Understanding the Root Causes of Social Conflicts in Nigeria: 
Insights from Ezza-Ezillo/Ezillo Communal Conflict in Ebonyi State

Itumo Anthony and Nwobashi Humphrey N.

Department of Political Science, Ebonyi State University, P.M.B 053, Abakaliki, Nigeria

Abstract: The need to understand the root causes of the violent intra-communal conflict between Ezillo people and Ezza-Ezillo people in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State has become a serious concern to both academics and government officials alike. The violent conflict which started on 8th May, 2008 has claimed several lives, destroyed property worth millions of naira, while some thousands of people have been displaced. This development causes untold hardship to both parties in the conflict and innocent citizens as it disrupted socio-economic activities within the Ezillo community and its environs including Abakaliki the State capital. Presently, normal socio-economic life is yet to return to Ezillo community as all efforts made by both the state and federal governments have failed to yield the desired results. This study is set out to interrogate the root cause of the conflict with a view to recommending enduring solutions to the perennial conflict. The data used in this study were draw from primary sources with instrumentality of questionnaire while chi-square statistics was used for data analysis. The theoretical framework that anchored the study is the opportunity structure theory.

Keywords: Conflict • Root Causes • Communal Conflict • Weak State • Ezza-Ezillo/Ezillo

INTRODUCTION

The rising tide of communal conflicts in Nigeria has continued to pose challenges of analysis and policy to both academics and government officials alike. Since the inauguration of civil in Nigeria on 29th May, 1999, there has been unprecedented rise in episodic violent conflicts. Between May 29, 1999 and March 2016, Nigeria has witnessed many virulent intra/inter-communal conflicts, waged by ethnic, religious, political and other identity groups across the country. The cases in point include; Ile/Modekeke conflict, Aguleri/Umuleri conflict, Jos conflict, Tiv/Jukun conflict, Nasarawa conflict, Igbira conflict, Warri conflict, among others. This development raises doubts about the prospects of democracy and the future of the nation [1]. The ways in which these conflicts were managed by state actors had implications for the escalations and de-escalations of the conflicts.

Ebonyi State is not immune to this situation, since 1999, it has witnessed astronomical rise in the spate of violence commmunal conflicts across communities in the state. These include; Effium/Ezza-Effium conflict in Ohaukwu Local Government Area, Abaomge/Ishinkwo communal conflict in Onicha Local Government Area and Amagu/Adadama conflict between Amagu community in Ikwo Local Government Area and Adadama community in Cross River State and the Ezza-Ezillo/Ezillo communal conflict in Ishielu Local Government Area which is our case study. Just to mention but a few.

The Ezillo/Ezza-Ezillo communal conflict is chosen for the study for the following reasons: First, it is the only intra communal conflict since the creation of Ebonyi state that had not only assumed the most dangerous dimension as to attract the attention of the federal government but had recorded the highest loss of life and wanton destruction of property. Second, Ezillo geographic region is strategically important to Ebonyi state; being one of the gate ways communities that situates along the Trans African Highs Way, linking the state with her sister states in the south-south and south east geopolitical zones. As such conflict along the Ezillo region is bound to have ripple effects on socio-economic activities within Ebonyi state and other states in the south east, south-south and even beyond. Therefore, research effort that attempts to explicate and offer possible solutions to the management of conflict is not only timely but highly imperative and germane. Third, it is one of the intra-communal conflicts that had recorded the highest frequency in terms of
occurrence. Fourth, Ezza-Ezillo/Ezillo communal conflict is one of the intra-communal conflicts in Ebonyi State which has not received adequate attention among research scholars of communal conflicts in Nigeria especially the assessment its process design, conflict intervention activities, the outcomes, how these impacted on individual participants, the target communities and larger society.

The most disturbing development that remains a source of worry to both academic and policy analysts is why some groups of people who had hitherto enjoyed relative peace for quite a long period suddenly engage themselves in violent conflict. Equally worrisome is the quality and quantity of weapons used in execution of these communal conflicts coupled with the attendant wanton destruction of life and property which accompany them.

Despite the crucial academic, socio-economic and political questions raised by the Ezillo communal conflicts, extant studies have paid little or no attention to the study of the antecedent conditions that precipitated the outbreak of the conflicts. There is need to provide nuance and coherent analysis of the conditions that precipitated the eruption of violent conflict in Ezillo. For one thing the quality and quantity of weapons used in the prosecution of the war and the wanton destruction of life and property in the community suggest the need for scholarly study of the conflict rather than relying merely on the usual administrative and legal approaches for knowledge and solutions to the conflict. This research, therefore, centres on explaining the underlying conditions that precipitate the outbreak of the communal conflicts in Nigeria, with particular reference to Ezillo communal conflict. The general question then is what is responsible for the sudden eruption of violent conflict in Ezillo community? Specifically this study will address the following research questions:

**Historicizing the Ezza-Ezillo/Ezillo Communal Conflict:**

The Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo people are found in Ezillo community in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. Historically, the Ezillo People are the aborigines of the community, otherwise regard as indigenes, while the Ezza-Ezilo people are perceived as non-indigenes or settlers in the community. The Ezza-Ezillo people came to the community in 1930s following their invitation by Ezillo people to assist them wage wars against the Ngbo people who were encroaching into their territory [2]. After the war, the Ezza-Ezillo people were given some parcel of land at Eguechara in Ezillo community to settle on permanent basis, by Ezillo elders, as a compensation or reward for their contribution to the success of the war [2],[3] and equally, to act as buffers against their adversaries from Ngbo clan [2].

As the war ended the two clans began to live peacefully together in Ezillo community but sooner than later, the Ezza-Ezillo people began to expand their settlements to other parts of Ezillo, as they started to acquire titles over some piece of lands even outside their original Eguechara area which incurred the wrath of Ezillo people. As a result of the above, problem ensued and the Ezillo people sought for the relocation of the Ezza-Ezillo people to their original Eguechara area. The matter was taken to an Abakaliki Colonial Customary Court in 1959 and the court ruled in favour of Ezillo clan, mandating the Ezza-Ezillo people to move back to Eguechara. The Ezza-ezillo people appealed the matter before one O. P. Gunning, an Abakaliki Colonial District Officer, who affirmed the judgement of the Customary Court. But unfortunately, the Ezza-Ezillo people refused to relocate to Eguechara area as directed by the district officer. Since then the relationship between the two clans had not been cordial enough to say the least.

The present violent communal conflict between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo clans started on May 10, 2008, as a little misunderstanding which broke out between one Sunday Idenyi of Ezillo and the Ezza youths at Eke Ishimkpuma market square over where to erect a commercial phone booth [2],[3]. This disagreement culminated to a clash between Ezza-Ezillo and Ezillo youths leading to pulling down of phone booth and later degenerated to burning of motorcycles belonging to both parties the same day. The following day, the matter escalated to a full scale violent communal conflict between Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo clans, leading to blocking of Ezillo region of the Enugu-Abakaliki high way and killing of innocent citizens plying along the high way and loss of life and property worth millions of naira belong to both parties. To say the least, for three months particularly, (January-March, 2010), Ezillo community was plunged into resurgence war against itself as well as innocent citizens plying along the Ezillo region of the Enugu-Abakaliki highway. The crisis has not only sent many innocent citizens to their early grave but disrupted socio-economic life in Ezillo and its neighbouring communities.

In swift reaction to the ugly situation, the Ebonyi State Government had in the month of May 2008, set up a Peace Committee, with a mandate to recommend appropriate solution to the conflict. The committee made
a number of recommendations upon which Ebonyi State Government issued a white paper of October 2, 2008, directing the Ezza-Ezillo people to vacate a substantial portion of the land in dispute and relocate to their original Eguechara area. The Ezza-Ezillo people protested that they were short changed and vowed never to relocate to Eguechara as directed by the government [4]. For sometimes now, there have been intermittent outbreak of violent hostility in the area even as some of the conflict actors have decided to resort to gorilla tactics to prosecute the violent conflict. In fact, the conflict has become intractable as all other efforts made by both the Ebonyi State government and the Federal Government of Nigeria to put paid to this ugly development had failed to produce the desired result.

Presently, normal socio-economic life is yet to return to Ezillo community. Even with the heavy security presence in the troubled area, people in the area still sleep with their eyes half closed, while others are yet to return to the area for fear of insecurity [4]. This communal conflict had never assumed such a dangerous dimension of this magnitude since it began some years ago. Although the two groups had some causes in the past to disagree over matters relating to socio-economic and political issues, such disagreement never degenerated to this level of violent confrontation, as the two parties had always devised diplomatic means of resolving their differences amicably [4].

Statement of the Problem: The need for urgent solution to stem the tides of the recurrent spate of violent intra-communal conflict between Ezillo people and Ezza-Ezillo people in Ezillo Community in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State constitutes serious source of worries to both academics and government officials alike. The violent conflict which started on 8th of May, 2008 have claimed several lives, destroyed property worth millions of naira, while some thousands of people have been displaced. This development has caused untold hardship to both parties in the conflict and innocent citizens as it disrupted socio-economic activities within the Ezillo community and its environs including Abakaliki the State capital. Presently, normal socio-economic life is yet to return to Ezillo community as all efforts made by both the state and federal governments have failed to yield the desired results. For sometimes now, there have been intermittent outbreak of violent hostility in the area as some of the conflict actors have decided to resort to gorilla tactics to prosecute the violent conflict. Even with the heavy security presence in the troubled area, people in the area still sleep with their eyes half closed, while the displaced people are yet to return to the area for fear of insecurity.

This situation appears more worrisome when weighed against the backdrop of the challenges posed to analysis and policy by the failure of the extant literature to provide research informed explanation domiciled specifically on Ezillo conflict. Especially on the explanation of the underlying factor (indigene/settler divides) which is at core of the violent communal conflict despite the obvious crucial academic questions raised by the issue. The above development has rendered the possible resolution of the Ezillo conflict extremely difficult. Presently, policy makers and conflict managers are faced with the challenge of low status of intellectual attainment of knowledge on the conflict. The lacunae made the management and resolution of the conflict an uphill task as it limited the access of government to more reliable and unbiased information guided by research which would have equipped the government with enough knowledge to midwife an effective policy framework to end the perennial conflict. As such, the government was forced or constrained to rely solely for solution on knowledge drawn from conclusions made by scholars on studies carried on similar conflicts across the country, security and media reports, legal and administrative methods. These methods not only failed to yield the desired results, but blurred the views and impelled the vision of government on the matter.

Unarguably, the time is ripe for a research that would open a new frontier of knowledge on the conflict and expand the search for solution beyond the limited shores of security and media reports and the narrow prisms of legal and administrative approaches. This will no doubt improve our understanding of the issue at stake and as such enhance the management and resolution of the perennial conflicts rather than relying on allusions drawn from studies on other similar conflicts in Nigeria which have not yield fruitful results. This is not to deny the possibility of applying covering or general laws; instead, it is, to suggest the need to eschew hasty generalizations. This study, therefore, is provoked by the need for an effective policy framework that would put paid to the violent communal conflicts in Ezillo. The questions addressed in this study are:

- Is there a nexus between Weak state capacity to provide security and law enforcement and the eruption violent conflict in Ezillo community?
- What are the possible ways of resolving the conflict?
Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinnings Conflict:

A constant fact about conflict is that it is an ever present phenomenon in social relations. It is inevitable in any social gathering, organisation and society. The certainty of conflict to occur in every social arena motivated its interpretation in various forms. However, the existing definitions follow a thought pattern that clearly describes conflict as: a state of incompatible behaviour, an opposition, an interaction of interdependent parties, a bad omen and positive or constructive outcome. As a state of incompatibility, conflict is described as a situation in which the concerns of two or more individuals operating within the unit appear to be incompatible [5].

Incompatibility breeds conflict because it is a psychological state in which people cannot get along with one another in an organisation. Gray and Starke (1984) considered conflict as the behaviour by a person or group intended to inhibit the attainment of goals by another person or group. Conflict will emerge when behaviour is laced with emotions, which is expressed in an antagonistic form. As an opposition, Hellriegel and Slocum [6] posited that conflict is an opposition arising from disagreement about goals, thoughts, or emotions with or among individuals, teams, departments, or organisations. Opposition is all about blocking an individual or a group from achieving set goals and this will leads to conflict because of the instant overt reaction that will be put up by the party being blocked. Conflict can also be defined as a situation in which interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interest and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals [7].

Wilmot and Hocker [8] described conflict as a felt struggle between two or more independent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values and goals, or differences in desires for esteem, control and connectedness. Conflict occurs when people are nested by some sort of social cods. It does not occur in isolation, people must be relating or be depending on one another. Conflict can be defined in terms of good or bad outcome. When the outcome of a conflict scenario is positive, it is defined as a functional or constructive conflict. Conflicts that end up in negative outcomes are regarded as dysfunctional conflicts. Hoelscher & Robert [9] viewed conflict as the underlying power that stimulates innovation.

Pondy [10] described conflict as a phenomenon that can produce positive outcomes by introducing different perspectives that produce innovative solution. Lindelow and Scott [11] defined conflict in negative term, as element that conjures negative connotation, invokes negative feelings and often leads to destruction. It is important to note that the outcome of a conflict situation depends on the perceptions and management approaches of the conflicting parties. The definition of Donohue and Kolt [7] suggested some fundamental elements that need to be clarified at this point. These are:

- Conflict occurs where people are interdependent. People must be connected in one way or the other, either through their views, goals, aspirations etc before they can be enmeshed in a conflict.
- Conflict can be expressed in manifest or latent form. The parties concerned may blow the problem out of proportion for people to know about its existence or they may make people not to be aware of the conflict. Manifest conflicts can be easily managed because they are known by people, but latent conflicts are not open to people’s awareness, hence, resolving them may be difficult.
- Conflict involves needs and interests. Needs are those things that are fundamentally of utmost importance to people, which they must fulfil as soon as the purchasing power is available. Interests on the other hand, are the desires of people. These elements, most especially, needs, have the potential to generate conflict, when people are blocked from pursuing their needs or interests.
- Conflict is caused by interference. In a bid to achieve the emerging needs or interest, interference may be experienced among the parties, bringing about the emergence of conflict. Conflict, therefore, is a fate of life, which occurs where the interactions of people are marked with differences in goals, perceptions, attitudes, views, beliefs, values or needs.

From the above analysis, conflict is a natural phenomenon which results from differences in individuals or groups aspirations, values, or needs. However, when conflict occurs, its manifestations and outcomes vary depending on the perceptions of the conflicting parties and the approaches adopted to manage it.

Communal Conflict: The word “communal” is derived from a Latin word “communis” which means “common.” Communal relates particularly to groups and it involves things commonly used, shared or experienced by a group in a society. Such things can be resources or conflict. When it is conflict, it is known as communal conflict. Communal conflict is a social conflict that relates to a
group or groups in a society. When it occurs within a group, it is known as intra-communal conflict and inter-communal conflict when it occurs between groups. It is worth noting that these groups have common social ties, which may make the competition that may ensue to be fierce. The point is that the misuse or unequal distribution of the available resources that should be jointly enjoyed by a group will produce conflict. The conflict will usually be complex to tackle because of the level of hatred that would probably have been cultivated among the parties in the process.

Communal conflict was considered by Azuonwu [12] as a conflict that occurs between two or more communities. Oboh & Hyande [13] described communal conflict as involving two or more communities engaging themselves in disagreement or act of violence over issues such as claims for land ownership, religious and political difference leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties. Communal violence (sometimes inter-communal violence) is a situation where violence is perpetuated across ethnic lines and victims are chosen based upon ethnic group membership Horowitz, [14]. Dzurgba [15] was of the opinion that communistic violence is that which occurs between two or more communities over territorial land, farmland and territorial water for fishing. These definitions revealed that communal conflict is more or less community conflict or ethnic conflict. This is not surprising because “communal” by its interpretation as a phenomenon that is common to a particular group characterises a community or ethnicity. Onwudiwe [16] attested to this fact when he said that communal friction is what is usually described as ethnic conflict. More so, for communal contenders to have been described as culturally distinct people, tribes, or clans in heterogeneous societies, who hold or seek a share in state power Gurr & Haxton, [17] help to buttress the point that communal conflict is often interpreted as community conflict or ethnic conflict. While it is not the focus of this thesis to divulge the differences inherent in these variables, if there is any, it is pertinent to stress that the peculiar identity of “communal” in terms of reference to a group, concerning common issues or elements could as well be attributed to other social groups in a society.

This implied that several communal groups make up a community and therefore, in terms of involvement or participation, communal conflict is narrower than community conflict. Therefore, communal conflict is a state of incompatibility that emanates from a commonly shared or used property or resource by a group or groups in a society. It occurs within or between groups that are defined by some forms of social ties over resources that are jointly owned or shared in a community. Communal conflict arises when two distinct groups in a community disagree over jointly shared resources due to the possibility of inequitable distribution or the problem of domination by a group. The development of this kind of conflict in any society has attachment to commonly shared or used resources or elements which can be tangible or intangible.

The identity of communal conflict is rather fluid in nature. This is because it occurs in diverse forms, which can sometimes be misleading to identify. Albert [18] posited that this form of conflict “often manifest in terms of host-stranger face-offs in which a section of the community tags itself as the host (owners of the community) and some other groups as strangers (that is, those who migrated into the community at a date later than the coming of the “owners” of the community). Apart from this, communal conflict can also be imbued in religious issues, land, politics, resources, local government, chieftaincy issues, etc.

Causes of Communal Conflict: Various factors have been identified by scholars as responsible for communal conflict in the country. The causes vary from one area to another. Yecho [19] indicated that the causes of communal conflicts are not static but rather dynamic and varied in nature depending on the socio-economic and geopolitical circumstances at the time. Onwudiwe [16] listed social conditions as population explosion, economic migration and the anti-poor policies of the government as triggers of communal friction. Horowitz (1990) pinned down communal conflict to revolve around politics, politicians and their pursuit of group advantage. Albert [18] identified indigene/settler problem, religious differences, ownership of land and its resources, goals and aspirations of people as some of the factors that can ignite communal conflict in the country. Hembe [20] indicated that political struggle and colonization, while Lyam [21] mentioned loss of soil fertility, soil erosion, deforestation, bush burning and flooding as some of the causes of communal conflict. Yecho [19] pointed out that the fundamental causes of communal conflict are poor economic conditions, high level of illiteracy, the quest for and fear of domination by other groups, land disputes, market ownership, chieftaincy tussle and party politics.

Varvar [22] indicated that increased demand for land for agriculture, unemployment, rural hunger, poverty impoverishment as communal conflict triggers. Deprivation, exploitation and domination of minority groups by major ethnic groups and leadership problem.
were highlighted by Angya and Doki [23] as factors that can exert communal crisis. Equally, religious differences, competition for livelihood resources and traditional chieftaincy tussles were enumerated by Oboh and Hyande [13] as potential communal conflict triggers in the country. Competitions for land and chieftaincy tussle are the major causes of communal conflict in the North. For instance, in Nasarawa in 1993, Alago, Hausa and Tiv clashed over land and chieftaincy from 1995-2005, the Egburra and Bassa in Toto clashed over land, chieftaincy and politics. In 1989, 1990 and 1997, intra-communal conflict occurred in Ipav in Gboko based on land problem. In Taraba State, between the Chamba/Jukun and Kuteb over chieftaincy tussle since 1996 when it stated, it is still ongoing; in 2004 in Adamawa State between the Bachama and Hausa/Fulani over land ownership, politics and religious. On March 5, 2005, communal clash between Maruta (Jigawa) and Burmin (Bauchi) occurred over market relocation. On June 2003, Ekepedo and Ogori clash over land ownership in Kogi/ Edo States. Best [24] argued that in Benue Valley, the pressure on land from all directions heightens the proliferation of ethnic and communal conflicts in the region, including the political ones, most of them arising from the land question. In essence, the causes of communal conflict from the above analysis are:

- **Economic factor:** The factors manifest in the forms of competition for inadequate resources such land and its content; problems of distribution of available resources; unemployment and poverty.

- **Social factor:** This has to do with issues that border on deprivation, envy, jealousy, marginalization and exploitation of people. In fact, fear of domination by major groups is equally a social factor that attracts communal conflict.

- **Political factor:** It involves the contest for available political positions in a community and leadership failure. Also added to this, is traditional chieftaincy tussle imminent in communities in the country.

- **Ecological factor:** This factor manifests in the forms of encroachment problem, farming and pastoral problems, deforestation, flooding, soil erosion and bush burning. Communal conflict creates room for people to drift from place to place as a survival mechanism and in search of livelihood.

- **Colonial factor:** Colonialism is believed to be the background cause of communal conflict in Africa and Nigeria inclusive. Most of the communal conflicts have direct attachment to colonial formation, while others manifesting in the post colonial period have explanation in colonialism.

**Cases of Communal Conflicts in Nigeria:** Several cases of communal conflicts abound across communities and states in Nigeria. The finding of Erena [25] revealed that population is the main determinant of communal land conflict in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. Equally, in Cross River State, the Biakpan and Etono 11 communal groups clashed over land. In Ebonyi State, communal crises exist between Izza/Ezillo groups. In Akwa Ibom State, Eyo Abasi and Idua have been experiencing communal crisis over oil rich parcel of land located at the boundary of their localities. Other examples of communal conflicts are the Yoruba-Hausa community in Shagamu with respect to the Oro traditional festival; Ogoni-Adoni Hausa-Yoruba clashes in Ibi-Araba in Lagos State; the Eleme-Okrika which is centred on the creation of state and local government, unclear boundaries and clash over ownership of oil fields, farmlands and waterways; Itsekiri-Ijawa/Urhobo over the movement of LGA headquarters from Ijawa area to Itsekiri territory and land ownership/dispute.

The Aguleri-Umuleri in Anambra State over land problem; the Ife-Modakeke in Osun State over indigene/setters problem; the Ijawa-Ilafe conflict in Ondo over ownership of land reputed to be rich in oil reserve. Its pervasive existence in every nook and cranny of the Nigerian society has heightened the state of insecurity. Communal conflict has adopted the posture of intractability and in most cases, highly violent in nature in Nigeria. In the North, communal conflicts are reoccurring decimal to the extent that their occurrences have imposed insecurity in communities where they exist. Examples of communal conflicts abound in Northern Nigeria. In Tiv area of Benue State in various local government areas between 1988 and 2004, 29 communal conflicts were recorded by the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affair as having occurred in the state. Within the periods, some of the conflicts reoccurred two to three times.

The Tiv-Jukun in Wukari which has to do with the case of Indigene/setter; the Chamba-Kuteb Chieftancy tussles over selection process; the Basa-Egburu in Nassarawa; the Hausa/Fulani-Sawaya in Bauchi; Fulani-Irigwe and Yelwa-Shendam, both in Plateau State. Communal conflicts also exist in Nasarawa State, for instance, in Assakio, Obi and Odobu communities in Lafia Local Government Area, the clashes of communal war between these groups are ongoing in the state. Tiv farmers and nomadic Fulani in Benue and Nasarawa States and the Tiv in Guma and Gwer West are also embroiled in a conflict. Even in Abuja, communal conflict between
Fulani pastoralists and Gwari farmers in Gwako village in Gwagwalada Area Council is ravaging the place. Other states in the country are not immune from the experiences of communal conflict. The manifestations of communal conflicts follow patterns that make them difficult to be identified in the North. This is because they do not occur in pure form. Communal conflicts are highly filled with religious and ethnic sentiments. However, the social ties that exist in a group and the partnership involved in sharing and using resources that often ignite the conflict give room for a clear identification of communal conflict in a society. The point is that at community levels, communal conflict can be clearly ascertained. This is due to the elements that underlie the conflict. The manifestations of communal conflicts are more pronounced at the community level in rural settings. Therefore, the identification of communal conflicts is an important determining factor in deciding what should be done, how and when it should be done to stem their destructive tendencies at a particular time.

Theoretical Framework: The framework of analysis chosen for this study is the opportunity structure theory. This theory is an off-shoot of structural functional theory. It is associated with the works of some scholars such as; [26], [27], [28], [29], [30] and [31] others include [32], [25], [33] among others. The theory is based on the view that violent conflict is a function of dynamic interplay among certain interrelated structural variables. Scholars of this orientation link the likelihood of violent behaviours to the presence or absence of certain opportunity structures favourable for the organisation and mobilisation of violent.

Simply put, the central trust of this theory is that no matter however discontented or aggrieved, a group of people may become they cannot resort to violent behaviours unless certain opportunity structures that drive/trigger violent behaviours are on ground. These include; availability of willing violent participants, weak state capacity to provide security and law enforcement, availability of small arms and low cost weapons and availability of elites well connected with the local social networks of violence (both legal and extra legal networks). Where these structures/conditions are not in place or relatively unavailable; aggrieved individuals will seek to explore other peaceful options or measures to address their grievances.

This theory is apt for the explanation of this study because it not only unveils the underlying conditions that assured the relative peace in Ezillo community before the outbreak of the hostility, but also exposes both the local conditions and other appropriate structures that provided the favourable climate for the violent conflict in Ezillo which is the trust this study. In line with the propositions of this theory, it is axiomatic to argue that weak state capacity to provide security and law enforcement was responsible for the outbreak of the violent communal conflict in Ezillo. The second proposition of this theory aptly captures the root of problem in Ezillo where the conducts of the state security agencies in the management of the conflicts have demonstrated their weak capacity to provide security and law enforcement in the state. The inability of state security agencies to take strategic steps by initiating proactive measures that would nip the eruption of the conflicts the in the bud, confirms the vulnerability or incapacity of the Nigeria state in maintaining law and order in the society which is one of the basic propositions of this theory. From the theoretical proposition it is appropriate to hypothesize that: There is significant relationship between weak state capacity to provide security and law enforcement and the violent communal conflict in Ezillo.

Methodology: The data used in this study came from two major sources, namely; Secondary and Primary sources. The secondary data came from published and unpublished materials relevant to the study. These involved books, journals, magazines, newspapers, official documents as well as conference and seminar papers drawn mainly from the libraries of the Universities in Nigeria. The primary data used for this study were collected through the application of questionnaire instrument. The researcher made use of structured questionnaires with five multiple-choice questions to elicit the needed information from the respondents. The researcher distributed these questionnaires to five hundred respondents who are considered as having the relevant information required for the study using purposeful and random sampling techniques. The study utilized tables and charts for data presentation while the simple percent and chi-square used for analysis, interpretation and testing of hypothesis respectively. The testing of the hypotheses and the analysis of data were carried out with the Chi-square statistic instrument with the application SPSS.

Test of Hypothesis
Decision Rule: Reject the null hypothesis (H₀) and accept the alternate hypothesis (H₁), if the P-Value is less than 0.05.
Table Showing Data Distribution on Spss Calculation of Chi-square Test for Hypothesis Three

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Chi-Sq = 123.930
DF = 16, P-Value = 0.000

The table above shows the analysis of data used to test hypothesis two based on the application of the chi-square values for the SPSS computation with the level of significance value adopted as 0.05 at alpha. With the calculated value in table 8 as 123.930 being greater than critical value of 0.05 and P. V. of 0.000 being less than the critical value, the null hypothesis (Ho) was rejected while the alternate hypothesis (Ha) which states that; The violent communal conflict in Ezillo is precipitated by weak state capacity to provide security and law enforcement.

**Empirical Discourse and Analysis:** One of the conditions which precipitated the violent communal conflict in Ezillo community is weak state capacity to provide security and law enforcement. The relationship between the two variables received significance statistical supports during the analysis of data and testing of hypotheses. This finding confirms the hypothesized theoretical relationship between weak state capacity to provide security and law enforcement and the violent communal conflict in Ezillo. There is a general agreement among scholars of opportunity-structure school in conflict literature that weak state capacity to provide security and law enforcement fuels violent behaviours. The argument is that inability of government to enforce law and order provides platforms or opportunities for would-be-violent entrepreneurs to mobilize and organized violent conflict in relatively peaceful environment [33].

The Nigeria government in terms of its capacity to provide security and law enforcement to say the least is nothing but a shadow of government. In Nigeria state, law and order are violated by many people with impunity. The decades of maladministration, corruption, economic decline and mismanagement have left governments in many developing counties including Nigeria too weak to prevent violence. In such countries participants in collective violence operate under the backdrop of reduced risk of being punished [17]. It is presumed that violent participants are likely to weigh the propensity of possible security responses to rapidly intervene in violent behaviours, well ahead of their involvement in such acts. Skocpol (1979)[31] posits that the possibility that government might effectively utilize the security agencies to repress violent behaviours increases the cost of violent conflict as would-be-violent participants may be unwilling to show interests.

In the case of the violent conflict in Ezillo, it is pertinent to argue that the weak state capacity to provide security and law enforcement contributed in no small measure towards the outbreak and escalation of the violent conflict. The conduct of the security agents in the management and the resolution of the Ezillo communal conflict have demonstrated their weak capacity to provide security and law enforcement in the state.

The attitudes of the security agents in handling of the conflict in Ezillo to say the least is not encouraging. The incapacity of the security agents to handle crisis situations was glaringly exposed during the conflict in Ezilo. In the memorandum submitted to the Ezillo Peace Committee by Ezza-Ezillo, they people expressed their disgust for dastard manner in which the Division Police Officer, Ezillo Division handled the matter which they reported to the office at the initial stage of the crisis. It was recorded that the Ishielu Police Division at Ezillo were earlier informed of the enveloping crisis at Eke Umuezekohka market which later snowballed into the
major hostility between Ezza-Ezillo and Ezillo people but unfortunately, the police mishandled the matter. In their own words: “we sent a two-man delegation led by one Godwin Eze to go and make report to the DPO, Ishielu Police Division at Ezillo and urge him to intervene immediately, so as to forestall a possible breakdown of law and order. Alas, instead of the DPO to do so, he rather arrested and detained the said two-man delegation and they have been in detention up till now.” [2].

This act is a flagrant demonstration of the police paucity of knowledge in handling crisis situation and this in no small measures contributed to the outbreak and escalation of the violent conflict. It is logical to argue that the detention of the two man delegates added more salt to the injury as their action constituted betrayal of the trust and confidence which the Ezza-Ezillo people had initially in the police. As such they were forced to alternatively resort to violent conflict as a way of settling their differences.

Second, the inability of the security agents to take strategic steps by initiating proactive measure to nip the violence in the bud was highly evident in the Ezillo conflict. There were several security reports on the possibility of the outbreak of the Ezillo violent conflict which the security agents could have acted upon to prevent the violent conflict. The Ishielu council chairman and leaders of thought from both Ezza-Ezillo and Ezillo clans wrote and submitted several security reports of which if they had been taken seriously by the relevant authorities could have prevented the outbreak of the violent conflict. This further confirms the vulnerability or incapacity of the Nigeria security agents in maintaining law and order in the society.

Worse still the capacity of the security agent, to cooperate, coordinate, access, share and manage intelligent data within and among themselves are very low. Analysis of data in this study shows significance statistical support to this assertion. This has affected the degree to which they could quickly respond to the daunting security challenges facing the country. Given the importance of intelligent information data in conflict prevention and management, it will be highly impossible for them to promptly plan and react against the possible outbreak of conflicts or even prevent its outburst. This is because the degree to which the security agents can plan, act quick and accurately against any violent behaviour is largely dependent upon the degree of the information that is available to them. For instance, the security agents would like to know who and who are to be involved in such violent behaviour, their sponsor(s) their locations, the time they want to strike and possibly their perceived targets. These security information data are vital for conflict prevention and management.

Again, the security agents are not proactive in their responses to the security challenges in the Nigeria state. The era in which the security agents carry guns along the street to guising for possible hideouts of hoodlums is over. The pattern and tactics of violent actors have changed tremendously and as such there is also need for the security agents to change their tactics and strategies too. To do this successfully, the security agents need to get information from the public to plan their strategies on how to overcome the daunting challenges of violent activities in the country. But unfortunately, this is hampered by poor public perception of the security agents, especially the police as the people are not favourably disposed to cooperate with the security agents in this regard. The analysis of data in this study shows that the public image on police is too poor to provide the much needed intelligent data perceived as a prerequisite for good community policing. People have lost confidence in the police and as such are not feeling safe to offer useful information to the security agents as such intelligent data gathering extremely become impossible.

Furthermore, resort to violent behaviours as a means of settling communal disputes is largely due to peoples’ lack of confidence in the ability of the government to impartially and diligently prosecute similar cases in the past. The memories of past experiences alert and remind the conflict actors that the government will not do anything timely to help their situation especially when there had been several other related cases that were reported to government in the past to no avail. This is relevant in the case of Ezillo conflict in which several cases presented before the courts of competent jurisdictions in the state are still pending for many years now.

The instances of such cases were contained in the memorandum submitted to the Peace Committee on Ezillo Civil Disturbances in May, 2008 by the Ezillo Clan, to include: Amuji Ezillo versus Omena Ede of Ezza pending at Abakaliki High Court; Mr Eje Nwebenyi of Ezillo versus Nnajia Onuoha of Ezza pending at Abakaliki Customary Court of Appeal. Suit No. HAB/41M2003; John Chima of Ezza versus Sunday Ezigbo Ugbona of Ezillo pending at High Court Ezzamgbo. Suit NoIKW/1/2006. Mr Boniface Igi of Ezillo versus Umuezeokoha Ezza over motor park land at Ishimkpuma pending at Abakaliki High Court; Mr Martin Omebe of Ezillo versus Godwin Ucha of Ezza
Pending at Abakaliki High Court; Ndiegugu-ugwu Ezillo versus Eze Onu of Ezza pending at Abakaliki High Court; Eje Nwebenyi of Ezillo versus Nwinya Omoha of Ezza pending at Abakaliki High Court etc [3].

It is pertinent to argue that the delay by the relevant authorities to diligently conclude the prosecutions of the above cases have injected the feeling of frustration in the minds of people of Ezillo and Ezza clans. As such both parties in the conflict were compelled to abandon their usual resort to peaceful means of litigations to armed violent confrontation.

Besides, the degree to which the security agents can control and effectively prevent crisis is also a function of their number, training, equipment and motivation available to them. In this case, the numbers of security agents in Nigeria are few compared to the number of violent militia groups across the country. There are about three hundred and seventy-five thousand police men in the country according Onovo (2008)[34], the former inspector general of police. The ratio of this number is too low when compared with the population of the country that is about one hundred and eighty million people according to the World Bank population projection on Nigeria 2006 and 2006 National Population Census. There is virtually lack of enough security to police the Nigeria society given the rapid increase in the mutation of militia groups in the country couple with the attendant astronomical rise in the spate of violent conflicts and violent crimes in the society today.

Worse still, the security agents are ill trained to cope with the challenges of security facing the country. In most cases the police have demonstrated their lack of expertise in handling of crisis situation. There had been some instance in which the policemen were unable to get access to the theatres of some of the conflict regions for many days after they have been drafted to the crisis regions owing to the lack of expertise and overriding power of the militants. This was the exert case in Ezillo conflict in which the firing power of the militants far outweighed that of the security agents to the extent that the police ran away and abandoned their patrolling vehicles including their bullet proof vehicles to the militants who destroyed them. This is not unconnected with their insignificant number and lack expertise arising from the poor training of the security agents. Even though in Nigeria, the governors of the thirty-six state are said to be the chief securities of their states, they are just figure heads and cannot issue order to their police commissioners in their state no matter how dangerous the situation may be getting. This was the exert situation in Ezillo communal conflict where the deployment of policemen to re-enforce the Ebonyi State police command to control the Ezillo crisis took about two weeks, even when the security situation was getting out of hand.

Again, the policemen are ill motivated to absolutely commit themselves to the control of crisis. In most cases their stipends are not given to them in time. Sometimes, even when stipends are finally paid, the money is too merger to keep them for a good period. As a result of this the security agents do not get highly committed to their jobs. This becomes more worrisome when compared to their militant counter parts who receive about fifty to eighty thousand naira in a week according to some media reports [35].

You will recall that, the militias that were hired to prosecute the conflict in Ezillo were reported by the local media to had been paid about fifty thousand naira in a week. This explains why the militia groups are highly committed than the security agents. The most worrisome of situation is the manner in which the policemen who lost their lives in the crisis in some part of the country are treated. In most cases the policemen who were killed while trying to prevent crisis are not even paid their death benefits by their commands and even when they are paid it is always many months or even some year after (Police Diary, Tuesday, 11 September, 2012. This exposes the family of the victims to suffering and as such no one wants to die for a state that does not recognize patriotic acts.

More than that, the security agents are ill equipped to face the militia groups. The militants are highly equipped with sophisticated and modern equipment compared to their police counterparts. In some cases they are not given enough ammunition when their militia counterparts are properly equipped to face any situation or challenges that may be posed by the security agents [36].

CONCLUSION

This study interrogates the underlying condition that precipitated the outbreak of violent communal conflicts in Ezillo community in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. It is set out to unearth the antecedent conditions that provided favourable climate for the
mobilisation, outbreak and escalation of the violent communal conflicts in which many people lost their lives and property worth millions of naira destroyed. This study challenges the conflict literature for failure to study the condition which precipitated various violent communal conflicts that occurred in some parts of Ebonyi State particularly the one in Ezillo community. The study argues that related studies have side-stepped the study of the conflict despite the obvious socio-economic and academic questions raised by the violent communal conflict that are begging for attention. It further remarked that study of the antecedent condition that precipitated the violent conflicts in Ebonyi State, especially the one in Ezillo has been understudied by scholars, as they have centred their explanations only on the causes of conflicts that occurred in other geographical regions of the country. The study affirms that, although it is important to understand the root causes of communal conflicts, it is however more rewarding to understand the antecedent condition which precipitated the outbreak of such conflicts. This is a very important aspect of conflict study which has been neglected by scholars in the conflict literature.

The study posits that search for solution to the perennial violent conflicts in Ezillo has been left to government officials and civil society organizations alone. This, the study remarked has made the transformation, management and resolution of the conflict an uphill task as government has relied solely on the limited shores of security and media reports and the narrow prism of legal and administrative approaches for solution which have blurred the vision of government on the matter. This study is provoked by the need to clear the under-bush and offer academically based explanations that will enhance understanding, provide viable and enduring solutions to the perennial conflicts.

The study hypothesized that the violent communal conflict in Ezillo was not precipitated by opportunity structures that facilitate or fuel violent behaviours such; availabilities of: willing violent participants, small arms and low cost weapons, elites well connected into local level social networks of violence and weak state capacity to provide security and law enforcement. The findings of this research reveal a strong synergy with the propositions used in the study. Significantly, all the hypothesized relationships tested in this study gave significant statistical supported for the alternate hypotheses. Similarly both the degree of freedom (df) and p-values obtained through SPSS chi-square calculations conform with the direction of the relationship hypothesized between the variables. The study therefore has found significant statistical support for the opportunity structure theory as a viable construct for explanation of the violent conflict in Ezillo. Despite these findings, important questions remain. It is pertinent to point out that since the scope of this study is limited to the violent communal conflict in Ezillo from 2008-2010, inferring or extrapolating the relationship outside the “snapshot” is problematic. To achieve a more statistical footing, future research must not only aim to expand on the number of cases in Ebonyi State, but also the time span of the analysis.

**Recommendations:** In light of the findings made and conclusions drawn in this study, the researcher recommends the following measures to stem the tides of violent communal conflicts in Ezillo in Ebonyi State.

- **Provisions of employment opportunity for the teeming unemployed youths to enable them engage their energies on positive productive ventures and contribute to nation building rather than distabilisation and violent activities.**
- **Aggressive capacity building of the unemployed youths through skill acquisition and empowerment through the provision of micro credit facilities to enable them start private businesses. This will give the youths self employments and make them employers of labour rather perpetual job seekers which predispose them to violent behaviors.**
- **Strengthening the border security network system to stem the tides of inflows and proliferations of arms and ammunitions into the country. There is the need to strengthen the cooperation among various security agents in the country to checkmate the inflows of arms along the borders.**
- **Establishment of community intelligent and security services to work hand in glove with the security agents to fish out the perpetrators and/or sponsors of violent communal conflicts.**
- **Establishment of state police to enhance rapid responses to out beak of violent communal conflicts and other violent crimes in the state.**
- **Increasing the number of security personnel, proper training and re-training and motivation of the security agents to meet up with the current security challenges facing the country.**
- **Government should develop the political will to arrest and delegantely prosecute and punish groups or individual who have covertly or overtly identified have any link to the sponsorship and/or promotion of violent communal conflicts in Ezillo.**
• Government should implement the recommendations of the reports of previous committee/panel of enquiries on other violent communal conflicts in the Ebonyi state. This will serve as a precautionary measure to those who may wish to engage in similar acts or behaviours in future.

REFERENCES