the privileged few and the disadvantage majority of landless youths and widows.[158]

An IDI respondent from Ezillo has this to say:

> We are on daily basis seeing Ezza segregate us from their cultural processes as expression of superiority. If we do not put our feet on the ground to reject this pressure for oneness with our people, they will end up discrimination us in all things. We must stand up against sharing our identity with Ezza to avoid enslavement. What actually aggravate the conflict is Ezza taking up Ezillo social, political and economic chances at the state and national levels

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[157]IDI/Men/ Lawyer and town union member/43years and above /Ezza/ 15th August 2016
[158]IDI/Man/ Tertiary student / Youth group/27years e /Ezillo/19th July 2016

claiming Ezillo identity and at the same time Ezza identity. Ezza people in this community have ruined it. Example our youths who are equally qualified to take up available social, political and economic chances from the LGA, state and national arena are displaced by our visitor Ezza claiming our identity. It is too bad and we cannot allow it to continue. The major reason is that when the so call Ezza takes up this position, they forget the community that gave them the platform. Then they will remember their mainstream community.[159]

Asymmetrical power relationship in land relations, and the culture of intervention, has become the modus operandi of the society. One may blame the State for failing to provide stable infrastructural alternatives that strikes a balance, or one could blame the culture for preventing the State from doing so. Either way, one is left with the result that Ezillo community has grown to depend heavily on asymmetry and inequality. When individuals find themselves faced with problems they must rely on personal relationships to deal with them. The weak need more powerful patrons to work on their behalf and, as the response above shows, one indicator of an individual's power is the quality of patron and the number of his clients. However, the role of patron is not the exclusive domain of the rich, nor is the role of client excluded from the rich. Indeed, as Boissevain states, 'most persons in fact occupy roles as both patron and client' (1966: 24).

Drawing from the earlier discussion on the network of patron-client and conflict entrepreneurs in and outside Ezillo, patron/client systems, can be understood as a system which operates around a set of roles rather than economic positions. The responds above indicate that inter-patron`s network and supremacy struggle that reconstructs land relation fiddling with the historical land ownership narrative in favour of an particular patron (s)/client (s) by so doing entrench their interest against popular or mainstream interests in land ownership. The foist construct of land relation formally reify foist patron identity as having tie with the land in question. Taking advantage of lack of historical documentation of land inheritance and ownership in Ezillo community, very rich patrons politically connected and influential network with their clients to raise allegation against their landed opponents with intention to manipulate the system of justice to favour their interest out of opponent claimed landed property. Some of these patrons have been indicted for oppressing the less privilege in the society going by the response below. An IDI respondent from Ezza says

In contrast to earlier positions that patrons/client network is for mutual benefit, young households and women, especially widows, encountered

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[159]IDI/ Youth leader/ Farmers/ 60years /Ezillo/15th August 2016

increasing difficulty gaining access to land following the persistence of conflict in Ezillo. Partly because of the activities of some big men who are interested in the diseased family heads land. People in these categories appear to face many hurdles unless they are related to the traditional or local leaders responsible for allocation or are able to pay. [160]

An FGD participant from Ezillo has this to say

> Since my husband died my husband, family members have subjected his children and me to all sorts of reproach and intimidation. Worst of them all is that they refuse allowing us to go to farm insisting that we must observe one-year period of mourning before I can be allowed to go out particularly to take farm produce. Within this period both the family and outsider struggle to dispossess and sell my husband landed properties leaving almost nothing for me. I cannot allow my little son to go into this struggle because it can claim his life like that his father. Now, after the one-year mourning I have to borrow land before I can farm.[161]

Another FGD participant from Ezillo has this to say

> My experience after the death of my father even as an adult taught me that land conflict is a serious matter of life and death. Most uncles connive with people outside the family to sell off my father's land without our consent. They turn back to make claims that our father sold it before death. Some claim the land was leased for a huge amount that they know I cannot pay to continue using the land. In fact, it is not easy to take possession of a dead man's land as an inheritor here without passing through a lot of harassment and serious fight with groups and personalities who make counter claims against your customary claim of ownership [162]

It is as a result of culturally inflicted maltreatment involving sometimes total exclusion of women from active participation in social process that concern them in the public space without their husband worsened by the death of their husband and frustrating widowhood rites and cultural rights that led to the forging of women networks and formation of several women groups to champion advocacy for women rights and liberation in Ezillo. Most land related fight and quarrel in Ezillo involve the clash of interests among land dispossessors, persons or groups pushing to reclaim dispossessed land from suspected family whose family head is late with or without children inheritors. There are networks of land grabbers constituting family or village heads who out of vendetta occupy lands belonging to their dead colleagues. There are also increasing activities of local women group networks involving women in authority in and outside Ezillo collaborating to stop marginalisation of rural

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[160]IDI/ Youth leader/ Farmers/ 60years /Ezillo/15th August 2016
[161]FGD/Ezillo/Elderly Woman/Farmer / 62 years old/ 1st August 2016
[162]FGD/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezillo/ 12thAugust 2016

women to ensure that women across culture access their rights and are liberated from such cultural limitations as from widowhood rites, exclusion from land right among others.

The increase in the control and private ownership of land has greatly accentuated interethnic polarisation, tension, social inequalities and the number of landless patrons and peasants, particularly among the rural poor. Consequently, this systemic subversion has increasingly widened the gap between the landed peasants and the landless peasants in Ezillo community. Worst hit are women who according to Enuke (2015) constitute about sixty percent of Ezillo rural peasant farmers. This expanding gap has consistently denied these women of their place in the public space of landed peasantry. Despite that majority of these women farmer are widows who lost their husbands to Ezillo intermittent conflicts, the structure of land distribution, access and use still sideline them. It is cultural and normative that Ezillo society and some others socialise its members from childhood not to recognise women as owners of land for any reason. In the event of death of the husband, their widows are stripped of their husband landed properties into family land by the husband family members. This can change if the diseased before dearth had grown up male child who is strong enough to assert claims to his father's land. The complexities associated with reclaiming the landed property of a dead man by either the wife or the children can be life threatening as show in the response below. An FGD participant from Ezillo has this to say

> My own experience is that my husband died leaving my three daughters and me. Since I decided to stay and bring up these children in my husband's family for love sake, I have been subjected to series of hardship. Despite my husband's plenty of land he cultivate while alive, today after his death, people from different families even strangers are still fighting over these my husband's land to own them. Surprisingly, my husband's brothers and family members network with these fighters for our land telling us in pretence that my husband was involved in several associations and where he borrowed money for one project or another without the consent of his own family members. My mother-in-law advice me to stay clear of land of my husband land issue as it is normal that I do not have any stake in my husband landed properties here as a woman who had daughters only. Since then we have been without land to call our own except my husband's four rooms building where my husband's brothers are already threatening to sell to pay my husband's debt.[163]

From the above responses, two social network nodes are conspicuous. There include: in-kin and out-kin network and local peasant women and women in position of authority and power within and out Ezillo to championing restoration of women rights and liberty across cultures

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[163]FGD/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezillo/12thJuly 2016

and public space. However, while Ezillo culture presents normative structure that exclude women from having equal stake with men in land ownership in favour of men having exclusive right to own land, the death of a woman`s husband opens up a space for conflict between the diseased household and his family extension. Sustaining this conflict is the chains of networks that evolve with time contesting land ownership with fictitious claims that indict the dead. With the burden of evidence on the shoulders of the bereaved who may not know much about dealings of the diseased when he was a life, prove of innocence becomes problematic with high possibility of losing out. The network of plaintiffs takes advantage of cultural inhibitions of women owning land, paucity of evidence and documentation to raise unfound issues to justify the dispossession of land. This act of desperation brings to question the innocence of the plaintiff networks in the death of the diseased. This is in line with the opinion of Obioha, (2008) that posits that some landed peasant have become target for destruction by desperate land vendors to evade justice.

The responses also evidenced that when husband dies, his widow and children`s livelihood survival, safety and development are threatened by the cultural restrictions, deprivation, humiliation, harassment and ultimately frustration the widow is subjected to. This bereaved household in order to survive resort to peasant farm assistants and rarely do they own land having been displaced and dispossessed of their own land. They work for landowners and share profits at the end of the planting season. Most people of this category have little or no access to formal education; hence their social mobility within and into another class is usually restricted except on rare cases of inter-marriage with landowners (Onabanjo, 2013). That woman is viewed from two different points: domestic and sexual (Rawat, 2007) contribute largely to the restrictions widows suffer in Ezillo community. The vulnerability of children of the diseased evolves from the cultural condition of woman and this reflects on the performance and productivity of the children.

4.1.6 Ezillo conflict and development

The focus of this section is to analyse how land related violent conflicts have decelerated or accelerated Ezillo rural community development (RCD) in general, physical and human development in particular. In doing this, it is considered imperative to look at the historical and contemporary social contexts of interaction, conflict and development in Ezillo community.

Despite its appreciable pre-colonial achievements in bridging northeast Igbo sub-ethnic,

divide through fostering agro-base interaction, exchange of farm skill and product that accelerated agrarian network and development, Ezillo like other rural communities in Nigeria remains a lower-middle income community. Unsound practices in farmland use and management have contributed to farmland loss, rising social conflicts and deprivation of the landless, which perpetuates rural poverty and land tenure insecurity of the weak and poor. In this sense, the Ezillo approach bears resemblances with other communities whose experiences have failed the poor and have produced unintended consequences snowballing into perennial land conflict. In essence, the failure to take into account the livelihoods of the poor especially from sustainable land use perspectives exemplifies their pursuit of short-term gains perceived to be derivable from conflict rather than longer-term solutions derivable from dialogue and negotiation to solve complex rural development issues. The conflict component of these issue compound development challenges decelerating rather than improving human betterment. It is therefore the aim of this section to examine conflict-based challenges confronting Ezillo RCD and how these challenges further impact development positively.

The importance of RCD in contemporary Nigerian and Ezillo in particular cannot be overemphasized. Its significance stems from its recognised role in the improvement of physical and social environments that advance economic, political, social and cultural spheres of the community. As a strategy, RCD ensures rapid national development hence (Ibeanu's, 1998) assertion that RCD is one of the major planks upon which National developmental policies and their implementation are hinged. Despite the efforts made in Ezillo to mitigate rural conflict in order to accelerate RCD, the conditions of the rural dwellers have not improved.

Ironically, though some literature paints the picture of negative consequences of conflict in the society, there is consensus among scholars that conflict has positive and negative aspect that consecutively impact conflict infested society (Collier, 2003; World Bank, 2006; World Bank, 2007; Cramer, 2006; Ogbogbo, *et al*, 2012). In Ezillo context for instance, before now, narratives about Ezillo conflict has always been one side story from the dominant actors who feed the public with what they want them to hear in favour of entrench interest. People particularly outsiders are increasingly becoming aware and interested in researching Ezillo conflict and by extension having in mind Ezillo community development as a target of concern unlike before. The result of these researches will turn out feasible developmental agenda for policy and development agencies. It is in this context that the conflict however it

is considered to have added to the development packaging of Ezillo community. It has also succeeded in giving strong voice to the hitherto voiceless Ezillo peasantry.

While the target of conflict mostly is to silence opponents, in this era of advancement in information communication technology (ICT) through social media, there is often no hiding place for all shades of conflicts once it ensue. One important value conflict has produced is giving voice to the hitherto voiceless. Gone are the days of exclusive reportage when full blown wars are reported as one side story of brotherly altercation. Until recently, Ezillo case, hitherto was never this much known instead it was scantly read and narrated by dominant interests in the conflict as one side story of family affair in favour of dominant actors while it continue to claim lives and properties. An IDI respondent says

> The attentions of all including international and national, state and local governments are promptly drawn to Ezillo conflict now unlike before when big men of the community feed the public with false narratives about it. They usually claim that the conflict is a family affair. Thanks to the advent of ICT and social media. This provide for shades of opinions and perspective on possible causes and effects of conflict.[164]

The dominant actor's culpability in hiding the facts of conflict to exacerbate it for personal gain is curtailed by ICT and social media. Now, both the real causes and the plight of the vulnerable are bare for policy and remedy to affect both actors of conflict. The voiceless voice is so loud now attracting sympathy and rescue that translates in most cases to their collective development. This has given rice to intervention programs in form of emergency packages including resettlement and rehabilitation programs of the state. Survival through livelihood resuscitation achieved contributes in the social, economic and political restoration. These empowerment factors drive community development. As the empowered poor people find themselves back into their farm, business, training or schooling, their well-being is taken care off. In Ezillo, though the voice of the vulnerable may have been heard in many cases it has failed to change the balance of power between the landed haves and the landless have nots. The voice of those in poverty has been heard, but only up to a particular point. A KII respondent says

> The perennial conflict in Ezillo affects not only people in Ezillo community but also all those using the Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway that bisects the community into two. The daily influx of commuter in and across Ezillo as a transit town adds social media and information technology to expose to the world the true situation of Ezillo in conflict times. In this context, the

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[164]IDI/Woman/ town union Executive /57years /Ezillo/18th July 2016

hitherto voiceless peasantry now engage the government attention though the media now more accessible than ever before. This attention gained some times translates addressing the conflict issues some other time the issues are diversionary and politicised. Conflict victims or vulnerable gaining their voice to seek intervention and justice is a product of a positive development attributed to conflict situated within democratisation wind blowing across the globe not Ezillo alone. Part of the dynamics of conflict is the attraction of sympathy and intervention that end up providing background for community development.[165]

At the centre of conflict and community development is the idea that it has the capacity to develop strong voice for the voiceless. It asserts the importance of having both the 'authentic voice' of people living in poverty and the 'representative voice' that is effective in the development of policy. With further support, this 'voice' can respond by informing and developing policies that will address the real needs of people in poverty. Involvement and participation in this process can lead to empowerment, which is central to the process of community development and the business of social change. These voices bring to table the challenges and realities for discussion and negotiation among conflicting parties.

Furthermore, the concept of development in Ezillo as reconstructed and redefined is explained by the common saying,that *'necessity is the mother of invention'*. This means that the challenges of associated with the communal conflict get transformed into advantage and progress. An FGD respondent says

> It is interesting to note that our youth despite all odds have decided not to fail in their quest to secure Ezillo community. This they do by mounting intensive daily surveillance on the influx of people in and out of the community to ensure that all strange visitors are monitored from their entrance into Ezillo to their exit from Ezillo. [166]

Another says

> The Ezza-Ezillo youths sincerely have not disappointed when it comes the taking care of the elders and especially their mothers and children in the face of intermittent conflict even at gunpoint they are always there for us. Perhaps, without the conflict we may not have had it this good of the youths. This is because many youths elsewhere without such conflict like in Ezillo engaging in hooliganism and all sorts of social vices are common. However, here we have youths who are pained by the troubles in the land and have resolved to plea the last drop of their blood to secure their land. I am proud of them.[167]

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[165]KII/ 49 years /Male Law enforcement officer /Ezillo divisional headquarters/ 20th August 2016
[166]FGD/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezillo/18th August 2016.
[167]FGD/Elderly man/ Farmers/ 60years and above / Ezza /12th August 2016.

The import from the responses above is that the same conflict that creates difficult times for people has also toughened the same people into adaptive resilience. Ezillo people, particularly the deprived women, children, youths, the elderly and militant actors in the conflict are compelled by their experience to give development home meaning. This they conceptualise by invoking their inert resilient capacity to adapt and survive under harsh economic and social realities. Many of the vulnerable women and children over night have tenaciously farming and other means of livelihood to survive while most of the children have been compelled to become adults particularly those the conflicts have made orphans with their widowed mothers assuming the responsibility of both mother and father. The youths, provoked by the conflict, have resorted into creative display of ingenuities that lead some into vocational trainings, some into farming, some into transport and other businesses within the community. In all, it is also accepted despite the foregoing that violent conflict is a disruption to peace and sustainable improvement in the quality of life in Ezillo rural community.

In contrast to conflict support development perspective, Collier (1999) firmly agrees that conflict actually is still a big threat to rural community development. He opined that there are routes through which conflict destroy community and human development. These include destruction, disruption, diversion, and dis-saving. War actions destroy production and health facilities, war-related deaths and maiming reduces the workforce, destruction of roads hinders economic exchange and increase transportation costs. Disruption occurs through the insecurity created by violence and a general breakdown of the social order, as well as the effect of large population that flee their homes and jobs. Particularly devastating for public health is the increased difficulty of obtaining safe drinking water in conflict zones (Ogbogbo, *et al*, 2012). In many instances, large refugee populations are exposed to epidemic diseases through crowding, bad water, poor sanitation, and malnourishment (Mbah and Nwangwu, 2014).

Civil wars lead to massive diversion of public funds. But it also attracts aids and developments of public interest. Increased security spending shifts public resources from expenditures that promote infrastructural delivery, economic growth, public health service delivery and general RCD are seriously affected. Sometimes also, the community get to attract infrastructure reasoned by aid and government agencies to have contributed to the conflict due to its absence. For example, the hitherto idle large expanse of very fertile Ezillo land for rice farming that both Ezillo and Ezza are contesting ownership is now taken over by government million acre government funded massive rural commercial rice farming scheme

in Ezillo. It is obvious that many labourers working in the farm would have come from Ezillo and Ezza. However, war economy suffers from dis-saving and massive capital flight. The effect on capital is due to the destruction of infrastructure as well as the increases in transaction costs. The ability to enforce contracts is reduced, as the institutions of civil society are weakened, mutual trust declines into suspicion and uncertainty these give rise to opportunism becoming more profitable (Collier, 1999, 178).

Drawing from the abovementioned therefore, sustainable development in the quality of life of Ezillo rural dwellers is fraught by perennial conflict. As a result, it becomes obvious that conflict would affect the Ezillo rural areas in major aspects of its development efforts such as economic growth, improved and profitable agriculture and land right security, population growth and productivity, improved rural infrastructure, functional and accessible education and healthcare facilities. Yet, the major effect of conflict on RCD is poverty. This cannot be underestimated hence; a more important link to establish is that between conflict and poverty which one has the major impact of conflict on rural areas? However, for any instance of conflict, poverty is one thing they have in common. Conflict drives the households and individuals of these households into sometimes opportunities of relief and most time into poverty in the following ways; human capital, financial capital, physical capital, political capital and social capital. An IDI respondent says

> Although nothing can measure the loss of lives in Ezillo conflict, it is important to note also that some people survive and emerge from the conflict better than they were before the conflict. For instance, I am doing better now in my business and the children are in schools. Thanks to government rural community empowerment and infrastructural development in war ravaged areas like Ezillo that is ongoing. Before now, our farm lands have all being in dispute. Having lost our daddy to the dispute, we had nobody to plead our course but God until government intervene.[168]

Another says

> One of my child benefitted from Senator Ucha`s scholarship scheme for vulnerable indigent peasants of Ezillo. It is the conflict that actually attracted this and other similar charity and gestures from well meaning individuals and corporate bodies. [169]

The responses above indicate that conflict can have positive and negative impact that either decelerat or accelerate physical and human development. The human capital component is made vulnerable most when there are physical and mental impairment.Resulting from this is

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[168]IDI/ Youth leader/ Farmers/ 60years /Ezillo/15th August 2016
[169]IDI/ Male /Retired teacher/member town union/ Ezza/60 yr old /16thAugust 2016

declines in health and nutritional status, as well as in education and training opportunities, which in turn drive individuals and households into poverty. The same conflict can uplift the living standard of families and individual empowered by governments and aid agencies emergency intervention programs. In corroboration is a KII respondent from Ezillo that says:

> the peasant ability to earn income in both short-term and long-term is constrained by conflict leading to decline in income stability, healthcare and well-being that can hinder individual's general capacity and mental output to work and reason. Also, chronic poverty is directly linked to physical impairment experienced by civilians and combatants in times of conflict. Children are largely affected by this impairment more than the adults. For example, an impaired child loses access to education that can prepair him/her for future employment. Conflict also erodes human capital by causing mental impairment and permanent psychological trauma.[170]

Another KII respondent says

> Ezillo is one of the poorest areas in Ebonyi State. The main source of livelihood of the people is subsistence farming, which accounts for about 62% of total employment. The main crops grown include rice, potatoes, maize, cassava, groundnuts and melon pumpkin. Ezza in Ezillo have demonstrated capability to work with Ezillo in all area to beat down this unpleasant record. Yet, the people seem unfriendly due to unfound suspicion. Conflict over land is often combined with strong economic, spatial, cultural and emotional values. The main livestock include camel, donkey, sheep and goats. Poultry keeping is also a thriving agro farming activity. Also, due to the strategic location of the area as a transit town, it serves as a commercial hub attracting migrants from sates such as Enugu state, Benue, and Cross River state and also neighbouring communities such as Nkalagu, Emene, Okpoto, Ngbo, Nkalaha and Akpugo. Ezillo is considered one of the rural areas in Ebonyi; it is less developed and has a high rate of poverty. [171]

Though the Ezza in Ezillo have demonstrated capability to work with Ezillo in all areas of productive endevour to rescue the community from backward, but fear and suspicion are major bariers. Beside, physical and mental impairment caused by conflict, it can also increase the spread of HIV/AIDS through rape as a weapon of war. Many women were raped while some took to prostitution as a survival strategy in Ezillo following the persistent conflict (Enuke, 2015). The survival threat that conflict constitute has led to the decline in the capacity to embrace education and training opportunities during a conflict depletes human capital formation that limits financial capital among the younger generations. An IDI respondent from Ezza says

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[170]KII/Clergy and lawyer/Ezillo/49 years/ 28th July 2016
[171]KII/Elderly Woman/ Farmers and retire politician/73years /Ezza community leader/20th August 2016

There is loss of livelihoods caused by not onlyphysical and mental impairment nor other epidemic accompanying conflict, the dislocation of rural peasant economy and family system have combine to cause social misery. Ebonyi State land acquisition project in Ezillo is oppressive scheme intended to take away land from political opponents and innocent peasants in Ezillo. The state argues that the acquisition and takeover of disputed land is an intervention to resolve the conflict. However, in the real sense, it is a threat to the rural financial capital and livelihood as it creates capital flight. This strategic selection of family or village owned land by government to acquire is witch-hunt used to punish perceived opponents and a mean of to silence the voiceless and powerless peasants by the power agents of the state. The disaffection created by landlessness in the face of hitherto abundant land promoted landconflict.[172]

Another says

In Ezillo, land conflict is a product of inequality and exclusion that transcend land privatisation, concentration and landlessness. As the peasants, community leaders and the state jostle over control right to access, extract and use land and its resources in Ezillo, the interaction is epitomises dominant and dominated scheme of power relation. This interaction space is dominated by the state claim to its responsibility to provide rural community development using land and land resources.[173]

While some wish that conflict continued for what they gain from it some wish it never ever happen. For instance, many incentives change hand in conflict times with the aim to create incentive to either continue or stop the conflict. While traffickers in hard drug and human smile to the bank with the proceeds of their business, the vulnerable that survived conflict continue to count their losses. Limited social and financial capital that translates to economic distortion that is witnessed both at macro and micro levels. This is a threat to wartime financial capitals that could stand against post-conflict recovery. Issues such as capital flight, falling investment level, and loss of credit, savings and transfers, such as pensions, bridge the macro and micro divide (Brück, 2001). The loss of livelihoods results from physical and mental impairment as well as epidemic accompanying conflict like HIV, combine to dislocate rural peasant economy and family system resulting ultimately in social misery.

The greater part of the human costs of conflict does not result directly from battle deaths and injuries, but rather indirectly from the loss of livelihoods caused by the dislocation of economy and society resulting from conflict (Stewart *et al*, 2001). Markets can fail due to insecurity, uncertainty and scarcity of information, leading to reduced trading opportunities,

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[172]IDI/Man/ town union Executive /63years and above /Ezza/15th August 2016
[173]IDI/ Youth leader/ Farmers/ 40years /Ezillo/15th August 2016

higher transaction costs, efficiency losses and reduced incentives to invest for the future (Brück, 2001). The destruction of assets in conflict has a significant impact on livelihoods, the breakdown or shrinking investment in public infrastructure and services further diminishes physical capital. Social services such as hospitals, clinics and schools can deteriorate due to reductions in government expenditure on infrastructure (Stewart *et al,* 2001; Fozzard, 2002). Ezillo has witnessed extensive physical destruction of lives and properties mostly from remote rural centres and borderline settlements where invaders and expansionist test their strength by removing and manipulating land border limits.

Frontier expansion stemming from weakened customary tenure institutions and the nature of production and exchange relations leads to conflict. The primary contention is that resource scarcity and abundance interacted in Ezillo to create conditions conducive for conflict. Its abundant arable land and resources, including bauxite, limestone and igneous rock for granite production, triggered early settlement in Ezillo. Illegal miners have been making money from these deposits most of who are settlers. Worst still, is that the miners pay tax/royalty neither to the community nor to the state. Some of these illegal activities have generated conflict of interest between the community and the state on one hand. On the other hand the conflict is among the miners themselves and another is between the patrons and their clients in the business. It is against this backdrop that the community leaders decided to invite the government into the land for safety. An IDI respondent from Ezillo has this to say

> The general agrarian production is disrupted to the extent that while farmers do not feel secure to attend to their farm produce, the ones in the farm already rip for harvesting get spoilt leaving high economic burden on their owner who may have borrowed to cultivate them. This experience has led to a disincentive to invest in agribusiness in Ezillo community for fear of when the next round of conflict will come.[174]

Another say

> There are things that can only happen in time of conflict. One of them is rogue economic boom. Illegal miners and farm thieves subvert the law and continue to exploit conflict to steal natural capitals like extractive minerals and farm produce. To these set of entrepreneur, conflict is a blessing because it develops their well-being.[175]

A KII respondent from Ezillo says

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[174]IDI/Woman/ Politician and town union member /61years /Ezillo/18th July 2016
[175]IDI/Men/ town union Executive /44years /Ezza/11th August 2016

It is better for us that the government is taking over the disputed lands in Ezillo than for the land-hungry Ezza people to occupy them. The land and our identity as Ezillo are safer in government hand than in settlers hands who may one day decide to delete our identity by occupying all our land. The land conflict is a product of resource scarcity for indigene and abundance of same land for strangers why? So, let the state take them instead.[176]

Another says

The decision to allow government own most sensitive land in Ezillo is a collective one. We have come to a point where Ezza people are already seeing us as strangers in our own land. There is no better way to attack development and secure our land from Ezza invasion than to leave the land under government control.[177]

The data show that interest in agrarian production is at its lowest ebb. This is because of fear of when conflict will emerge to disrupt farm process. While farmers do not feel secure to attend to their farm produce, the ones in the farm already rip for harvesting get spoilt leaving high economic burden on their owner who may have borrowed to cultivate them. This experience has led to a disincentive to the farmer wanting to invest in agribusiness in Ezillo community. Access to and use of land, security of tenure and the distribution of holdings are also threatened by conflict.

No doubt, some people instigate conflict situation in order to have them be in charge of certain public values and utility from natural capital. These are rebels who cash in on social disorganisation to subvert prescribed norms using rebellion and innovation (Hale, 1990). They sustain conflict with ill-gotten wealth from natural capital they control against the will of the majority owners of the capital. Example of these innovator are conflict entrepreneurs in the case of Ezillo are the illegal miners of bauxite, limestone, igneous rock and those expansionist who forcefully occupy people`s land and use it without their owners consent. Conflict provides opportunity for some to engage in drug and human trafficking. Also, some of these conflict entrepreneurs amass so much wealth that they sponsored or engage in politics where they influence policy and decision against or for conflict to serve their interests. While the lots of these categories of people are bettered by the continuation of conflict, they continue to narrow space for social inclusiveness in the access and use of benefits from natural capital particularly land and its resources. This people definition of conflict is development in contrast to the mainstream definition.

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[176]IDI/Men/ town union Executive /44years /Ezza/11th August 2016
[177]KII/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 70years /Ezillo community leader/16th August 2016

The persistence of conflict and influx of external intervention including government agents exposed the vastness of Ezillo land and the resources therein which hitherto were hidden. The state interest in the occupation and development of Ezillo rice farmland became a growing concern. This has lead to such government presence as in the Ezillo industrial layout and Ezillo commercial rice scheme. Several hundreds of acres of land were acquired from Ezillo by Ebonyi state government for this scheme. Later, the Ebonyi state government, promising to bring about economic, political and social development, embarked on communal land acquisition drive as an intervention strategy against the will of the critical stakeholders in the community.

Gladly, the Ezillo people invited and allow government to take over remaining community land considered strategic such as the disputed fertile loamy swampy/water logged plain at the bank of Ebenyi River suitable for all year round rice farming. This is done to secure the land from Ezza occupation and dispossession. The attraction surrounding such land like the vast fertile loamy swampy land suitable for rice cultivation has been responsible for the Ezza incursion into the area. This they are doing through all year round farming on the land under local lease system and this has resulted into fight several times. Now that the area is fully under government, the fight has reduced. It is believed that these initiatives serve to secure indigenous right to land in Ezillo and at the same time provide needed government presence that is intended to guarantee the development of economic, social and political capital to give voice to the voiceless in Ezillo. In this context, there is more government presence and counter insurgence strategy to basically protect breakdown of government monopoly of force. The impact of conflict on state monopoly of force or political capital is considered undesirable largely because of its spiral effect on social capital that can disrupt productive social networks. A FGD participant says

> The general insecurity attributed to conflict in Ezillo has direct impact on the demography of the community. Out-migration from the community is on the increase dragging down the population willing to stand and face the conflict on the side of the Ezillo indirectly giving the the Ezza component of the conflict undue numerical advantage over Ezillo people. Neighbouring states get populated by these migrations. Examples of these receiving states are Enugu State, Abia, and Cross River among others. Also, neighbouring towns like Abakaliki, Nkalagu, Nkalaha, and Mgbo among others. The perennial violence has not only made it risky to do business in Ezillo community, but also ensures that few people have money to spend.[178]

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[178]FGD/Elderly man/ Farmers/ 60years and above / Ezillo/25th August 2016

Another says

> Conflict has cut off social support from dislocated family members who cannot trace the whereabout of their kiths and kin scattered for safety. This negatively affects network and interaction that builds social bunding. As conflict fragment families, this directly undermines social capital as serves as source of survival and livelihood to weaker members of the family.[179]

Out-migration characterise the conflict situation in Ezillo community such that affect cohesion and solidarity needed to effectively tackle the conflict challenges. The disarray situation complicates the possibility of forming common front to face common challenge emerging from the conflict situation. As many migrate out of the community, the population remaining is weakened such that constitutes threat onward advancement against common challenge. However, most returning migrant are face with the challenge of identifying their original settlement as most of their houses are burnt down and turn to something else by their enemies. This postconflict homelessness is so pathetihat the victim are forced into becoming tenants in their own land and village. The last clash of violence before this fieldtrip was in 2015. The recent migration would have been the cause of the recent clashes at the end of 2008, 2010, 2011, and early 2015. While this migration is a setback to Ezillo community development, it is an advantage to the development of the recipient parts of Nigeria.

This disconnection complicates livelihood and social survival. This vulnerability constrains human capital and its mobilisation for improved social well-being. Juxtaposing this position is the description of the parlous state of education and healthcare facilities in Ezillo by an FGD participant who says

> The healthcare situation in Ezillo is in cumatos. Most patience dies before searching for healthcare facility to use as only two private hospitals exist therein. The pressure on these facilities is too much that the professional available is grossly inadequate. One owned by the Catholic Church mission and the other owned by an individual non-indigene from Imo state. The health effects of the violent clashes include deaths, injuries, ill health and psychological disorders among the residents of the community. Yet, there is no functional public hospital owned by state or government at the centre.[180]

Another says

> It is much more pathetic to know that in Ezillo today, the community has only produced four trained and qualified medical doctors. They include Dr Innocent Ose; Dr. Ejike Egbe; Dr. Agaji Basil; Dr. Kelechi Egbu. Others working in the two privately owned hospitals in Ezillo are non- indigenous

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[179]FGD/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezza/ 12th August 2016
[180]FGD/Elderly man/ Farmers/ 60years and above / Ezillo/25th August 2016

medical practitioners. Outside the foreigners and other Nigerians outside Ebonyi state, many others are from Ezza-Ezillo.[181]

Yet, another says

> Meanwhile, these two functioning hospitals in Ezillo community as referred to above include: a private missionary hospital owned by foreign religious mission, the Catholic Church mission, called Maria Iles Quadulupe missionary hospital in Umuozoke village. The second private hospital is the St. Luke's hospital Amukpa village on the other hand is a privately owned by an individual Nigerian who settled in Ezillo. Motility rate generally in Ezillo is very high due to limited health facilities and its accessibility especially during crisis time.[182]

You can imagine the implications to survive health challenge without access to health facilities for a conflict infested community like Ezillo. In one occasion during the fieldwork for instance, an interviewee says:

> one of the healthcare administrator serving in one of the hospital told us that during the outbreak of violence, scores of people are rushed to the hospital with several degrees of injuries as cutlass wounds, guns wounds and injuries from poisoned arrows. Most of these he claimed either die or are maimed. It is a common claim that during the outbreak of violence, scores of people are rushed to the hospital with several degrees of injuries as cutlass wounds, guns wounds and injuries from poisoned arrows. [183]

The above data paint a picture of desperation and outright inaccessibility of healthcare in Ezillo and the devastating effect on survival particularly during and after conflict situation in the community. Beyond deserting duty post during conflict, most health workers also refuse posting to the community. Some of those already there frequently request for transfers to other places. Bellow is an instance of casualties of war and absence of medical attention. Who knows some of these victims may have survived conflict and attacks if there were enough and accessible healthcare facilities in Ezillo as at the time of the incidence.

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[181]FGD/Elderly Men/ Politician/60years and above /Ezza/12th August 2016
[182]FGD/Elderly Man/ Retired Civil Servant/60years and above /Ezillo/ 25th August 2016
[183]IDI/Woman/ Politician and town union member /61years /Ezillo/18th July 2016

Fig. 15: Human Casualty of Ezillo Massacre in January 1, 2012

Fig 16: Human Casualty of Ezillo Massacre, January 1, 2012.

Most of these casualties either die or are maimed because of absence of medical attention. The two privately owned hospitals are always overstretched that pressure on the facility weighs down the hospital capacity to deliver prompt and efficacious service. The monopoly enjoyed by this two private hospitals make health service delivery a value for the highest bidders in Ezillo. As a war ravaged agrarian community infested with high deprivation and poverty, cost of available healthcare is out rightly not affordable and that limits accessibility.

Similarly, access to education in Ezillo is never at any time worst that it is the conflict has last. The access situation is not different compared to access to health facility. Several school both primary and secondary schools have either been burnt down to rubbles or are vandalised and deserted for learning. An FGD participant says

> the conflict negatively affects education in Ezillo community. Mr Enuke Ebenyi, a head teacher of a local school, told us once upon a time that any time violence erupts schools are closed down because of the fear that the violence might spread there. Teachers are afraid of been hunted like plagues and harcked down in their houses, so many have flew out of the town for safety. This has led to most teachers preferring to resign appointment than to be posted to Ezillo for fear of conflict and being a victim.[184]

Another says

> The annual first school leaving certificate and the general certificate of education results of the area had dropped drastically due to absentee teachers and students all because of the conflict.

Also,

> Worst still, the only primary and secondary schools in Ezillo today are the Ugbonu primary school and the special girl's science secondary school Ezillo. Within the premises of the secondary school, about four other secondary schools chased out from their original locations are cohabiting with the girl's school. The something is happening in Ugbonu primary school.[185]

Yet, another says

> The government and community are eager to reconstruct damaged school and resettled the students. However, this cannot take place in the atmosphere of conflict. Several attempts have been made only for the militants to pull them down.[186]

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[184]FGD/Elderly Man/ Retired Civil Servant/60years and above /Ezillo/ 25th August 2016
[185]FGD/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezillo/12th August 2016
[186]FGD/Elderly Woman/ Farmers/ 60years and above /Ezillo/12th July 2016

The the conflict infected educational system in Ezillo is one that has further increased the illiteracy rate in the already educationally disadvantaged community in and an educationally less advantaged state of Ebonyi, South East Nigeria. This negative report heighten also the school drop out rate in the community with spiral effect on the states` overall school enrollment rate. Mr Enuke Ebenyi in his book captured it thus: *"any time violence erupts schools are closed down because of the fear that the violence might spread there"*. This reflects one of the conclusions in the above on the teacher's plight in Ezillo school system. That they are afraid of been hunted like plagues and harcked down in their houses, so many have flew out of the town for safety. Just like the students have flee the school, so do their teachers desert schools and even their homes in Ezillo for fear of humiliation or even death. Many teachers have reportedly resigned appointment when posted Ezillo community for fear of repercution.

Compounding this schooling experience in Ezillo is the total close down of surviving schools by authorities for safety. Yet, the closed facilities were still burnt down, as reported, the only primary and secondary schools in Ezillo today are the Ugbonu primary school and the special girl's science secondary school Ezillo. Within the premises of the secondary school, about four other secondary schools chased out from their original locations are cohabiting with the girl's school. The something is happening in Ugbonu primary school.As reported, the annual first school leaving certificate and the general certificate of education results of the area had dropped had to drop as consequence eratic school system embraced by the teachers.
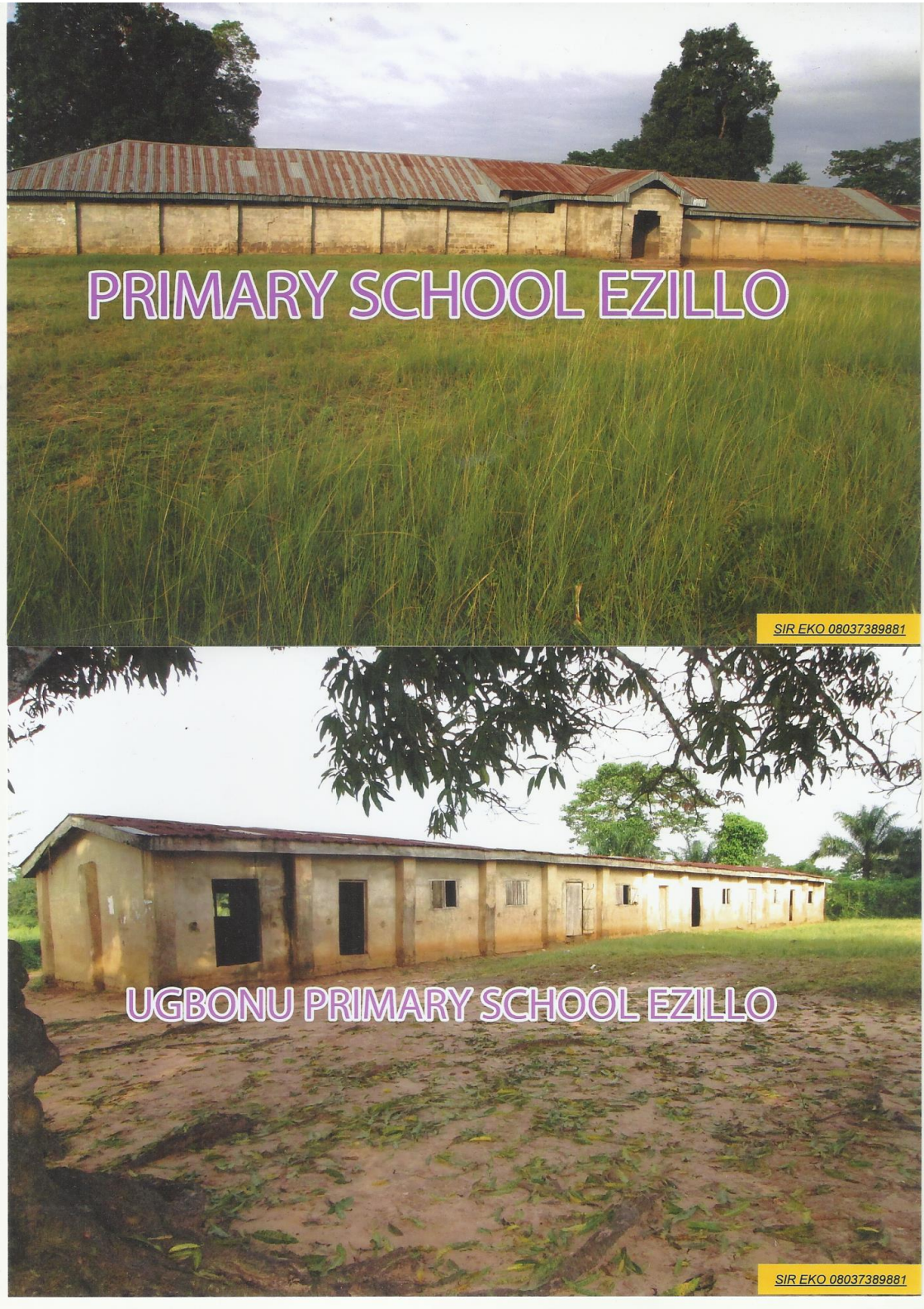
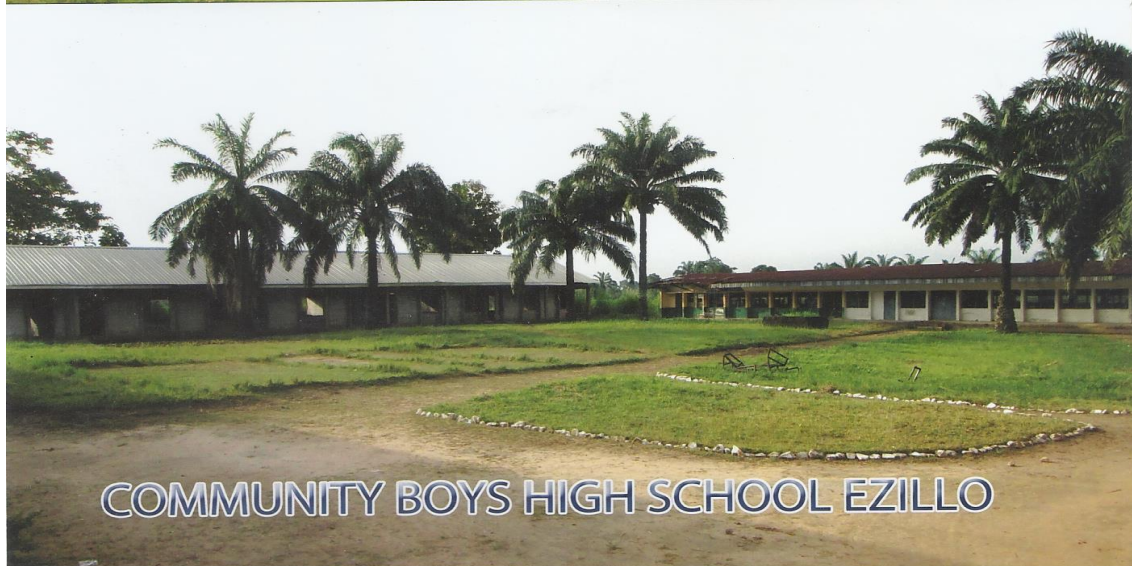**Fig. 17:**Primary Schools in Ezillo Community affected by conflicts.

Fig. 18: Secondary Schools in Ezillo Community affected by conflicts.

On the 10th of May 2008, it was reported that conflict ensued in Isimkpuma motor park Ezillo between Ezillo and Ezza that degenerated from autarcation to full blown violent conflict. The proximity of the fracas to Community Boy's High School Ezillo attracted the sympathy of the school authority and students who were divided along identity lines. Some of these sympathisers supported Ezillo while some others aligned with Ezza leading to the closure of the school. Closing schools down for months or years as well as outright burning down of schools in Ezillo is not new but a common occurrence. This has largely impacted negatively on literacy level of majority of those community members who cannot send their children outside Ezillo to school. A range of factors affects children's ability to continue their education. Security of children at school, segregation in the school between Ezza and Ezillo children who are socialised to believe they are in conflict. Most common is shortage of means of family revenue due to the loss or disruption of livelihood means. Separation from family members and absents of social support network following out-migration or death of parents/sponsor, or children may be required to work in place of adults who have migrated out of the community, or died to help support the family. Commenting generally on the development of infrastructural facilities in Ezillo, a KII respondent say

> Infrastructures such as healthcare, schools, market, electric power supply, good road network and clean water supply in the community are at almost zero level due violent clashes in Ezillo. The overstreched Governments and Local Authority are overwhelmed by the conflict. In my view, the serious infrastructure gap in Ezillo is the result of high expenditures required to maintain security, the authorities are unable to commit adequate resources to the provision of infrastructural facilities. It is also difficult to get central government to provide the resources needed for such facilities because it already spends many resources on the security of the community. A cursory look at such facilities as roads, clinics and schools in the community shows that most of these facilities are badly worn out and need renovation and replacement where they are available at all. [187]

Another says

> Now, investments in farming and agriculture that used to boom in Ezillo is now zero. People are infectected by the feart of the unknown in their houses, village square, market, schools, and churches and even in the farm. As social trust get waned, innovative productive activities is greatly affected. Because agricultural production is adversely affected household economy is flat with the consequent possibility of engaging in social vices to survive. Such as prostitution, armed robbery, child trafficking and child abuse.In addition, trading, artisanship and local industrial production, which are the

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[187]KII/Elderly Man/ Farmers/ 70years /Ezillo community leader/16th August 2016

second most vital component of the community economy,have been negatively affected. [188]

Yet, another says

> Market in Ezillo is no longer as vibrant as it used to be when community members can trust and share mutual respect and love for one another. During outbreak of violence in the community, farmers, especially those engaged in the cultivation of perishable foodstuffs such as vegetables like fluted pumpkin, cucumber, maize, Okro, watermelons, onions, potatoes, yam, rice and cassava suffer heavy losses. Vegetable crops are cultivated by irrigation that need constant monitoring and supervision and tuber crops need constant tendering for a bumper yield. [189]

Data above show that the social fabrics fundamental for social order and equilibrium in Ezillo is reconfigured into dichotomised identities. Such that the once shared kinship tie is now divided across sub-ethnic lines recognised in terms of out-group and in-group labels. This has not helped coexistence, peace, safety and development in Ezillo community. All relevant systems that facilitate development and socio-economic processes like school, health, market, transport, labour and peace disrupted. During violent clashes, farmers are unable to transport their foodstuff to the market places. These results in the foodstuffs getting rotten on the farms, the markets are deprived of these produce, scarcity sets in while their prices soar in the community and the country as a whole.

Insecurity of investment in agriculture and human labour as well as healthcare, school, churches and market are socialised to be risk zones. This is not good for development and peace. Businesses that were operating in the community have relocated to relatively more peaceful parts of the country. The businesses that have remained in the conflict zone are one-man businesses that deal in cross-border trading of illegal arms, banditary and child trafficking. These small-scale commercial ventures therefore lack the capacity to provide employment for a vast majority of the youth of the community.

These disruptions and loss of livelihoods have dire implication for poverty in the community: the poor are pushed to the fringes of survival and many more people who were hitherto not poor, have been pushed into poverty. In addition, the insecurity and general lawlessness associated with the outbreak of violence in the community has forced many people to seek refuge in other parts of the country. Most of the refugees leave behind their sources of

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[188]KII/Elderly Man/ Trader/ community representative in Enugu/60years /Ezza/19th August 2016
[189]KII/Clergy and lawyer/Ezillo/49 years/ 28th July 2016

livelihood, and therefore would have to start setting up new businesses when they arrive at their new destination. It should be noted at this point that, due to time and financial constraints, this research was unable to assess the effects of the relocation on the livelihoods of the refugees. Nevertheless, it can be deduced that having to start life all over again could have a negative effect on the livelihoods of such people.

As indicated earlier, conflict and development affect each other. Underlying the relationships is what Collier et al (2003:1) describe as a double causation which gives rise to virtuous and vicious circles. This means that a condition of peace and security encourages investment in productive ventures that gives employment and enhanced livelihood to individuals as well as communities. It also follows to say that peace and security are prerequisite for infrastructural provision and development. Conversely, conflict begets insecurity, discourages investment and production, undermines the provision and development of infrastructures and leads to underdevelopment and poverty. The disruption and destruction of public facilities is a direct disruption of human and community development. For instance, the rebels to dismantle using foreign mercenaries and dynamite targeted the bridge over the popular Ebenyi River that is on Enugu – Abakaliki Expressway. If that should cause roadblock, there is obstruction in free movement, market transaction, increases transaction costs of travelling to the markets, and other public places. If rebels target electric power supply, artisans and domestic users of light are affected leading to disruption in economic activities (Goudie and Neyapti, 1999).

Apart from the visible impact of Ezillo conflict on Ezillo community development, scholars seem to agree that conflict and development are two ends of social process that reinforce one another (Collier *et al.,* 2003; Cramer, 2006). Conclusion from literature confirmsthat violent conflict retards development, but conversely, development retards war conflict. In other words, violent conflict has an impact on the national, local as well as domestic economies of a conflict area. Justino, (2007) puts it more succinctly; violent conflict will affect the levels of poverty in any given economy, as well as the dynamics of poverty along the lifetime of the conflict and in post-conflict context. Conversely, retarded economic development can lead either to violent conflicts or to the escalation of existing conflicts. How do these observations relate to the conflict in Ezillo? The model below, which is derived from the empirical data, illustrates the vicious cycle produced by the conflict in the Ezillo.

Vicious Cycle of Conflict
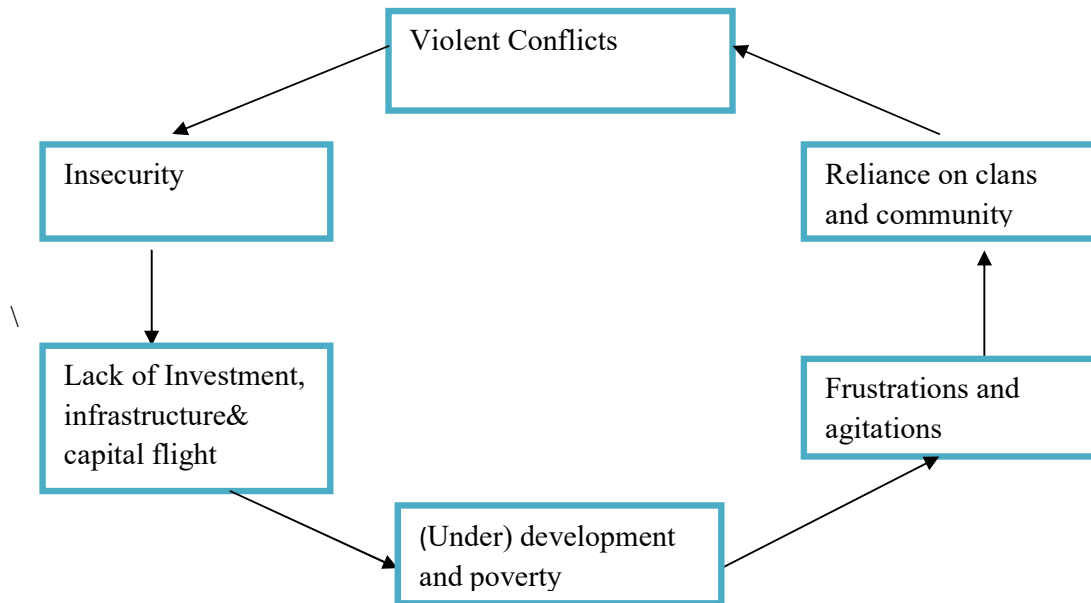
Diag. 1: Vicious cycle produced by the conflict.
Source: Malik-Kusi, 2012.

As the model illustrates, while conflict generates insecurity, investments in farming and development is affected to decelerate development and accelerate poverty, frustration and agitation that pushes victims to seek refuge in community and clan identity. Consequently, the situation breeds agitations and frustrations among the peoples. Above all, these frustrations drive individuals and interest groups to ethnic-based solidarities in a bid to defend what they consider theirbirthrights. This revives ethnic rivalry and deepens ethnic consciousness among the different groups, each of which recruits their youth to perpetrate the violence. A vicious cycle of violence has emerged over time because other extraneous forces (political support for one group and/or role of migrated financiers) complicate the issues.

Contrary to the illustration, there are few basic points that can be made regarding the conflict-development nexus in Ezillo. First, poverty is clearly a key factor in explaining violence; however, recognising that poverty plays a role in generating conflict does not imply that conflict should be resolved and prevented through 'rapid growth and integration into global markets', as the World Bank (WB) economic campaign suggests (World Bank, 1997; World Bank, 2006). In fact, poverty may be generated in processes of capitalist development such as primitive accumulation. This produces a cycle (confounding the logic of the conventional

conflict-development nexus): capitalist development is a violent process that causes poverty and inequality, which fuel further violence. Poverty is of course, not the only factor fuelling violence; to assume this is equivalent to stating that the poor are the most violent actors in a conflict, which is not the case. Both elite groups and marginalized or 'poor' sections of society have used violence to pursue particular ends.

Both parties to the conflict believe strongly in the vicious cycle produced by the conflict in Ezillo. This is largely because conflict in this community is seen by the actors as a struggle to conquer poverty and eclusion from access and use of their inheritance. For the Ezza-Ezillo people, violence becomes a useful tool in their quest to secure and consolidate its identity space from invasion and internal colonisation. On the part of Ezillo the justification to engage Ezza till victory is worn is derived from their strong affinity to Ezillo land as source of their identity that must neither be infiltrated nor compromised. The federal, state and local government authorities have periodically come up with military and para-military area operations as contingency interventions and end up creating additional issues of contestation like biase attention. These measures mean that Federal, State and Local Government Authorities have had to channel more resources into maintaining the military and police presence. According to an IDI who says:

> There are increasing budget allocations to manage the Ezillo conflict. Apart from the federal and state payment of their communication, health, and fuel bills, the community spends every month on the general security of the community. There is also periodic individual voluntary unofficial contribution to support the stationed rapid response mobile force in the community. [190]

Despite federal, state and LGA's governments expenditure on offsetting the bills of these forces there is community and individual support in appreciation of the relative peace and security of the community. This expenditure can overstretch the community economically. That it was hard to project a definit financial cost of Ezillo conflict to the governments; community and individual goes to tell the extent of devastation insecurity has caused the area. The cost component of the conflict compels relevant authorities to shift budget from development to tackle first insecurity with which no meaningful development can take place. No doubt security must be guaranteed for development to take place. Unfortunately, the time

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[190]IDI/Man/ town union Executive /63years and above /Ezza/15th August 2016

line of the conflict remains unpredictable from the submission of an informant. A KII respondents from the law enforcement agent says

> In the morning of Friday, April 17, 2015, motorists plying the ever-busy Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway on getting to Ezillo town were forced by visibly angry youths to return to their respective take off points. The youths had earlier blocked the road – making it difficult for vehicles coming from either Enugu or Abakaliki to have unhindered passage. The bewildered motorists either returned to their bases or continued their journey by making use of bumpy routes.About 12 people lost their lives in a single night to mid night killer squad. This is reported record excluding the unreported for fear of reprisal. It a common knowledge that in every major violent outbreak in Ezillo, more than a hundred live is lost. [191]

The obstruction of the road indeed, symbolized the resurgence of the infamous Ezza-Ezillo crisis. The state deputy governor and governor-elect, Engineer Dave Nweze Umahi, disclosed that the road was blocked by youths of Ezillo, to remonstrate the invasion by Ezza-Ezillo youths numbering about 70, of a disputed piece of land in the area. According to Umahi, who was recently elected governor of the state on the platform of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), some soldiers and police officers dispatched to the areas to restore law and order, were shot at and wounded by the gun wielding youths from the two sides of the divide. "One Ezza youth was shot dead before security personnel succeeded in restoring normalcy in the affected areas", said the governor-elect.

The crisis resulted in the killing of more than 150 persons from both sides of the fray, including innocent motorists and commuters who where endlessly waylaid along the Ezillo axis of the Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway. Ogbonnaya (2015) recalls that a top civil servant of Cross River State origin, and several indigenes of Mbaise in Imo State, travelling on the Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway, was among those brutally murdered by the warring Ezillo and Ezza. The communal war led to the closure of the Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway for more than two years, and was re-opened when the then federal government approved the deployment of more than 1,000 mobile police officers to the state to quell the crisis as well as keep the road safe for motorists and commuters. The state government in its effort to ensure lasting peace in the area, gave the Ezza people resident in Ezillo another portion of land to inhabit, and promised to provide electricity and access roads to the area. However, before these could be accomplished the Ezza people dragged the state government to court

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[191]IDI/Men/ town union member /64years /Ezillo/17th August 2016

prompting the suspension of work in the area. Another KII respondent from the law enforcement agency says

> Though normalcy is restored in Ezillo as of today, yet not a few agreed that the April 17, 2015 disturbances was not a reprisal December 31, 2011 conflict from the evidence we in our possession. The struggle for land between the Ezillo and Ezza people laced with complexities looking at the earlier conflict and the recent one. For example in the early hours of December 31, 2011, gunmen numbering over 20 invaded the area of Ezillo community killing more than 67 persons, including a police Divisional Crime Officer (DCO) in charge of the police station in the area. Those killed included children between the ages of three and five, youths and aged men and women. In addition,the gunmen suspected to be Ezza youths slaughtered over 30 donkeys. In April 17, 2015, more than 70-armed fighters invaded and killed more than 150 people. This suggests complexity and sophistication in the destruction human capital as if its development is easy.[192]

The increasing complexity and sophistication of Ezillo communal conflict is underpinned by the wave of sophistication in technology and social transformation (Mohan, 1997; Onwe, 2015). According to Agbo (2015),figures later released by the state government, over 100 persons were killed and property worth several millions of Naira was destroyed. 13 suspects alleged to have been involved in the attack were remanded at the Abakaliki prison, after being charged before an Abakaliki chief magistrate court for murder, felony and arson. The suspects who were brought before a chief magistrate court in Abakaliki were accused of attacking and killing over 60 persons and destroying property worth several millions of Naira on December 31, 2011. In a four-count charge, the suspects were accused of murder, felony and arson. However, for inexplicable reasons, the suspects were released from prison custody. In addition, shortly after their release, some persons believed to be Ezza indigenes re-occupied the disputed piece of land, prompting the recent blocking of the ever -busy Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway on the April 17, 2015.

This recent development has created immeasurable tension and panic within and outside the state, as many motorists have abandoned the road for fear of being attacked by the warring groups. The Ebonyi State government, has however, directed security agencies in the state to immediately investigate the circumstances behind the invasion of Ezillo, as well as fish out the sponsors of the crisis, which disrupted vehicular and human traffic along the Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway for several hours. The security agencies were given six weeks to

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[192]KII/ 49 years /Male Law enforcement officer /Ezillo divisional headquarters/ 20th August 2016

complete their assignment. A communiqué issued at the end of the joint meeting between leaders of thought from Ezillo and Ezza- Ezillo, security agencies and the Ebonyi State government held at the conference hall of the office of the deputy governor, directed that "henceforth, on no account should parties in the dispute take laws into their hands or barricade the expressway again" (Agbo, 2015).

The communiqué read by the Secretary to the State Government, Dr. Boniface Chime, directed that all those who intruded into the disputed land should within 24 hours vacate the land as those who failed to do so will be treated as criminals and handed over to security agents. The communiqué urged leaders of the two communities to review the government white paper on the crisis, and make suggestions on the resolution of the lingering crisis within six weeks. The communiqué also suggested that a 27-man joint- peace committee consisting of 11 representative from both sides, as well as representatives of the State Security Service, SSS, civil defence, army and police be set up immediately to unravel the immediate cause of the crisis, and make suggestions on how to achieve lasting solution to the crisis. Yet, another KII respondent from the clergy says

> It appears to me looking at the trend of Ezillo conflict that it has a regular pattern that presents a kind of spiral effect in its course and consequence. One leads to another. For instance if the dispute is taken from May 10, 2008 massacre to how the dispute led to February 19, 2010 mass killings in the same area to the December 31, 20011 to April 17 2015. One will be tempted to think that this dispute is programmed.[193]

According to the state government, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission consisting of Ezillo people, the Ezza-Ezillo people, the clergy and elders within and outside Ebonyi State will soon be set up on the matter, pointing out that any breach of the agreement must be reported to the security agents. Worrisome is the recurring nature of the conflict having been attended to by successive regimes. Governor Martin Elechi who was on medical trip abroad when the fresh crisis erupted inApril 17 2015, said according to Agbo, (2015) on arrival to the state, Governor Elechi said

> That it was high time the intermittent clashes between Ezza-Ezillo and Ezillo communities over land were put to an end. This clash and other similar onesin Ebonyi State are not healthy to our collective resolve to develop rural communities. Despite enomous state and federal investment in security infrastructure expected to keep security of lives and property,

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[193]KII/ Ezillo/Male lawyer and Youth leader/ 45 years old/ 21th July 2016

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conflicts, however, challenge their effectiveness and spread as they recur with similar pattern considering the events between 2008 and 2011. Nothing about conflict practically speaking can provide us the much-needed development and peaceful coexistence considering thatfamilies once united are scattered and dislocated by conflicts. Peace is essential in the existence of any society as people who desire peace should be ready to make sacrifices. Conflicts should be avoided in every sense because when they start, no one can determine how far they can go, you cannot predict its magnitude and those that would be affected. We would, however, strive to ensure peace in the areas, as peace is the greatest legacy we can bequeath to the unborn generations (6-8).

Data above show benefit from conflict instead how debilitating it is to human and material safety and sustainable development characterised by extensive arson and hostage taking.This suggest that conflict has caused infrastructural underdevelopment, insecurity, armed robbery, and prolonged family dislocation and poverty. Arson, looting and gun running are simultaneously perpetuated during clashes between the feuding factions. These destroy the properties of many people from both factions. In the wake of the violence, which took place at the close of 2011, it was reported that over 15 shops and 159 houses were burnt (Agbo, 2015). Public facilities are however not targeted in these clashes. Below are pictures of houses and properties that were burnt and destroyed during the Conflict. The intermittent nature of Ezillo conflict when actors are expected to have forgiven one another contradict nature, patterns and frequencies of similar conflicts elsewhere that extends existingand competing theories in conflict studies. This pardynm shift demand more theoretical explanation.

Most explanations for civil war, such as ethnic and religious rivalry or colonial legacies, it is emphasized, are not supported by the report's statistical evidence. Such grievances are widespread and do not consistently produce violence: 'although political conflict is common to all societies, civil war is concentrated in the lowest-income countries' (Collier *et al.* 2003, 91). While it is acknowledged that 'partial' democracies may be more susceptible to war, the authors insist that democracy in low-income countries does not guarantee against conflict. Having discarded the explanatory power of a long list of factors, it is concluded that 'the key root cause of conflict is the failure of economic development' (Collier *et al*. 2003, 53). However, the trajectory of destruction is explained by pictures bellow
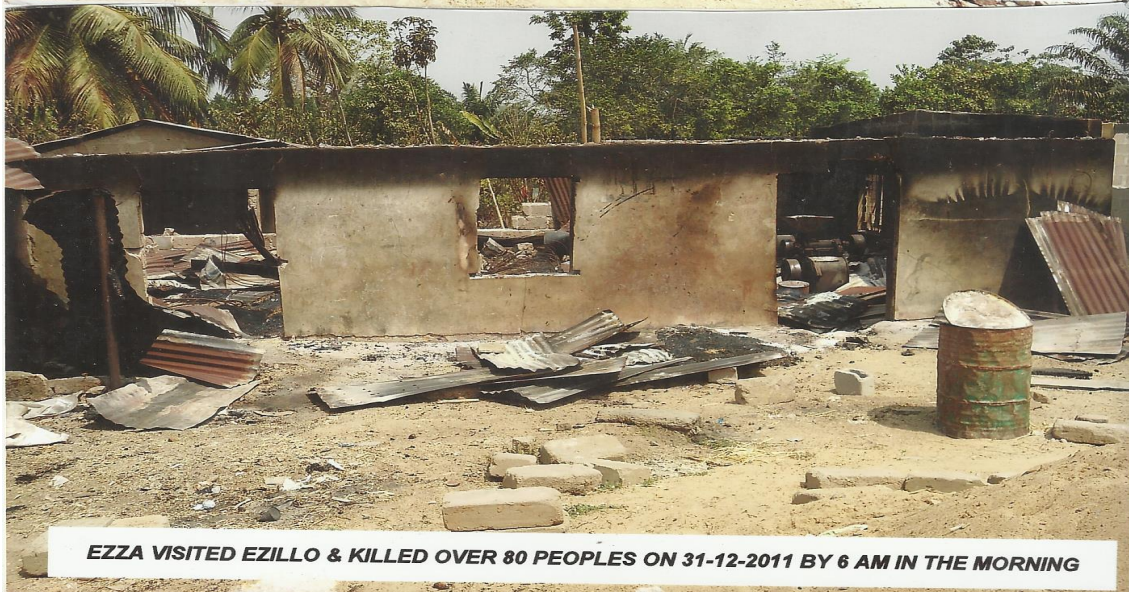
Picture A: An abandoned shop

Fig. 19: Picture showing properties in Ezillo affected by conflict through arson, looting and destruction.

Fig. 20: Picture B: Houses attacked and burnt during the conflict.

Fig. 21: Picture C: Vehicles, machineries and house pulled down amidst the violence

One of the few to scrutinize the conventional conflict-development model is Cramer, who challenges the claim that 'conflict or violence is development in reverse' and puts forward an alternative supposition: progress and development require 'momentous transitions' that are typically 'brutal' (2006, 44-5). The view that conflict is entirely negative, he argues, can 'only be sustained by a form of historical amnesia' because 'Western and more or less liberal civilisation had violence at its foundation, in war, slavery, imperial adventure and primitive accumulation' (2006, 9, 43). For Cramer contemporary conflicts are best understood as manifestations of the 'contradictions' of 'late transitions to capitalism' (2006, 13). The transition to capitalism is often violent for various reasons. In the context of rapid social change there is an opportunity to contest the 'terms of accumulation', the institutions that establish these terms, and how wealth is distributed. The development of capitalism depends on the establishment of private property rights that are by their very nature exclusionary and therefore likely to generate conflict. One of the key elements of the violent transition to capitalism is primitive accumulation, which Cramer defines as a 'twin process of forceful asset accumulation and displacement of people' (2006, 217). Finally, international factors (fluctuations in global commodity markets, the presence of multinational companies or foreign aid agencies, the influence of international financial institutions, military aid or intervention, etc.) may further fan the flames of violent conflict (Cramer 2006, 215-6).

Cramer's notion of violent conflict, based on Marx's 'tragic view of history', like Liberalism, is rooted in a belief in progress, but from one standpoint, violence is enabling and from the other it is disabling. Cramer himself recognizes that there is a danger that the argument could be used to romanticize, justify or encourage violence and war in the name of progress (2006, 47). He maintains that 'violent transitions' to capitalism have no definite outcome and that there may be 'no end in sight'; he thereby avoids professing that violent conflict is necessary or positive and also warns the reader against the temptation of trying to distinguish between 'good and bad wars' or those that promote 'progressive' change and those that are 'negative and destructive' even in their long-term consequences (2006, 48, 238, 284). However, he fails to address the notion of progress itself. Cramer uses the terms development and progress interchangeably; defining development as industrialisation and the spread of capitalism (2006, 254). Therefore, it can be deduced that for Cramer the spread of capitalism is favourable for the 'improvement of the human condition' and the 'advance of society'. But determining what is progressive involves value-judgments and normative claims.

A few examples from the case of Ezillo examined in this paper reveal how capitalist development is not necessarily 'progressive' from the point of view of all the stakeholders. While the establishment of mega some as 'progress' may judge agro-industrial projects since they generate jobs, livelihood and earnings, for the communities violently displaced from their land, these agro-industry projects like the state commercial rice farming scheme and the extractive industrial operations represent devastation. Similarly, from the point of view of a conservationist, the destruction of biodiversity that precedes the imposition of monoculture plantations does not fall into a category of 'progressive change'. Finally, some people may claim that the availability of large expanse of fertile arable land and the growth of agro-business as well as the extractive industry in Ezillo, despite the violence associated with them is progressive since they generate wealth that is reinvested in other legal or legitimate ventures. Thus, recognising that *capitalist* development is a violent process is not the same as claiming that violent conflict associated with capitalist development is part of progress.

5.0   **CHAPTER FIVE**

5.1Summery, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1.1 Summery

Using essentially qualitative approach and social constructionism as theoretical framework, this study has examined the connection and disconnection of historical and contemporary social context of Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo land conflict in Ezillo community. At the theoretical level, the study affirms social constructivists' insight that highlight the institutionalization of social construction from daily face-to-face social interaction that over time affects social process in the society. This postulation reflects in the interpretation of Ezillo social conflict and identity transformation as normative social construct that difference in space and time. As a pre-colonial settlement, Ezillo community started experiencing communal conflict as with Ezza-Ezillo from the colonial period. The conflict has persisted over the last eight decades with little scholarly attention directed to it. In order to scholarly contribute to the ongoing discussion about this conflicts aimed at examining the peculiarities of Ezillo land conflict that make it uniquely different from other similar major land conflicts particularly in southeast region and Nigeria in general, this study examine the social context that make land contestation inevitable.

Findings from the study reveal that the intra-communal interaction between the people of Ezillo and Ezza dates back to the late 1920s. The Ezillo Community, now the headquarters of Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi state, had a communal conflict with Mgbo, its neighbouring community in the present-day Ohaukwu Local Government Area of the Ebonyi state. Historical account of common descent provided for sub-ethnic homogeneity that forbade Ezillo from shedding the blood of Mgbo. Ezillo decided to lay a complaint before Ezza, generally regarded as the oldest of all Abakaliki/northeast Igbo clans. Accordingly, the Ezza came to make peace between the Ezillo and Mgbo by occupying the buffer territory, which Ezillo insists is in the present-day Eguechara. On the contrary, the Ezza version of the story indicates that they were invited to fight and drive the Mgbo backwards and lives in the land, which is now the claimed present-day disputed areas of Ishimkpume, Amalinze, Umuezikoha, amongst other hamlets. The two community groups had lived together peacefully and had even been inter-marrying after the defeat of Mgbo. Ezza people are generally nomadic, most populous, and most evenly spread across the three geo-political

senatorial zones of the state. They are also found in Wawa land in Enugu as well as some parts of Benue, Kogi, and Cross-River States. Ezza identity became identity used by colonial Britain to recognise the northeast Igboland. Ezza insistence to institutionalise this colonial legacy in their inter-group relation after colonialism has pitched them against other significant identity groups in the area. For generations, the quest to secure and expand land resource access and use has pitched the largely nomadic Ezza group against their host Ezillo group in Ezillo community. The conflict has now metamorphosed into animosity conflict arising from provocation of bottled up anger and pain of experience.

Moreover, findings on existing contentions on authority over land revealed different dimensions to contentious authority claims. For instance, there was evidence of desecration of sacred land and disregard to traditional authority accompanied by growing expansionist, hegemonic and dominion tendencies that periodically provoke contestation. This connected to historical transformation of labour in favour of Ezza labour migrants in Ezillo. This created a wide gap between landed and landless peasants. The Ezza labour migrants arose from labour and servant to Ezillo landowners to dominate the landed peasants in Ezillo. Agreeing with this historic reality by Ezillo generated resistance and contestation. In what look like reversal, the post-colonial government acquisition of mining cites in Ezillo perceived as dispossession of Ezza and Ezillo land was seen as set back to Ezza farm owners in Ezillo. That also generated disagreement particularly that the elite from both sides seem to have mastermind the government acquisition. The battle space was created between the elites and the landed local peasants in Ezillo. Another centre of contestation discovered was the colonial political economic transformation of the cultural meaning of land from symbolic sacred inalienable source of identity to transferable store of market value that created contentious dual meanings to land that faced local resistance.

Further findings on the implication of land conflict on identity issues was robust in the sense that the conflict it activated vicious social differentiation bringing to the table several forms of identity claim in connection with land ownership in Ezillo. While the earlier Ezza migrant labourers were seen as identity without legitimate claim to any land in Ezillo, the invited Ezza warriors were considered settlers with limited legitimacy to only land originally allocated to them as compensation for rendering military service to Ezillo. The point of conflict is the visible depletion of Ezillo land by Ezza migrant labourer who connives with legitimate Ezza-Ezillo as kins to acquire Ezillo land as a basis to claim legitimate Ezza-Ezillo identity. Another point conflict is competition for limited power structures and economic

opportunities available for Ezillo indigenes that Ezza-Ezillo is taking over with constructed Ezillo identity.

Findings also show that the foundation of supremacy contest between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo community groups is the divisive colonial policy of divide and rule that over blotted Ezza identity beyond measure far above others. This suggests in absolute term superiority and inferiority complex that embolden the Ezza group into expansionist, intimidation and domineering attitude threatening the survival of others groups they contact. Segregation, discrimination, suspicion and fear began to characterise the contexts of Ezza inter-group relations. Despite numerical strength, historical and ancestral reification of Ezza supremacy, the Ezza-Ezillo is still expected to comply with prescribed norms in Ezillo.

Findings again on social network that sustain conflict reveals that Ezza-Ezillo and their host have used their social capital differentials to further, project and propagate their communal identity interests and relevance in Ezillo land relations. There is ambivalence of competition for supremacy of social and political capital. Using network nodes, members of each group engage and mobilise conflict in their quest to secure access and use of land. Sometimes the media is used as a propaganda instrument. At another time, the following instruments are used: money (exchange), structure (normative structure) or institution (security agencies). The healthy dimension social networks are the tendency for improvement but the negative aspect is rivalry and clash of interest particularly in land relations. Common among these networks nodes are land merchants and conflict entrepreneurs; local peasants and elites groups; town union groups and women group; patrons and their clients; traditional authority and landless peasants.

Finally, findings on development show that protracted violent conflicts in Ezillo have had severe consequences on livelihood, household disconnection and dislocation, infrastructural destruction and dilapidation, loss of lives to war and disease, disruption of healthcare and functional education delivery.

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, one of the major findings of this study is that land as a source of identity is also a source of wealth and power. Access to it becomes competitive because it is an identity platform for economic and political aspiration to local, state and federal power structures dominated by elite manipulation in Ezillo community. Ezillo land conflict trajectory confirms

a simple, predictable evolutionary direction. Just as many people struggle to turn access claims into legitimate property, many are striped of property rights to their possessions when the institutions that guaranteed them are weakened. Similarly, just as competing institutions attempt to shore up legitimacy for their power, that legitimacy may well be undermined by circumstances in the wider fabric of society beyond their control. This trajectory and paradox informs the context of development crisis in Ezillo community. Therefore, for over eight decades, development in Ezillo has suffered a great deal due to the frequent changes that occur in life, social realities and institutions that regulate land relations. These changes inevitably cause conflict. The effect of conflict has not only affected the rural development but also social, human, intellectual, economic and technological developments in general. The study, therefore, brings into light, the limited capacity of state institutions to think through, and implement appropriate policies that can address the unemployment, hunger social malaise situations in Ezillo community. The chains of violent conflicts have affected negatively on the socio- economic organization of Ezillo. The victims of violence are mainly the women and the children; several women turned widows with added responsibilities of children upbringing in addition to industrious women having their wares destroyed when irate youth's groups torch properties and markets.

This study has implication on land management and conflict prevention against land and its resources. First, it provided basis for understanding the causal and recipient role of land in conflict between discrete community groups in southeastern Nigeria. It also revealed the underlying bedrock of who is in charge of land administration in the region. Here the weakness of the government of the land is evidently but indirectly portrayed in leaving land administration into the hands of community leaders and individual families. This perhaps led to land fragmentation and administrative pluralism, making residents to claim their village`s, family`s or individual`s rights over pieces of land, resulting in conflicts. It can be deduced that countries with effective regulatory frameworks on land are more likely to have less struggle over land as recorded in this study.

5.3 Recommendations

In this regards and by way of recommendation, the policy makers of Nigeria need to revisit the current land reform provisions to address the intractable issues of who is a citizenship and an indigene as well as their entitlements in land relations. This would address the problem of strangers` inaccessibility to indigenous land and practically ensure land as public property.

The review have to be done with full consent of selected community leaders, who would be expected to carry their people along on the need to holistically make land available for all without prejudice. There is also the need to emphasize informal and traditional approaches to conflict management and peace building in our legislation to empower the local communities and institutions to be more communally relevant. There is an urgent need to put emphasis on technical and vocational education instead of the present emphasis on secondary education, which does not address issues of self-employment and wealth generation outside of public sector employment. Despite the tendency for clan identity to be mobilized as basis of conflict, it is possible to use the sense of solidarity fostered by clan identities as the framework for mobilizing resources and promoting development, as was the case in pre-colonial northeast Igboland when clans offered annual sacrifices to ancestors to address communal problems and seek blessings from the ancestors.

Furthermore, intermittent violent conflicts in Ezillo have the implication of socializing youths into a culture of violence and other forms of delinquent behaviors. The negative impact of incessant violence in a community calls for concerted efforts at the levels of the state and community to reverse the present ugly trends. At the level of the state, the NigerCem Nkalagu Cement industry needs to be revived to boost employment in the area.

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IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR INTERVIEWEES AND KEY INFORMANTS

> **THE SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EZILLO AND EZZA LAND CONFLICT IN EZILLO COMMUNITY, EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA**

Interviewer: Introduce yourself, the purpose of your visit and your expectations from the respondents.

SECTION A: Socio-demographic Characteristics Respondents

The following is to be filled for each of the respondents.

Characteristics of Respondents	Response
Date of Interview	
Name of Village	
Specific Venue for Interview	
Sex	
Age	
Occupation	
Educational level	
Religion	
Name of interviewee`s Code	
Position of respondent in community	
Duration of living in the community	
Name of organizational affiliation	
Income source	

SECTION B: The historical processes that have informed the Ezillo land conflict
Probe for:
   a. Describe historical facts on Ezza and Ezillo interaction.
   b. What historical processes and factors have informed Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo conflict?
   c. Describe the major conflict that happened pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times
   d. Has land always been a matter of conflict among the Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo?
   e. At what point did the Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo started to engage in conflict?

SECTION C: The existing contentions on authority over land in Ezillo
Probe for:
   a. What in particular are those contentions or contestation on authority in Ezillo?
   b. What informs and constitute contention on authority over land?
   c. What circumstances or situation impels agitation for control over land?
   d. What are the objects of this competition?
   e. What matters or issues in particular breed or provoke contestation for control and competition for land among the Ezillo community groups?
   f. Are there particular subject that triggers desire and movement for land control?

SECTION D: The implication of Ezillo land conflict to identity issues
Probe for:
   a. How does Ezillo land conflict influence definition of self among members of the conflicting groups?
   b. What forms individual and group identities are formed as a result of Ezillo land conflict?
   c. What forms individual and group interest emanate from the organisation of land conflict in Ezillo land conflict?
   d. How is inferiority and superiority of individuals or groups formed and determined by Ezillo land conflict?
   e. How does the Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo conflict impact identity?

SECTION E: Investigate how supremacy contests reverberates Ezillo land conflict.
Probe for:
   a. In what form (s) does supremacy interest determine, shape and influence Ezillo land conflict?
   b. How does desire for supremacy instigate Ezillo land conflict?
   c. Explain possible ways in which contest for supremacy organize and reorganize Ezillo land conflict
   d. Describe possible conditions that regulates and reformulate conflict order over land

SECTION F: Find out the social networks that sustain the conflict
Probe for:
   a. Who are the key actors that have been involved in the conflict over time?
   b. Are there possible groups or associations to which these actors belong?
   c. What interests in particular do these groups and associations represent?
   d. Are there activities that bring members of these groups together at particular time?
   e. Are there sets of roles, which members of these groups occupy in relation to conflict sustenance?

f. Describe possible requirements for the occupation of such roles

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR ELDERLY MALE AND FEMALE AGE 60 + AND MILITANT YOUTH GROUP IN EZILLO COMMUNITY.

THE SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EZILLO AND EZZA LAND CONFLICT IN EZILLO COMMUNITY, EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

SECTION A: Focus Group Discussion Identification Particulars

VARIABLE	Response	Variable	Response
Community group		Clan	
Venue name		Date of FGD	
Time FGD Started		Moderator`s Code	
Time Interview Ended			
Language of Interview	English--- Pidgin English-- Others (specify)---		

Confidentiality and consent:

Greetings Ma/Sir,

I am…………………………………………………………………………of Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan. This is a PHD field study and you have been chosen to help in supplying vital information strategic to the achievement of this purpose. I sincerely wish you participate as this study can never be completed without your participation. The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the social context of Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo land conflict in Ezillo community, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Your comprehensive and factual responses are therefore solicited and will be treated in strict confidence. This is why I do not need your names compulsorily. Please feel free to tell me the absolute truth on all issues raised in the course of the interview/discussion. Please accept my gratitude in advance for your time and attention. Do you possibly have any question about the study and me before we continue the session? (Be sure to answer all questions and clear all concerns before progressing).

SECTION B: The historical processes that have informed the Ezillo land conflict
Probe for:

   a. Describe historical facts on Ezza and Ezillo interaction.
   b. What historical processes and factors have informed Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo conflict?
   c. Describe the major conflict that happened pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times
   d. Has land always been a matter of conflict among the Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo?
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   a. What in particular are those contentions or contestation on authority in Ezillo?
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   d. Are there activities that bring members of these groups together at particular time?

e. Are there sets of roles, which members of these groups occupy in relation to conflict sustenance?
f. Describe possible requirements for the occupation of such roles.

APPENDIX II
HISTORICAL RECORDS