COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: AN EXAMINATION OF EZILLO AND EZZA-EZILLO CONFLICT OF EBONYI STATE, (1982-2012)

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Abstract
The paper undertook a comprehensive study of a wide range of issues involved in the protracted character of the fifty-two (52) year Ezillo-Ezza-Ezillo Communal conflict. The paper also underlined the systemic and overlapping cyclical nature of the conflict in terms of its causes. In the review of literature we tried to situate in proper perspective, by undertaking conceptual review of conflict, communal conflict and their causes. We reviewed conventional causes such as indigene-settler-problematic, socio-economic and political resources. Extant literatures are of the view that conflict are caused by a multivariable factors. Similarly, the indeterminate and imprecise definition of who is an indigene and who is not, coupled with the mistrust, rivalries that occasion the coexistence of the two social categories are the major conflict triggers in many Nigeria communities including Ezza-Ezillo- Ezillo. This much was also elaborated in the theoretical framework for the study which was anchored on the Marxist theory of conflicts and the pluralism theory. The main thrust being that the hostile relation usually inherent in societies are driven by differences in material resources and existence of groups and subgroups. Following from our review of extant literature and analysis, we discovered that issues such as indigenship, land ownership, cultural denigration, competition for resources and measures taken by the government managing the conflicts were responsible for the conflict. In view of these unresolved issues the paper proffered plausible recommendations.

Keywords: Communal Conflict, Violence, Indigene, Political Economy, Ezillo-Ezza-Ezillo and Federal Character.

Introduction
Conflict, generally is a reality of social relations. Conflicts at any level arise from divergences of interests, desires, goals and values aspirations in the competition for resources to meet imposing demands on social life in a defined socio-physical environment (Otite, 2001). As a matter of fact, Man in a socio-physical environment lives in continuous process of dependence and interdependence which often produces contradictions and conflicts.

Communal conflicts constitute one of the major recurring problems bedeviling the socio-political landscape of Africa. To be sure, communal conflicts are not new, particularly in socio-cultural complex societies defined by a high number of ethnic nationalities and language groups.
such as Nigeria. Pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria experienced inter-kingdom dynastic feuds, and inter-community conflicts (Ogban-Iyam, 2005). Many contemporary Nigeria communities have experienced several cases of communal conflicts. Some of the notable examples include the Zango-Kataf conflict in Kaduna State (1999-2001); Tiv-Jukun Wukari conflict in Taraba State(1999-2001); Itsekiri-Urhobo Warri crisis, (1999-2000); Yelwa-Shendam conflict (2003-2005), Mangu-Bokoss crisis(1988-1999), the Ife-Modakeke crisis (1999-2000) (Otite, et al, 1999; Imobighe et al, 2002; Ubi, 2001; Omotayo, 2005; Best 2007). One of the common features of these conflicts has to do with their confrontational and violent dimension which led to the loss of lives and property of people who hitherto lived together in relative harmony. The Ezillo-Ezza-Ezillo communal conflict has shown how communal co-existence could be ruptured with attendant disastrous consequences on the social, cultural and political life of the people.

Ezillo is one of the seven sub-ethnic communities in Ishielu Local Government of Ebonyi State. Ishielu L.G.A has a population of 151, 048 (NPC 2006) with one of the largest concentrations of sub-ethnic and dialectic groups in Ebonyi State. These sub-ethnic and dialectic groups are Agba, Ohofia-Agba (Ntezi dialect) Ntezi, Okpoto (Korri dialect), Ezillo (Ezillo dialect) Nkalagu, Nkalaha, Iyionu (Nkalaha), Azuinyaba (Ezza dialect). Within some of these sub-ethnic communities are Ezza-settler-communities eg. Ezza-Ezillo, Ezza-Nkalagu, Ezza Ogboji-in Azuinyaba.

Ezillo and Ezza Ezillo has population of 37022 (NPC 2006), Ezillo community is made up of seven villages namely (in order of seniority) Amofia, Amaleze, Umuakpaa, Umuezeoke, Amuhu and Amorie; The Ezza-Ezillo community in made up of two villages namely Umuezeoka and Umuezeokoha. Ezillo community is located at the North Southern fringe of Ishielu LGA and shares borders with Ngbo, Iyionu & Nkalagu communities in the North, Ntezi and Okpoto in the East and Inyaba in the south. Because of the strategic location of Ezillo across the Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway, it hosts both people and infrastructural facilities such as the Ezillo Farm Settlement, and the Ezillo Regional Water Scheme etc. There are several schools of thought on the origin of the Ezillo people. However, popular documented literature traced the origin of Ezillo to Mgbom Eze in Ishieke Izzi in the present Ebonyi, LGA and Ikwo LGA. According to this thought, the Ezillos and their Ezzangbo/Ngbo brothers regard Mgbom Eze as the ancestral father of Amaleze village in Ezillo. This ancestral brotherhood accounts for the sacred relationship between Ezillo and Ngbo on one hand and Izzi people on the other hand. Hence the abhorrence of bloodshed between these groups (Enuke 2010).

The Ezza-Ezillo people came from Ezza South & Ezza North LGAs of Ebonyi State on the invitation of the Ezillo people to settle a land dispute between them and their Ngbo neighbour at Egu-Echara in the early 1930s (Ugbo et al, 2008 and Memo to Peace Committee,2008). Ever since the end of the dispute, the Ezzas have continued to live amongst their host community, Ezillo. However, the relationships between the two groups have not been harmonious as it has degenerated to indigene-settler conundrum. Even though, there have been several episodes of conflicts in Ezillo since the last 52 years, but the confrontational phase occurred on 10th of May 2008, following an altercation between an Ezillo boy and an Ezza man over the erection of telephone booth at the Issinkpuma motor park. It is the confrontational nature of the conflict and the associated loss of life and property that motivated this study.

Conceptualising Communal Conflicts:

Iviento (1995), in his definition of communal conflict, underscored the importance of components like place, interaction and subsistence which provides an insight into the dynamics of communal life. For instance, people inhabit a geographic area, and work together in turn which provide opportunity for interaction, which engender conflict. Importantly, even the ubiquity of modern communication technology has not replaced the fundamental relationship between propinquity and interaction. In this regard, Mulin (1996) notes that conflicts in any social system
(society), result from differences in perception, limited resources, role conflicts, inequitable treatment, violation of territory etc.

Communal conflicts arise over the production and consumption of goods, socialization, social control, and social participation (Warren, 1978:99). Communal conflicts are therefore products of social relations. Communal conflicts are threat or action of one party directed at territory – rights, interests or privileges – of another party, because of differences over economic issues, power or authority, cultural values and beliefs (Robinson, 1989; Coleman, 1957). It has been posited in the literature that most communal conflicts are mainly economic issues of which land constitute about 90% (See Otite and Albert, 1999). The thesis then is “if community is place where people interact to meet their daily needs, then communal conflict takes place within a geographical area and relates to peoples’ interaction.

From the foregoing, there are salient, impinging critical variables that can be isolated. Importantly, conflicts are system driven at both social and physical levels. In other words, pluralism and divergences are fundamental to the development of conflict. But violent conflict inherent in the organisation and community deserve study as it can be functional and dysfunctional to the goal of development and so should be properly managed.

**Theoretical Framework**

Generally, there are many theoretical approaches that could be used in analyzing of phenomenon conflict. To this end, the theoretical and epistemological basis of our analysis encompasses a blend of different theories of conflict: Marxist theory of conflict, and the theory of pluralism. The two major thrust/philosophical focal premises are as follow:

I. There is a pathological strain between the nature of societies and the way they are structured which often leads to contested citizenship and national cohesion;

II. In post-colonial states, divided state conflicts are contingent upon territorial claims in a context of (i) cultural cleavages (ii) competition for highly valued, but relatively scarce, resources, including land, new administrative boundaries and headquarters, bureaucratic and political placement, infrastructures, trading opportunities, and other goods (iii) actual and perceived horizontal inequalities in access to diverse resources and (iv) state failure or mismanagement of inter-ethnic relations. (Nnoli 1980; Egwu 2004:406-443 & Mazrui 2008). However, for the purpose of this study, Marxist theory of conflict suffices.

Marxist theory of conflict is closely associated with the economic theory of conflict except for the structuralist emphasis on relationship between parties. In other words, the existence and endurance of conflicts are best explained in terms of economics because people in conflict are perceived to be fighting over something material (Usen 2008). Conflicts issues transform and undergo mutations overtime. These changes according to Bredal and Malone (quoted in Usen 2008), represent at the most basic level, a contest for control over economic assets, resources and system.

Marx critically reviewed the Hegelian philosophy of right which appeared in 1844 and found that material (economic) life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. In the words of Marx, “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being determine their consciousness” (Marx, 1968:181). Hence, dialectical materialism, as its defining method is characterized by:

1. Dynamic character of social reality
2. Inter-relatedness of different levels of structure
3. Primacy of material condition

Arguably, within every society, a well-placed small number of people (elites) wield absolute power to rule the masses for their own selfish interest, though the masses might benefit in the long run. Karl Marx and Fredrick Engel’s share this position in their work Manifesto of the Communist Party when they argued that the relationship between the bourgeoisie and proletariat
in a capitalist system is a relationship of domination of labour by capital despite the formal freedom and equality (Dyke, 1969:168).

The Marxist conflict approach derives from the assertion that social relations of production under capitalism generates two major and distinct classes in the society (Anugwom 2010: 37 – 51) the bourgeoisie class ie the dominant class (owners of the factors of production) and the proletarian one (the subordinate class who submit their labour to the former to earn a living). This social relation is inherently antagonistic and conflictual. Thus, there is always frictions and contestations over who gets what, when, and how. The basic tenets of the Marxist perspective are:

- That the fundamental preoccupation of man is survival and the security of material condition is primal to other conditions
- That the fundamental causes of conflict are rooted in the social relations of production-which include the production and distribution of basic requirements of social life-decidedly always in favour of the privileged class
- That the contradictions arising from the interests of the bourgeoisie class and the proletariat that is, class are conflict –generating.
- Peoples behaviour are primarily a reflection of social relationship of economic production (Akao, 1999: 21 -33; Ogban Iyam 2005; Anugwom 2009: 37 – 51).
- Groups maintain their own distinct cultural values, institutional patterns and political orientation.
- Each group tries at all times to maintain its exclusive identity,
- Quest to remain independent of other groups create perpetual friction among them,
- There are elements of domination and subordination in same social setting (see Otite 2001:1-2).

**Application of the Theoretical Framework**

The Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo conflict is aptly captured by the philosophical underpinning of the Marxist and pluralism theories. This is based on the interlocking and multivariate character of the conflict terms of the causes, the role of the state and the dysfunctional effects. If we isolate some of the critical tenets of the postulates raised by Marx such as the quest for survival and material condition, production and distribution, socio-economic, political resources and elite behaviour, we discover that the same issues have been germane and central to the Ezillo problematique, over time.

These are manifested in the intense struggle for the ownership of Ezillo and the taciturn reaction of the Ezillo people that strangers should not disposes them of their ancestral home land. Not to be left out is the alleged marginalization and discrimination by both parties in the distribution and allocation of resources which had always been skewed in favour and disfavour of the other parties, eg a creation of electoral wards, political appointments and development projects such as electricity, hospital and schools. These were the pertinent issues raised in their memoranda to the Ebonyi State Peace Committee on the Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo Conflict 2008 and also in response the questions put to them by the researcher.

Secondly, that the Ezzas would still stick and rather deeply festooned to their traditional, cultural heritage and other symbols of identity as revealed by the naming of Ezillo markets after their own names, and celebration of their New Yam Festival different from those of Ezillo demonstrates the potency of ethnic pluralism in communal setting. Even after cohabiting with their Ezillo host since the past 52 years, the Ezzas have maintained their socio-cultural identity and even display such to the consternation of their host communities. What is rather puzzling is the violent engagement of supposed two brothers. It is for this puzzle that the theory could be used as explanatory framework for the Ezillo conflicts.

**Causes of Communal Conflict among Nigeria Communities: The Ezillo Conflicts Cases**

Communal conflicts are caused by a multiplicity of factors as has been revealed in the literature, namely:
The Indigene and Settler Conundrum:

With a land area of about 923,768 square km which works out at about 1 person per 16.2 sq km, on the average based on a population of 150 million people, many of which are concentrated in the urban areas, (NPC 2006 census), it would appear that there is enough land space for every citizen to use for productive purposes. However, the contrary is the case. The indigene and settler conundrum is far wider than land space or its adequacy. Udo (1999) posits that Nigeria is largely a tribal society in which various ethnic groups lay claims to territories to the exclusion of other groups.

For emphasis, the contestation arising from the indigene-settler problematic stems from the conception, definition and perception of who is an indigene and who is not or who is a settler and what right does one have which the other should not have. The batch of identity also structures indigene-settler relations. Osaghae and Suberu (2005:27) define identity as “any group attributes that provides recognition, definitions, reference affinity, coherence and meaning for individual members of the group acting individually or collectively”. These values shape the attitude and behaviour of settler communities. According to Egwu (1999) and Best et al. (2001), the settlers import their culture and tradition into their new community to the discomfort of the host communities.

The settler (non-indigene) communities latch on the Constitutional provisions on human rights and the problem of definition of status to assert their rights in their places of settlement. For instance, many National Constitutions and Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees free movement, free association and ownership of property but at the same time enshrine the Principles of Federal Character and Quota System (FRN, 1999). On the other hand, Mandami, (2001: 4-22) opines that the history of migration before slavery, during slavery and after slavery makes yesterday’s immigrants today’s indigenes, and yesterday’s settlers today’s natives. Who qualifies as an indigene, a citizen or national of a particular place in Nigeria is an important debate especially in the spate of various violent conflicts which have affected thousands of lives, economic activities, and human development.

The Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, NIALS (2011) defines an indigene as a person who is a native (first people) to a territory as opposed to a settler (Later comer). Indices such as length of time, settlement in that location, exercises of control over the land and other resources in that location; successful effort at forging a sense of separate distinguishing identity defined indigenship. On the other hand, citizenship refers to nationality, the possession of formal legal membership in specific nation recognized under both international and domestic laws (Gibney 2006). The nexus between citizenship and indigenship creates an identity dilemma which often breeds hostile relationship between host communities and settler-communities as has been demonstrated in the Ezillo-Ezza-Ezillo conflict of Ebonyi state, the Tiv-Jukun conflict in Taraba state, and the Ijaw and Itskeri crisis in Delta State (See Ebonyi State Government White Paper, 2008; Best et al, 1991; Imobighe et. al, 2002).

The scenario poses strategic question on citizenship and multiculturalism: Is a person a citizen of a place of domicile, an indigene of a place of birth or both? Is it so, if the order of priority and loyalty is reversed? (Melemore,1981:1).This self and institutional dilemma breeds conflicts in human Relations. Nnoli (2003) posits that ethnic conflicts derive from the constriction between indigenship and citizenship in the 1979 and subsequent constitutions evident in such institutional requirements as, place of birth, quota, state of origin, catchment area, among others. The problem is compounded by the inability of the Settler or migrant communities to fully integrate themselves with the host indigene/native communities through acculturalisation. Rather what obtains is retribalization and marginal personality (see Osaghe, 2007 and Melemore,1981).The allegation and counter allegations of desecration of cultural symbol and tradition such as the naming of markets, schools in the dialect of migrant communities illustrate
this view clearly. (Memo to the Ebonyi State Government Peace Committee on Ezillo-Ezza conflict, 2008).

**Economic Resources (Land and Territory Issues in Conflict):**

Several studies reveal that a reasonable number of communal conflicts in Africa and Nigerian communities are traceable to land scarcity, territorial disputes and competition for the use of land resources. Dunmoye (2003) in a survey of conflicts in the Middle Belt zone of Nigeria traced the cause of communal conflict to land scarcity and boundary disputes, due to population pressure, alienation and concentration. However, the argument that land scarcity results into dispute flies in the face of other documented findings about the socio-economic and cultural values of land and territory as economic resources. Moreover, conflicts over land are antithetical to equity, justice in distribution, allocation and use of land based resources. The Akaeze and Osso Edda Oguzaraonweya conflicts of 2003, in Ebonyi State, Aguleri- Umuleri conflict in Anambra state and the Tiv- Jukun communal conflicts Taraba state are plausible example (see Ebonyi State Government White Paper, 2005; Best, 1998).

**Socio-Cultural Factors:**

The worship and reverence of traditional and cultural values - deities, shrines and ancestors are still rampant particularly in the rural communities. Otite (2001), notes that the world of ancestors is seen as the extension of the world of the living and that supernatural beings are part of the Nigeria system of thought. The use of kola nuts, pouring of libation and animal blood as rites of land agreement, and settlement of dispute are regular features of Igbo society.

Tradition and culture have been discovered as major conflict triggers, and transformers. This has to do with the sociology of settlement and settlement pattern and cultural diffusion in many ethnic groups in Nigeria. In the study of the Tiv-Jukun conflict, Best, et. al, (2001:825-117) revealed that the Tiv as the largest ethnic group in the Middle Belt Region were able to gain strong foothold in many communities in the zone because their language and culture permeated other culture thereby altering the sociology of those communities. Echiagu (1999) posits that the settlement pattern of the Ezzas and their war-like behaviour led to the invasion of lands of neighbouring sub-ethnic groups.

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’ artifacts, 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. (see Memo to the Ebonyi State Peace Committee on Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo Conflict, 2008)

**Political Factors:**

Politics interfaces all aspects of social life, justice, basic human rights, citizenship/ identity etc. Even so, and as been argued by several authors (such as Osaghae & Suberu, 2005; Bassey & Oshita, 2007; Okoli & Onah, 2002; Otite, 2001). Ofuebe, 2000; and Nnoli, 1980), the contradictions and contestations which are hallmarks of the Nigerian political system- pluralism, cultural diversity, ethnicity, quota system, and federal character principle (the national question) are in themselves conflctial. Moreover, conflicts inexorably arise over the dispensation, distribution and sharing of resources, particularly, the competition over access to these scarce resources etc (Otite, 2001, Best et. al, 2001; Bassey & Imobighie, 2007). Arguably, conflict is not so much about the scarcity of political resources than it is about perception of injustice, inequities – marginalization (Ofuebe, 1999, Oche, 2008).

In the case of Ezillo & Ezza-Ezillo, the two parties alleged political marginalization against one another. This is particularly the case whenever either party is in position of political authority. The Ezillos cited examples of such tendencies as the forceful acquisition of 12.3
hectares of land they donated for the construction of Offices for Federal Agencies like the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), National Population Commission (NPC), etc., and the attempt to create Izzo community within Ezillo community, all of which were carried out when Ezza people were at the helm of affairs. On the other hand, the Ezza’s alleged that they were being marginalized and denied infrastructural amenities because their Ezillo counterparts were occupying strategic positions in government.

**Recommendations**

From our treatise of the communal conflict in Ezillo-Ezza-Ezillo communities and based on the findings of the study, it is obvious that the factors of indigene settlers rights, land and the conflict for land, market space and autonomous communities (the quest for the equitable distribution and allocation of socio-economic and political resources) are the fundamental conflict triggers in the area. It was also revealed that the attitude of the parties to government conflict management policies such as judicial, quasi-judicial, traditional and coercive models were not quite efficacious and not warmly received by the two parties. Similarly, the conflict had dysfunctional effects on the development of the area.

The paper makes the following recommendations aimed at resolving the conflict to ensure sustainable development.

i. People driven management resolution mechanism (hybrid model) should be adopted. This should involve an integrated conflict management model - inclusive of broad spectrum of stakeholders- (the church, women, the youth and Elder councils) as against the 30 Peace man committee of persons made up of mainly traditional rulers and leaders of thought without regard to gender.

ii. There should be appropriate legislative enactment to deal with and define fairly and equitably the rights of citizens of a community including the status of such citizens. Moreso as it is difficult to pin in anthropological terms who is a settler or who is an indigene Economic and political rights should be clearly defined for citizens in all communities not just those in conflict.

iii. Robust, vibrant social communication and dialogue models should be put in place to bridge the current socio-cultural gaps noticeable in the area. This could be done through the activation of social networks such as clubs membership, sports, work place ties, alma mater ties etc.

iv. Government should ensure even spread of political appointments, socio-infrastructure amenities amongst the two warring communities through quota zoning and rotation system.

v. Those who lost lives and properties in the conflict should be compensated. Even as public properties such as primary and secondary schools, medical centers, markets should be rebuilt and scholarship and employment provided for the youths etc.

vi. All outstanding court cases and those in detention on account of the conflict should be withdrawn/released for meaningful dialogue to take place.

vii. Professional conflict mediators such as the Academic Associated Peace work AAPW, Institute of peace and conflict studies in the Universities should be engaged as better Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) organ.

**Conclusion**

The study undertook a comprehensive analysis of communal conflicts and their economic, socio-cultural and political underpinnings and has made cogent revelations underlining the causes of the Ezillo and Ezza – Ezillo conflict, the effects on the development of Ebonyi state generally and Ezillo in particular, and the role of the governments in managing and resolving the conflict. Indigene-Settler problems and Competition for Resources is responsible for the Conflict. This was subjected to test and the result showed that the issue of who is and who is not an indigene (settler) and competition for resources constitute a major factor in the conflict.
Majority of the respondents perceived indigene-settler problem of who owns Ezillo land as being responsible for the Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo communal conflict. This is affirmed by the following responses: Ezzas living in Ezillo had no boundary dispute with Ezillo as Ezillo has no boundary with Ezzas. Rather the Ezzas living in Ezillo land are claiming the ownership just as Ezillo people claim that they own Ezillo because it is their ancestral home. This finding corroborates Usman (2002) quoted in Maduagwu (2006: 26-45) observation that land disputes constitute the underlying issue in communal conflicts in the central state of Nigeria.

Similarly, an objective analysis of the memorandum submitted by both the Ezillo, and Ezza-Ezillo to the Ebonyi State Peace Committee on Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo conflicts, the text of a special broadcast by Governor Martin N. Elechi, on Thursday the 2nd day of October, 2008; the report of the Ebonyi State Peace Committee on Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo communal conflicts, as well as Verdicts of several court cases between Ezillo people and Ezza people instituted by either party, all corroborate the general view of the respondents sampled on causes of communal conflicts, and who owns Ezillo land. The excerpts of the Ebonyi state government decision on two key recommendations of the Peace Committee: (Special Broadcast by Governor Martin N. Elechi, of Ebonyi State Thursday the 2nd Day of October, 2008).

Ezillo people demanded that Ezza-Ezillo should completely vacate Ezillo land and the Peace Committee viewed such a request as unjustifiable on the ground that it was Ezillo people that invited the Ezzas to assist them fight their Ngbo rivals over a disputed parcel of land at Egu Echara. For peace to reign permanently at Ezillo, the Committee recommended that the Ezza-Ezillo should relocate to Egu Echara land originally allocated to them by Ezillo people through the customary method of land allocation (imabe ogbu). 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. To make it sufficient for the settlement and use of Ezza-Ezillo people, government decided to substantially increase the size of land from 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) at Latitude 06° 24’ 56.62” and longitude 07° 52’ 29.34” E and moving westward along the Old Road for a distance of 910.106 metres, the boundary of the land begins at a culvert on Offia-Atu stream on Latitude 06° 25’1446”N and Longitude 67° 50’40.32”E, making the land area being added to the Old Settlement Area by this new demarcation is 253.75 hectares, bringing the total land mass to be occupied henceforth by Ezza-Ezillo to 306.29 hectares up from the original 52.54 hectares.

Another fact that corroborates the general views of the respondents sampled on the causes of the communal conflicts on who owns Ezillo land is that, apart from cases pending at Abakaliki high court, all cases relating to land dispute since 1959 were decided in favour of the Ezillos (Memo submitted by Ezillo people to the Ebonyi State Peace Committee on the Ezillo and Ezza-Ezillo Communal Conflicts 2008).

In the same memorandum the Ezillo people further alleged as follows:

It is common knowledge that the relationship between Ezillo people and the Ezza settlers in their midst has not been cordial for a long time now because of the land grabbing tendencies of the latter, among other reasons. Had the Ezza settlers complied with the court judgments and quasi-judicial decision on these disputes which required them to vacate Ezillo land or approach Ezillo people for terms of their tenancy this unfortunate incident and other, before it could have been avoided. The then District officer Mr. O.P Gunning intervened by withdrawing the Ezzas from Eguechara and settling them temporarily at Egu Iteodo pending the resolution of the dispute and warned them against erection of any permanent structure or planting economic
trees at Egu Iteodo. It is unfortunate to note that the Ezzas instead of moving to
Egu Echara as agreed between them and Ezillo started scrambling for
and partitioning every available space of land in Ezillo to themselves and
bringing in their kinsmen from all parts of Ezza land into Ezillo without
recourse to Ezillo people.

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