

Valuing Reconciliation and Implications for Peaceful Co-existence among Feuding Ethnic Groups in Obi Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined conflicts among seven ethnic groups in Obi Local Government Area of Nasarawa State in North Central Nigeria. The objective was to understand their perception of reconciliation and what can be done to realize peaceful co-existence among them. The study design was survey, using both qualitative and quantitative instruments to elicit information from 216 respondents. The selection of respondents involved a combination of multi-stage sampling (selection of communities), systematic random sampling (selection of villages/settlements) and purposive random sampling (recently displaced returnees) techniques. We found that the ethnic conflict was not only intractable but also widespread, in different episodes, with damaging socio-economic and psychological impacts on community members. However, respondents opined that 'living in a multi-ethnic settlement', 'sharing same market', 'going to same place of worship', 'allowing their children to attend similar school', and cross-ethnic marriage', among others, can fast track the realization of peaceful co-existence. It strengthened the hypotheses of the 'need-based theory hypotheses' and the 'resource theory of social exchange'.

Key words: *Ethnic group, Fulani herdsmen, Peaceful coexistence, Reconciliation, Social exchange*

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Introduction

The concept of value has been variously defined (Schaefer, 2004) including a long list provided by Williams (1970). The definition that appears to be acceptable to many scholars is the one provided by Schaefer (2004, p.60) which, refers to values as “collective conceptions of what is considered good, desirable, and proper, or bad, undesirable, and improper, in a culture”. That definition drew variables from the earlier works of Talcott Parsons and Margaret Mead (Devine, 1972). From this understanding, values can be described as “standards and principles for judging the worth of things, people, object, ideas, actions and situations, to be good, worthwhile, or on the other hand, bad, worthless, despicable; or somewhere in-between these extreme” (Schouten, 1991, p.11). Sociologically speaking, values are directly related to the way people see other society members, as well as they relations to their environment. Depending on the culture and the acquisition process, some values are held very strongly that they interfere with objectivity of our perception. Within the reconciliation literature, valuation involves measuring the worth for “truth, justice, forgiveness, healing; and finding a way to live alongside” other ethnic groups once regarded as sworn-enemies “not necessarily to love them, or forgive them, or forget the past in any way, but to coexist with them” and develop a “degree of cooperation necessary to share” neighborliness, and live together better than separately (Fisher, 2012).

In conflict situations, where norms have broken down, life can be miserable especially for the poor. This observation speaks volume in North Central Nigeria, where this study is located. Incessant conflict between Fulani pastoralists and the farmers has elevated ethos of violence into sought after values. The conflict sub-culture created has turned the area into theatre of intractable conflict. The need for ‘reconciliation’ has been on the lips of everybody, yet reconciliation has remained elusive as seen by several failed attempts by government officials (Nathaniel, 2017). Understanding the underlying logic and causes(s) of reconciliation failure has been difficult. There is need to seek the inputs of ethnic groups’ members on what will make reconciliation possible, by understanding reconciliation from their own point of view. In order words, what socio-cultural and or religious characteristics do they share that can influence reconciliation? Since values are hard to observe directly, we infer them by interviewing ethnic group members on perceptions of available shared socio-economic, cultural and religious factors that can disarm conflict relation emotional barriers to peaceful co-existence. Suck knowledge can enable reconciliation to be upgraded from ‘mere wish’ that people talked and dreamt about to actualization.

How people value reconciliation therefore can be understood and structured into positive inter-ethnic relations. As Charles and Ikoh (2012) argued, a particular value can be described in terms of a *complex* concept, consisting of multiple elementary value concepts. In such instance, value

becomes a variable (along one or more definable scales of measure) which can be traded off to some degree, with other value levels. This is important in our context since inter-ethnic conflict is involved, and values that can help in reconciliation can be selectively interwoven under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Each ethnic group is shaped by a culture that seeks to protect ethnic identity and further ethnic relations (Bahry, Kosolapov, Kozyreva & Wilson, 2005). But even with such orientation, Spencer-Oatey (2008, p. 3) have argued that “culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behavior”. The point to note here is that ethnic culture may ‘influence’ but will not necessarily ‘determine’ how reconciliation is valued by individual ethnic group members. Besides, the three basic components of culture (things, ideas, and behavior patterns) can change or be modified, where warring members trade off some demands for peace (Hjort, 2004).

Casual observation of the different ethnic groups in the study area has shown that ordinary citizens who experienced conflict victimizations desired an end to the incessant crises. But their opinion and desire for reconciliation are hardly heard. It becomes necessary, therefore, to understanding their opinion on reconciliation and documenting their inputs. The significance of the findings may have both research and policy implications. Firstly, it is the first empirical study on these feuding ethnic groups that would collect bottom-up data on causes of conflict and reconciliation failure. It may therefore provide a baseline study for further research in the same area. Secondly, reconciliation helps in unifying a divided society and is a prerequisite for lessening destructive tensions. In this context the outcome may help in avoiding a relapse of the seemingly prevailing peace into violent conflict. As inter-ethnic conflict reduces, the economic wellbeing of the State may be improved through enhanced food production, and investors in solid minerals, which Nasarawa, is known for. Thirdly, the results of the study may provide inputs to government for sustainable reconciliation elsewhere in the state where inter-ethnic conflicts are being experienced.

The main theoretical argument in this work is drawn from the needs-based theory (Nadler & Shnabel, 2015) and the resource theory of social exchange (Foa & Foa, 1976). In the context of the need-based theory, being a victim is associated with a threat to one's status and power, whereas being a perpetrator threatens one's image as moral and socially acceptable. In order to counter these threats, victims must restore their sense of power, whereas perpetrators must restore their public moral image. A social exchange interaction in which these threats are removed would enhance the parties' willingness to reconcile. Relying on this, the resource theory explained that parties in conflict have something of values that they can exchange and or share, which are useful to them. Exchange of such things as love, status, information, money, goods, and service are resources that can facilitate the realization of a “trustworthy positive relations between former adversaries” as well as a “secure social identities and interact in an equality-based social environment” (Nadler, 2012, p. 294).

Study location

Obi is one of the 13 Local Government Areas in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Its headquarters is in the town of Obi. It has a land mass of 967 km² and a population of 148,874 as at the 2006 census. The 2015 population projection put the population at 194,800. Seven ethnic groups, viz: Migili, Alago, Eggon, Tiv, Gwandara, Kambari, and Fulani dominate the population. Each ethnic group lives in proximity of large and small villages, as well as farm settlements. Identity is effectively formed not by indigene-ship of Obi LGA, but by ethnicity and religious affiliation. As the incessant conflict engender mistrust and fear among the people, identity is further being narrowed, and each ethnic group tends to intensify internal cohesion.

Conflict among the ethnic groups centered on 'resource-control economy'. The resource is the land, which is needed by both the predominantly farming-ethnic groups: Migili, Eggon, Kambari, Gwandara, Alago and the Tiv; and the Fulani pastoralists. The land becomes a contest for on it depends the economy of farming and cow survival. It is being exacerbated by ecological resource conflict (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). Until recently, the conflict used to have two phases: one between the predominantly farming ethnic groups, due to struggle on who should own which portion of land, and suspicion of expansionist tendencies; and two, the Fulani cattle herders and the farming ethnic groups due to grazing on farms and the destruction of crops. The third phase of the conflict takes the form of some farming ethnic groups teaming up with the Fulani to attack other farming ethnic group. In recent years, the conflict has gone lethal as Fulani herdsmen have taken to the use of more sophisticated weapons and mercenaries. In retaliation, farmers have also resorted to the use of local vigilante groups (Nathaniel et al, 2017). The complexity of the conflict is not only its incessant occurrence, but also the choice of opponents in each of the different episodes. At one time the conflict may occur between the Eggon and the Alago, or between the Tiv and the Fulani; and at another time between the Alago/Fulani and Eggon, spanning different month with different justifications. As the crisis keep evolving and changing opponents, it has created a conflict trap, with generation of unforgiveable opponents. Each time a phase ended, warring sides count losses that include materials and human lives.

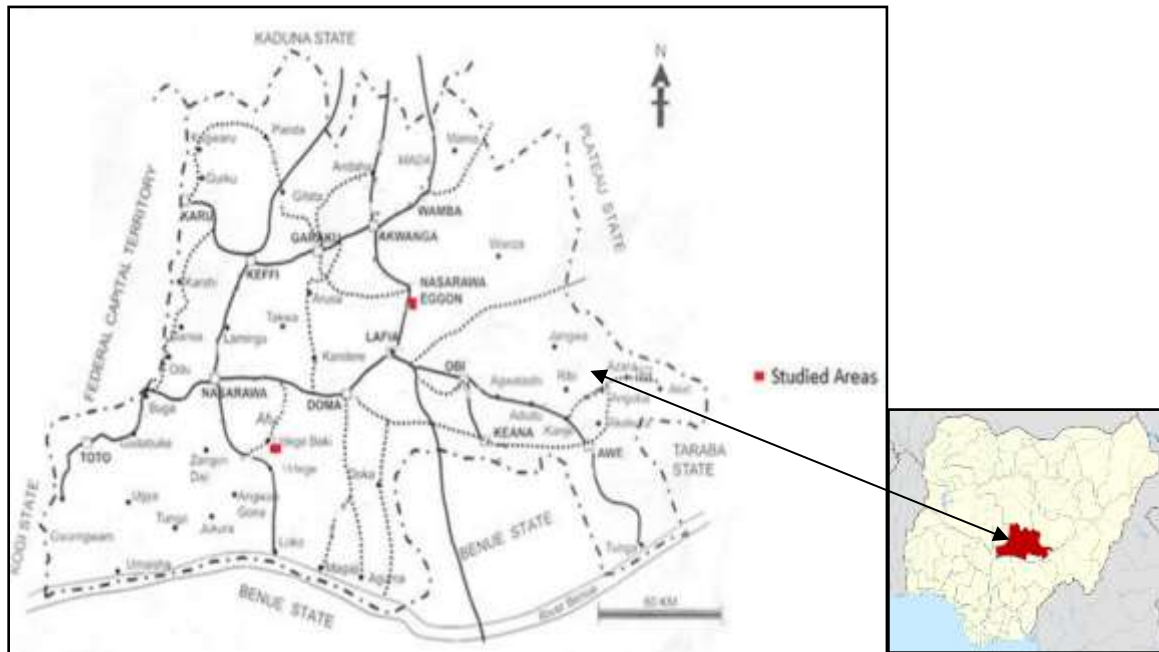


Fig. 1: Map of the Nasarawa state, Nigeria, showing the study area (Obi LGA)

Literature

Reconciliation is a new concept in the social science discourse having come into international focus only in 1984 during the Argentinean Truth Commission. The concept is reconstructed from the Latin words: *re + conciliare*, which suggests “put together” or “to unite” (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004). In Galtung’s (2001) analysis, the concept of refers to “closure and healing”; closure in the sense of not reopening hostilities and healing in the sense of being rehabilitative. In order to operationalize the concept of reconciliation out of its abstract nature, Bloomfield (2006, p.13) defined it an “over-arching process which includes the search for justice, truth, forgiveness, healing and so on”. In this context reconciliation makes forgiveness and hence peaceful co-existence possible. Many authors have sought to differentiate between forgiveness and reconciliation, arguing that the two involve very different actions (Pharm, Vinck, Stover, Moss, Wierda and Bailey, (2007). While forgiveness requires an emotional transformation in the individual victim but no change in the perpetrator and may result in forgetting, reconciliation builds on a mutual undertaking and commitment from both sides to acknowledge the past and build more constructive relationships for the future (Kritz, 1995; Brounéus, 2003). Parties in reconciliation therefore resort to mutual recognition and acceptance (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004), by changing hostile attitude to friendliness and believing that in peaceful co-existence, the interest of one another can be promoted, protected and secured. In this context, reconciliation seeks to make restoration of friendship and harmony between rival sides possible. It transforms the relations between rival sides from hostility and resentment to friendly and harmonious relations (Bloomfield, 2006). From this perspective, Kelman (2001) concluded that reconciliation can be regarded as an outcome, a goal which can be met.

Several other scholars have provided explanation for the concept of reconciliation. For instance, Brounéus (2003, p.3), referred to reconciliation as a “societal process involving mutual acknowledgment of past suffering and the changing of destructive attitude and behaviour into constructive relationships toward sustainable peace. Following this submission Bar-Tal, (2000, p. 360) defined reconciliation as “a psychological process for the formation of lasting peace”. In this context “lasting peace” implies building or rebuilding relationships today that are not haunted by the conflicts and hatreds of yesterday (Hayner, 1996). Reconciliation can therefore be regarded as “a process through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future” (Bloomfield, et al, 2003, p. 4).

Despite the promises and the usefulness of reconciliation, several attempts at reconciling warring communities often failed (LeVine & Campbell (1972). Scholars have found that ethnocentric attitude, which entails in-group favourability bias often thwarts reconciliatory efforts (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood & Sherif, 1961). Ethnocentrism lies at the core of conflict escalation. Thus, where inter-group conflicts arise, each of the parties may tend to perceive itself in a favourable way, which leads to the praising of own group and to the perception of being more virtuous than the adversary.

In an empirical work, Bar-Siman-Tov (2004), found that ethnocentric attitudes constitute constraints for warring groups to acknowledge the negative consequences of their actions and their responsibilities during the conflict as well as acknowledging the fact that the conflict has caused suffering to both parties. In another study, Brewer (2007) observed that ethnocentrism incites a negative image of the other side that may favour hostility, hatred and violence. Such ethnocentric tendencies prevent conflicting parties from offering apologies and forgiveness, and thus prevent the restoration of harmonious relationship.

Scholars like Lederach (1997) and Galtung (2001) have recorded and analyzed the ethnocentric display of some warring communities and warned that for reconciliation to take place, ethnocentric sentiment must be put aside. In furthering such argument, Martha (1998) observed that reconciliation can only be built on mutual undertaking and commitment from both sides. This suggests that both parties to reconciliation must acknowledge the past to build more constructive relationships for the future. For instance, Philpot & Hornsey (2008) wrote about the Japanese brutalities during the World War II, and observed that a public apology offered by the Japanese for the massacre of Australian prisoners of war received considerable media attention, and was a welcome strategy that helped in the reconciliation. However, Rotberg (2000) observed that while it did have a positive effect in conveying remorse and was more effective than no apology, it failed to promote forgiveness. In his opinion forgiveness remains a crucial step in the path toward reconciliation.

In their work, Long and Peter (2002) found a convergence between reconciliation and forgiveness in what they called the “reconciliation events”. The events which they argued are symbolic in all negotiations that brought forgiveness consists of “meeting between leaders and or senior representatives of the former opposing factions; a public ceremony, covered by witnesses and the

media; and ritualistic or symbolic behaviour that indicates shared promises”. Ericson (2001, p. 34) agreed with their submission but added that forgiveness-induced reconciliation must target the three pillars of conflict triangle. The triangle includes conflict behaviour, conflict attitude, and conflict structure. Conflict behaviour involves “replacing the ethos of violence with ethos of peace; it suggests finding ways to end armed conflict and restore shattered relationships” while conflict attitude consists of “challenging stereotypes, misperceptions and beliefs, and enhancing understanding and trust”. Conflict structure, on the other hand has to do with “transforming asymmetric power relations”. Reconciliation effort must target the three pillars if it does not want a re-occurrence of violence (Bloomfield, et al, (2003).

Targeting the conflict triangle requires a willing negotiating attitude. This is a process in which the willingness to seek out and fulfill the common interests of all sides involved in the conflict is brought to bear. Fisas (2004) highlights three aspects of the negotiating process: the conviction that any achievement is better than prolonging the existing situation. In this circumstance, satisfaction is sought by all parties, and each party is likely to make concessions. Negotiating is an important step towards the restoration of the social order and peace, but according to Long and Peter (2002), it is not enough on its own. Other variables have to be considered as well. This other variable includes trust, an element that enables the frames of polarization between the parts to be modified. In Davidson, McElwee and Hannan (2004) and Kelman ‘s (2001) findings, trust is a condition which increases the possibilities of reconciliation and the resolution of conflicts. This is because trust can help to create a vision of the future among former opponents and enable them to know what they must do for the goal of reconciliation to be achieved.

Theory

From the conceptual explanation we have focused on reconciliation as “a societal process that involves mutual acknowledgment of past suffering and the changing of destructive attitudes and behaviour into constructive relationships toward sustainable peace” (Brounéus, 2003, p 54). This follows the needs-based model of reconciliation which anchors its argument on the idea that following a crisis in which one side has been victimized by another; both the victim and the perpetrator are deprived of certain unique psychological resources. This deprivation brings about different emotional needs in victims and in perpetrators, and until these needs are satisfied, they serve as barriers to reconciliation (Nadler & Shnabel, 2015).

The need-based theory hypothesized that “victims and perpetrators experience differential identity threats and are consequently motivated to restore their agency and moral image; and empowering and accepting messages from the out- group can remove the threats to victims’ and perpetrators’ identities and increase their readiness for reconciliation” (Nadler & Shnabel, 2015, p. 35). In the context of the need-based theory, therefore, a social exchange interaction in which these threats are removed would enhance the parties' willingness to reconcile. On the other hand the resource theory of social exchange (Foa & Foa, 1976) argued that parties in conflict have something of values that they can exchange and or share, which are useful to them. Exchange of such things as love, status, information, money, goods, and service can facilitate the realization of a “trustworthy

positive relations between former adversaries” (Nadler, 2012, p. 294). Reconciliation is therefore facilitated when victims and perpetrators receive needed emotional “commodities” through post-conflict interactions.

Using the terminology of resource theory, Foa and Foa (1976, p. 16) defined “resource as anything that can be transmitted from one person to another”. The definition included social transactions as “a smile, a check, a haircut, a newspaper, a reproachful glance, and a loaf of bread”. In order to avoid creating a long list, the authors classified resource into six categories: love, status, information, money, goods, and service. Each of the categories contains certain social goods. For instance, while “Love” is an expression of affectionate regard, warmth, or comfort; “Status” indicates an evaluative judgment that conveys prestige, regard, or esteem. On the other hand, “information” includes advice, opinions, instruction, or enlightenment, while “money” regarded as any coin, currency, or token seeks to measure some standard unit of exchange value. “Goods” remain as tangible products, objects, or materials; and “Service” involves activities that affect the body or belongings of a person that often constitute labor for another. In a model analysis the authors (p.18) demonstrated the influence of Parson’s (1951) particularism versus universalism and Blau’s (1961) intrinsic and extrinsic rewards in the classification of the resources.

Deprivation of the above resources leads to a corresponding motivational state in which the individual experiences his or her deprivation as a need that must be fulfilled. In the context of our study the theories suggest that something of values belonging to the feuding ethnic groups have been threatened (maybe farmland, crops, cattle, etc); many others have been deprived through conflict victimizations. Ability to understand these threats and deprivation, and what can be given off in exchange for peace may provide clues to factors that constraint reconciliation.

Method

Respondents were drawn from 7 different ethnic groups that live in Obi LGA based on proportional representation. Since the ethnic groups speak different languages (with Hausa language as the lingua franca), it was easy to identify and locate them in the different villages and settlements where they lived.

Participants

Two hundred and sixteen (216) respondents participated in the study, including 129 male and 87 female, aged 18 – 50 years (mean age = 32.52 years). A multi-stage sampling strategy was used in the selection of communities. Thereafter we used systematic random sampling techniques to select the villages/settlements, and then the households. At the time of the survey some of the residents were trying to complete the re-building of their houses from the building materials given to them by the State government following the 2016 crises between Eggon and Fulani ethnic groups. In Eggon and Fulani communities, therefore, we purposively encouraged the returnees to participate in the FGDs. In all, 134 respondents were administered questionnaire, 56 participated in FGDs, 26 in in-depth interviews, and 5 in key informant interviews. The distribution is shown in Table 1 below.

Instruments and Procedure

Data were collected from all respondents by the researchers and trained field assistants. At the preliminary stage of the survey community elders and leaders were consulted and briefed about the objectives of the survey and were solicited of their cooperation. We repeated this during the validation of instrument and emphasized the fact that “participation in the study was voluntary”. The main instrument used in the study included questionnaire, in-depth interview (IDIs), focus group discussion (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KII). Questionnaires were administered door to door based on the systematic selection of house-hold heads.

In-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted on ethnic groups’ leaders and community elders. Each of the community (consisting of group of villages and or settlements) has elders (called *Mai-angwa*) and leaders of ‘Ethnic Associations’. While the *Mai-angwas* are recognized as the head of the community who take charge of the day-to-day affairs including settling disputes and quarrel among the villagers, the leaders of the ethnic association are responsible for coordination of social activities, and meetings of ethnic group’s members including gathering members for common interest. Such coordination is within and beyond their community, including linking them in case of problems that need financial and material assistance. Their participation in the study was for the purpose of understanding factors that influence incessant conflicts among ethnic groups in Obi LGA; understanding factors behind reconciliation failures and what can be done to achieve reconciliation in the community. Twenty-one (21) leaders were interviewed as part of the study.

Focus group discussions (FGDs): This instrument helped to understand general community-level definitions of reconciliation as well as their expectation, and victimization experience. It presented views and experiences across gender divide, including the views of the youth and youth leaders (regarded in the community as foot-soldiers). Participants in the FGDs included men and women (married and single). In all, seven FGDs (consisting of 8 participants each) were conducted during the study.

Key informant interviews: To find out more about reconciliation failures and incessant conflicts in the study area, five Councilors representing different political wards (the smallest political unit recognized by government) in Obi Local Government Council were interviewed. Their information help to know in detail effort of past reconciliation trials, and to verify suspicion of religious and political manipulations, as well as know those factors that can facilitate reconciliation in the community.

Measures

A wide range of variables related to concepts that seek to measure socio-demographics, causes of conflicts in the study area, conflict victimization experience, consequences of conflict experience, valuation of reconciliation, and suggestions towards realization of sustainable peaceful co-existence were assessed. Measures were either developed for the research or taken directly from Hjort (2004) and Pharm et al (2007) and modified based on existing scale. For many variables the

scales were nominal (1= Yes, 0 = No) and ordinal ranging from 1(not very effective), 2 (not effective), 3 (effective) and 4(very effective). The coding of scale is reported in Table 1.

Socio-demographic variables: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents included age, gender, and marital status. Gender was measured as female = 1, male = 0, while marital status (single, married, co-habit, divorced, and widow/widower) was nominally coded on a scale of 1 – 5. The age range of respondents included ≤ 20 years (1.49%), 21 – 25 years (21.64%), 26 – 30 years (13.43%), 31 -35 years (32.09%), 36 – 40 years (14.185), 41-45 years (8.96%) and 46 years and above (7.46%). The Mean and standard deviations of the socio-demographic variables are reported in Table 1.

Involvement in conflict and causes of conflicts variables: This was meant to assess inter-ethnic group conflict among the respondents. Although the frequency of conflict (in terms of time frame) was not assessed, the question elicited responses on inter-ethnic conflicts within the LGA and the causes of the fighting. The question was an open-ended one and respondents were at liberty to mention the ethnic groups they have fought with and the causes of the conflicts.

Conflict victimization experience variables: To measure conflict victimization experience, respondents were asked: *do you or anybody you know suffered the following victimization during the incessant crises in Obi LGA?* List of victimization was provided where respondents were asked to tick as many. They were also asked to mention other types of victimization(s) they know which was/were not provided for in the questionnaire.

Consequences of conflict experience: These were assessed as a way of finding out the impacts of conflicts on inter-ethnic relations (social and business) and safety. The questions were nominally measured and so enable researchers to find out the level of inter-ethnic groups' fear and prejudice with respect to 'avoidance', 'continuation of inter-ethnic groups' friendship', 'inter-ethnic marriage', 'willingness to take revenge', 'hatred', and 'lingering memory of useful relationships before the conflicts. The indicator on business relations (trust) was measured on 'yes' and 'no'; while perception of safety was grouped into seven categories: 'walk around in the night', 'going to farm', 'sleeping at night', 'going to nearest town or village', 'nearest market', 'meeting strangers', and 'stop a Fulani herdsman'.

Reconciliation Valuation: The worth of reconciliation was assessed using three subscales: meaning of reconciliation, desire for reconciliation, and readiness to accept reconciliation. In order to value reconciliation we operationalized the concept into 'renewing of friendship', 'absence of violence', 'unity and cooperation', 'freedom from worry', and 'forget/forgive' earlier developed by Deng, et al, (2015) and asked respondents to rate them on a scale of 'yes' and 'no'. Additionally, respondents were asked to rate their (a) desire for reconciliation, and (b) readiness to accept reconciliation. Certain theoretical understanding informs the adoption of the desire-readiness variables. Both the need-based and the resource exchange theories emphasized improved inter-groups relations in reconciliation; and that such change must first come from within the conflicting individuals. It is a way of measuring shift in behavior from one influenced by ethnic conflict and conflict subculture to one influenced by the willingness to embrace reconciliation and adopt

peaceful co-existence. The ‘desire for reconciliation; and ‘readiness to accept reconciliation’ were measured on a 3-point Likert scale [how would you rate your desire for reconciliation with other groups you fought with?; (3 = very desirable, 2 = fairly desirable, and 1= not at all)] and [how ready are you to accept reconciliation?; (3 = very ready, 2 = fairly ready, and 1 = not at all)].

Existence of socio-cultural and religious variables in facilitating reconciliation: This was meant to assess and measure socio-economic, cultural, and religious variable valued across the ethnic groups that can be used in social transaction. This was adapted from both the “resource exchange theory (which sees reconciliation as an act of social exchange). Effectiveness of achieving reconciliation through sharing and or participating in activity-exchange involving multi-ethnic settlement, living as close neighbours, sharing farmland, going to same market, same church, same mosque, children going to same school, having same source of water, cross ethnic marriage, and payment of traditional ransom (*diya*) were rated by respondents on a scale ranging from *not very effective* (1) to *very effective* (4).

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of some descriptive variables

Variables	Ethnic Groups %							Total
	Migili	Fula ni	Alag o	Eggo n	Tiv	Gwandar a	Kamb ari	
Sample size	15.28	17.1 3	18.5 2	11.57	13.4 3	12.96	11.11	216
Mean Age (Std Deviation)	29.19 (8.68)	32.2 3 (8.68)	31.6 4 (7.73)	33.00 (7.64)	33.1 7 (98.6)	35.50 (6.83)	35.92 (8.65)	
Gender								
Male	53.30	84.5 0	52.7 0	58.30	53.6 0	72.50	61.32	129
Female	46.70	15.5 0	47.7 0	41.40	46.4	27.50	38.68	87
Marital Status								
Single	14.29	7.69	14.2 9	23.08	11.1 1	12.50	8.33	27
Married	66.67	84.6 2	57.1 4	61.54	66.6 7	62.50	66.67	132
Co-habit	4.76	0.00	7.14	7.69	5.56	0.00	8.33	8
Divorce	9.52	0.00	7.14	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4
Widow/Widower	4.76	7.69	14.2 9	7.69	16.6 7	25.00	16.67	45
Instrumentation								
Questionnaire	15.67	19.4 0	20.9 0	9.70	13.4 3	11.94	8.96	134

In-depth interview	14.29	14.2 9	14.2 9	14.29	14.2 9	14.29	14.29	21
Focus Group	14.29	14.2 9	14.2 9	14.29	14.2 9	14.29	14.29	56
Key Informant	20.00	0.00	20.0	20.00	0.00	20.00	20.00	5
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Results

The conflict situation and causative factors

Inter-ethnic conflict in Obi LGA is not only incessant but has taken a lethal dimension in recent time. Beside massive displacement of people, majority of whom usually run to Lafia, the State capital, to take refuge, destruction of farms and crops are always recorded with negative consequences on food production. Since majority of the people are farmers, they earn their income from farm produce; the destruction of farms therefore means little or no income. For household heads who are bread winners for their family, lack of sources of livelihoods may exert negative multiplier effect on children's schooling, feeding, and health. Many of those affected by the incessant conflicts have often returned from hiding to find their houses burnt and destroyed beyond recognition; many others who cannot return for fear of reprisal have relocated to other places, while some still live with relations in Lafia, the state capital.

In order to find out the conflict situation in Obi LGA respondents were asked to mention the ethnic groups they have fought with and the cause(s) of the fight. Based on the responses of respondents we model the conflict situation as shown in Figure 1 below. While the double arrow shows ethnic groups in conflict, the single arrow points to the causative factors of conflict. The common causes of conflict were farm disputes and crops' destruction. Apart from the Fulani ethnic group who rear cattle, the rest are predominantly farmers. Disputes over farmland and the extent to which a particular ethnic group should farm periodically generate into intense conflict. Accusations and counter accusations of settler-indigene-ship are often raised to argue which ethnic groups have the right to farm which land and which portion.

In time past the Fulani used to be pastoral with active present during the dry season. This is no longer so with intense desertification in the core north due to climate induced ecological distortion. They have come not only to settle but also to continue with their major occupation: cattle rearing. Respondents complained that the cattle are not only grazing on their farmland but also destroying their crops due to poor guide and control of the Fulani herdsmen. In many instances, the farmers react by attacking the herdsmen and the cattle. Complaint of crops' destruction was common among all the ethnic groups except by the Fulani, and was a major cause of conflict between the Fulani and all other six ethnic groups in the study area.

Figure 1 depicts that conflict is not only common but incessant among the ethnic groups. For instance, the Fulani and the Eggon have had a fair share of the inter-ethnic conflicts fighting with all other ethnic groups in the area. Except for the Migili who are yet to fight with the Alago, the Tiv and the Kambari, conflict situation was reported between the Alago and the Tiv as well as with the

Kambari. For now the Tiv are at peace with the Gwandara, but their complaint of discrimination based on indigene-settler dispute suggests the existence of an uneasy relationship, as earlier observed by Alubo (2015).

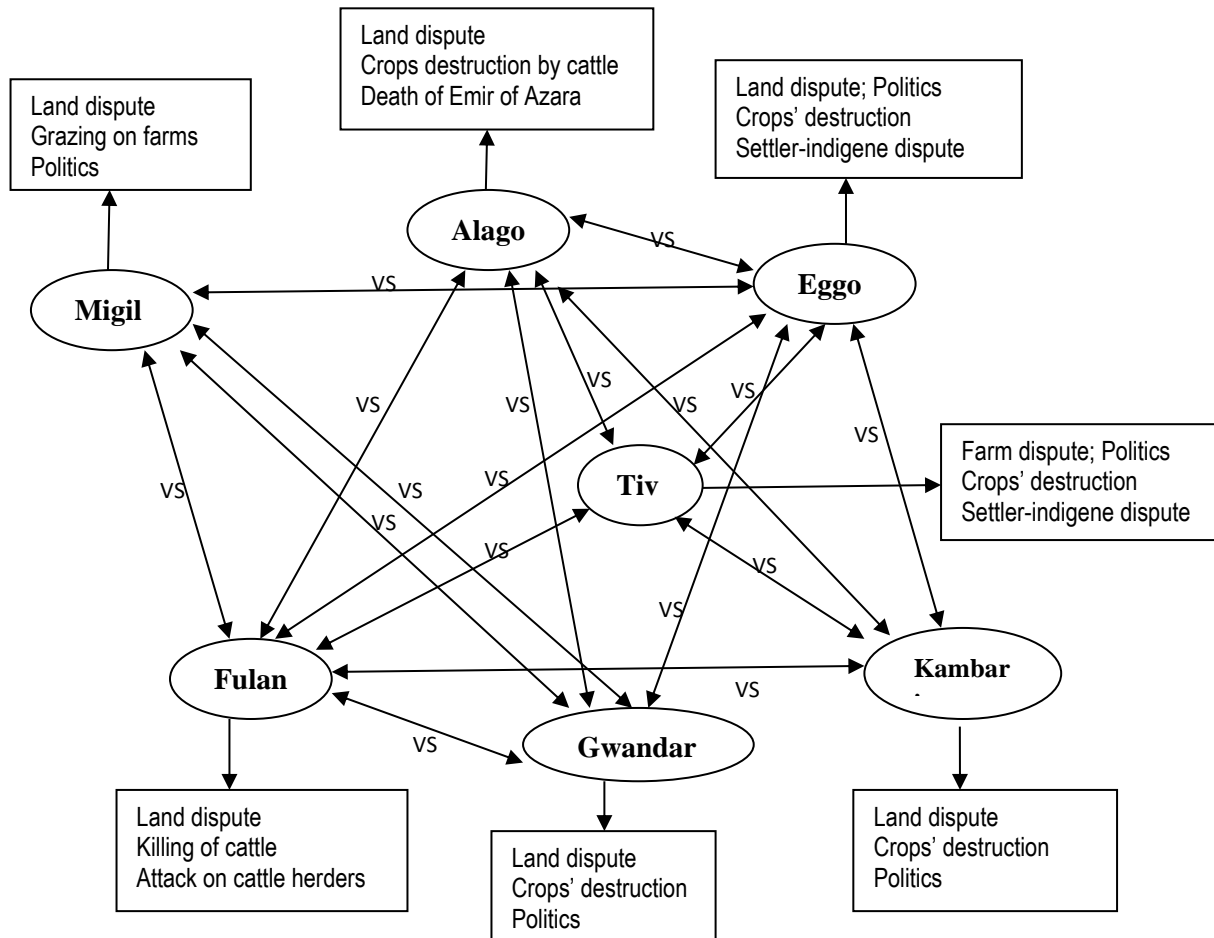


Fig. 1: Conflict situation in Obi LGA with double arrow indicating conflict relations and single arrow indicating causes of conflict

Conflict victimization experience

Data on conflict victimization experience seek to record pains of conflict suffered by the different ethnic groups in the area. As shown in Table 2 all the ethnic groups reported pains of conflict victimization that was above the community mean average of 8.90. The impact was mostly felt among the Alago (mean = 19.77) and least by the Eggon (mean = 8.77). Majority of the respondents (118 or 88.06%) were displaced during the conflicts. Alago people and the Fulani (20.34% vs. 16.96%) were likely to report internally displacement more than members of other ethnic groups. Destruction of property was also reported by 105(78.36%) of the respondents. The between groups' observation revealed that no ethnic group was immune from property destruction

which ranged from 10.48% among Tiv and Kambari respectively to 24.76 among the Alagos. Following property destruction was the destruction of houses, which was significantly elevated among respondents of Alago extraction.

Ethnic conflicts in the area are no longer fought with bows and arrows with machetes, but with sophisticated rifles including assault rifles like AK 47. Respondents (74.12%) reported conflict scenario that exhibited war related fighting. This suggests to a large extent the destruction of lives, farms, crops and animals during the conflicts. As Nathaniel (2017) observed, the Fulani cattle herders bear arms even in broad day light and usually hired machineries whenever conflict break out. Such warlike situation also accounts for aggravated assaults. Other than those killed (92 or 68.66%), many others sustained injury (61.19%), which was significantly reported by Alago, Tiv and the Migili.

Table 2: Conflict victimization express by ethnic group members in Obi LGA

Victimization experience	Ethnic Groups %							Total
	Migili	Fulani	Alago	Eggon	Tiv	Gwandara	Kambari	
Forced to run away	14.41	16.95	20.34	10.17	12.25	12.71	10.17	118
Witnessed war related fight	16.67	11.76	19.61	9.80	17.65	12.75	11.76	102
Witnessed family member /friend killed	16.28	12.79	19.77	8.14	12.79	17.44	12.79	86
Farm destroyed	15.31	13.67	22.45	11.22	13.27	14.29	10.20	98
Animal killed	15.66	15.55	21.69	9.64	12.05	14.46	10.84	83
House destroyed	13.86	12.87	23.76	12.87	9.90	14.85	11.88	101
Property destroyed	17.14	11.43	24.76	11.43	10.48	14.29	10.48	105
Seriously injured	15.22	14.13	18.48	10.87	16.30	14.13	10.87	92
Family member injured/maimed	12.20	6.10	21.95	8.54	20.73	17.07	13.41	82
Family member killed	13.41	15.85	19.51	7.32	17.07	13.41	13.41	82
Family member disappeared	17.46	11.16	17.46	6.45	14.29	15.87	17.46	63
A friend killed	10.99	14.29	25.27	7.69	15.38	14.29	12.09	91

Threatened with death	15.73	9.18	23.60	7.87	16.85	14.62	11.24	89
Mean rating	13.69	16.08	19.77	8.77	13.46	14.08	10.85	8.90

Consequences of conflicts on inter-ethnic relations in Obi LGA

The impacts of the conflict were assessed with respect to inter-ethnic relations (social and business) and perception of safety by ethnic groups' members. The findings are summarized in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

Conflicts and social relations: Assessment of the impact of the conflicts on social relations revealed both positive and negative outcomes. The positive outcomes were seen in terms of memories of 'good friendship enjoyed across ethnic groups in the community before the outbreak of the conflicts' and the 'willingness to engage in inter-tribal marriage'. Report of having enjoyed supportive friendship in the past from other ethnic groups in the community was very common among the Migili and the Fulani. One FGD confirmed that such supportive friendship informed why the Fulani decided to settle in the area, before "they let loose their cattle on farms in the name of grazing" (FGD in Tiv). Inter-ethnic marriage was highly supported by the Migili and the Gwandara. Encouraging friendship across the ethnic group may help in sustainable reconciliation. In Fisher's (2012) analysis, personal friendship with an out-group member can bring about tolerance toward out-groups in general and reduced ethnocentric pride.

Table 3: Assessment of interpersonal relationship among feuding ethnic groups in Obi LGA

Interpersonal relationship variables	Ethnic Groups %							Total
	Migili	Fulani	Alago	Eggon	Tiv	Gwandara	Kambari	
Avoidance	18.07	19.28	15.66	12.05	13.25	12.05	9.64	83
Don't talk with them	11.43	20.00	14.29	11.43	14.29	11.43	17.14	70
Broken off relationship	21.28	12.77	25.53	12.77	25.53	2.13	2.13	47
Can marry from them	20.00	10.91	14.55	12.73	5.45	20.00	16.36	55
Will take revenge	25.93	29.63	18.52	7.42	7.41	7.41	3.70	27
Talk about them in a bad way	12.00	28.00	16.00	9.33	17.33	13.33	4.00	75
Had received helps from them before	19.05	17.86	14.29	9.52	9.52	16.67	13.10	84

However, pains of conflict victimization experience were still taking tolls on inter-ethnic social relations. More than a halve of the respondents (83 or 61.94%) had ‘avoided’ people from other ethnic groups. Avoidance was significantly elevated among the Fulani (19.28%) and the Migili (18.07%). Following this was refusal to communicate with people from opposing ethnic groups. Such hatred was mostly reported by the Fulani and the Kambari ethnic groups. Although very few respondents (47 or 35.07%) refused to ‘re-open contact’ with their friends in other ethnic groups because of the conflict, taking revenge was the least option by community members (27 or 20.14%), especially among the Kambari (3.70%) as opposed to the Fulani (29.63%). Social relations were negatively affected by ‘hate words’ as 75 (53.57%) of the respondents said, ‘they talked about opposing ethnic groups in a bad way’.

Conflict and business relations: Surprisingly the rating of ‘trust’ among ethnic group members exhibited a balance on a nominal scale of ‘yes and no’. Although this finding confirms the intractable nature of the conflict, it also suggests that ‘trust’ was a variable to work hard for, as some level of friendship across the ethnic groups were still possible. It confirms the earlier findings in table 3 of existing memory of positive friendship. In a predominantly farming community trust is needed to avoid suspicion of theft of farm produces that are usually harvested and preserved on barns in the farms; ‘trust’ is needed to know that cattle will not be let loose on the crops. Most importantly ‘trust’ is needed to do engage in business of selling and buying in the same market.

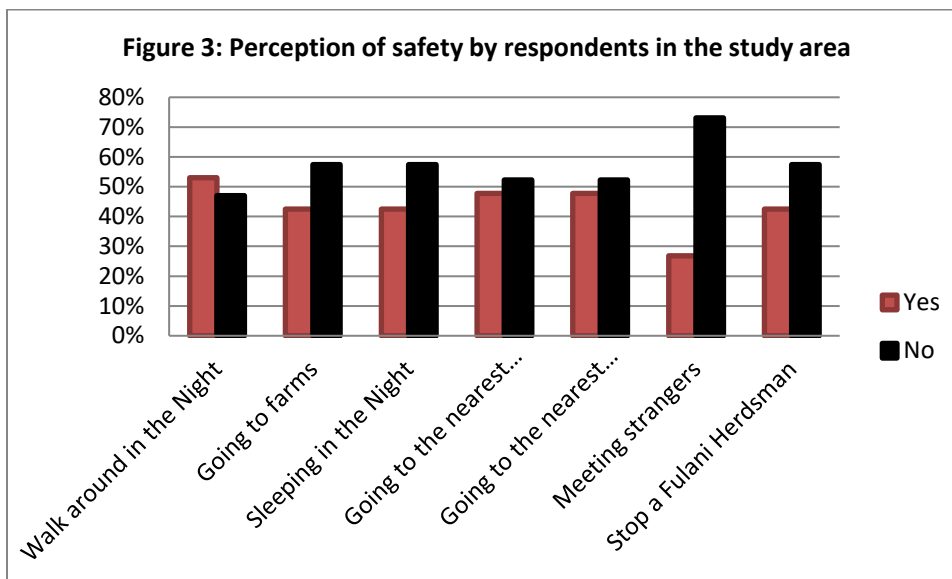
While respondents from Gwandara and Kambari were more likely to report favourably on trust, the Tiv and the Alago as well as Eggon were not favourably disposed to trusting people from other ethnic groups in the area. It is possible that overcoming the pains of incessant conflict victimization was still difficult, especially among the Eggons who were still re-building their houses during the time of this study.

Table 4: can you still trust people from opposing ethnic groups?

Rating of trust	Responses %							
	Migili	Fulani	Alago	Eggon	Tiv	Gwandara	Kambari	Total
Yes	61.90	53.85	35.71	38.46	11.11	81.25	83.33	67
No	38.10	46.15	64.29	61.54	88.89	18.75	16.67	67
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.00	134

Safety: Figure 3 presents respondents’ rating of seven variables that were used to test the perception of safety in the study area. It was necessary to know what fear exists in order to know how such fears can be overcome. Respondents were asked to indicate from a list of given variables those that constitute threat to their lives. More than a half of the respondent (53%) indicated ‘walking around in the night’. Night live was indeed rare in the study area as each community

was guarded by local vigilantes, while the major road that links to Lafia, the state capital was secured by the Police at Night. The whole essence was either to keep each feuding ethnic group from attacking the other or allowing Fulani mercenaries to sneak in during the night hours to attack others. The fear of ‘going to the farms’ and fear of ‘sleeping in the night’ drew equal proportion of respondents (42.54 Vs. 42.54%), suggesting that a majority of the respondents were no longer afraid of sleeping at night and or going to the farm (an indication that the security deployed and the vigilantes were effective). Although fear of ‘going to the nearest town or village’ and ‘fear of going to the nearest market’ exist, a good percentage (52.24%) of the respondents reported that did not constitute fear to them. Similarly, a good number of the respondents (57.46%) reported that they could meet with strangers without worry of being attacked. However, fear of ‘stopping Fulani herdsmen (42.54%) and their cows from grazing on farms was still very high among ethnic group members.



Valuing Reconciliation

Having tested the impact of the conflict on ethnic relations, we needed to find out the extent to which ethnic groups’ members will now appreciate living in peace. As Bar Tal (2000, p. 355) would argue, “reconciliation is a process...” which necessarily begins when “new relations of peaceful coexistence based on mutual trust and acceptance, cooperation, and consideration of each other’s needs” start to emerge. We have seen much of these in the test of ethnic social relations, except how reconciliation is worth in the perception of feuding ethnic groups’ members. Table 5 is a summary of how ethnic groups’ members view reconciliation.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by meaning of reconciliation

Meaning of reconciliation	Rating by Ethnic Groups %							Total
	Migili	Fulani	Alago	Eggon	Tiv	Gwandara	Kambari	
Renewing friendship	18.75	21.43	14.29	8.04	14.29	13.39	9.82	112
Absence of violence	1.43	15.38	14.29	12.09	16.48	14.29	13.19	91
Unity and cooperation	13.16	21.93	17.54	9.65	13.16	13.16	10.53	114
Being loved by neighbours	11.11	18.89	15.56	11.11	14.44	15.56	13.33	90
Forgive and forget	16.67	12.04	20.37	11.11	15.74	12.96	11.11	108

Reconciliation was defined as ‘renewing friendship’ by majority of the respondents (83.58%). This was indeed a big leap as it re-emphasized our earlier findings reported in table 3 about the important of friendship in the community. In reconciliation literature, ‘renewing friendship’ is acknowledged as one key factor in sustaining peace building among feuding partners. This is because it can help to address and engage the relational aspects of reconciliation (Lederach, 1997). Similarly, reconciliation was acknowledged as ‘unity and cooperation’. More than a half of the respondents (85.07%) acknowledged this, thus suggesting the need to live together in peace and harmony. In Hjort’s (2004) analysis, unity and cooperation may facilitate living and working together, sharing time and space and thus coming to see each other as individuals rather than antagonists.

Another finding that raised hope of reconciliation was in “forgiveness and forgetting” the past. Although Hamber and van der Merwe (1998) advised that the two variables should be kept apart, ‘forgiveness’ is recognized to be central to reconciliation (Bloomfield, et al, 2003); and a great number of the respondents (80.59%) had emphasized forgiving one another and forgetting the past wrongs caused one another. Interestingly 67.91 percent of the respondents had seen reconciliation as ‘absence of violence’, while 67.16 per cent described reconciliation as ‘being loved by neighbours’.

Socio-cultural and Religious variables in Reconciliation

The seven ethnic groups in the area are known for some distinct cultural beliefs and practices in spite of living in the same locality for years now. At least each of them has a distinct language, and some preserve tribal marks on themselves. However, nearness enhances cultural diffusion, which enables borrowing of certain cultural practices from each other. Such “commonness” makes shared characteristics possible and can be useful in understanding each other. The social structure

makes shared cultural practices possible and constitutes the material for ‘social bridge’ and promote shared beliefs in a new cultural pattern (Avruch, 1998), that can be invoked for peaceful co-existence purpose. This is what ‘resource theory of social exchange’ requires for social transaction. Situating reconciliation in the context of culture was for the purpose of reminding ethnic groups’ members the shared characteristics that make them live together. Given this background, respondents were asked to rate ten variables consisting of socio-economic, cultural and religion that are common among them in the community, which can facilitate reconciliation in the face of the incessant ethnic conflict. The mean rating and the standard deviation are reported in table 6

Table 6: Mean and Standard deviation of some Socio-economic and Religious Variables that ensure the realization of Peaceful Co-existence in Obi LGA

Variables	Rating				Mean	SD
	VE*	V*	NE*	NVE*		
Multi-ethnic village/settlement	87	25	11	11	3.40	0.95
Living as close neighbours	59	53	14	18	2.99	1.01
Sharing farmland	46	38	32	18	2.99	1.02
Going to same markets	68	42	04	20	3.18	1.05
Having same source of water	58	52	10	14	3.15	0.95
Going to same Church	65	55	5	9	3.38	0.70
Going to same Mosque	60	56	10	8	3.25	0.84
Attending same school	65	53	10	5	3.33	0.98
Cross-ethnic marriage	65	43	15	12	3.21	0.94
<i>Diya</i> (payment of ransom)	54	46	12	12	2.99	1.08

*VE = Very effective; E = Effective, NE = Not effective, NVE = Not very effective

The general use of Hausa language as a lingua franca in the study area is the first aspect of culture shared by all. Religion also tends to narrow the divide between them as both Christian and Islamic faithful can be found among them. Unfortunately incessant conflict had dispersed and polarized them; as inter-ethnic villages that once enabled children to learn the language of other ethnic groups other than their own have disappeared, since ethnic groups with small numerical strength used to be the first target and victim whenever crisis occur with their ethnic groups elsewhere. However, our findings revealed appreciation of multi-ethnic villages and settlement by respondents (mean = 3.40, SD = 0.90). On a scale of 4, this was indeed a high rating; and the low standard deviation of 0.95 suggests the unity of opinion in that rating. Expectedly ‘living as close neighbours (Mean = 2.99, SD = 1.01) and ‘sharing of farmland’ [(Mean = 2.79, SD = 1.02), was not significantly rated as living in ‘multi-ethnic villages. The reasons are obvious. Apart from the cattle menace, the Fulani seems to have very high self-preservation and would not want to mix with other ethnic groups. Beside this, in a predominantly farming community sharing of farmland will limit the reach of farmers, many of whom need large acres of land where they can farm without constraints.

Both economic and religious variables received high mean scores that were above 3 points. Although the standard deviations differ (suggesting the diversity in opinion), it suggests the importance of these variables in the economic and religious lives of the people. For instance, going to same market will not only make purchase and selling of goods possible, but would also facilitate making friends. A large market means a large poll of customers, and the possibility of having both sellers and buyers' interaction. Even when buyers have to come from outside the community, news of conflict may scare them away; and make access to villages in the hinterland difficult. Many farms' produces are perishable, especially in the absence of storage system and customers to buy them.

The payment of *diya* (a ransom) which has religious backing as compensation for killing, was not highly rated by respondents (Mean = 2.99, SD = 1.08). Opinion differs as shown in the high standard deviation of 1.08. Clarification sought during FGDs and IDIs showed that majority of the respondents thought *diya* will serve to remind people of the past; that it was better to forgive and forget. A few respondents that supported the payment of *diya* said it was in their custom to do so.

Discussion

We found that incessant conflicts in the community have exerted devastating consequences on peaceful co-existence among the people. This was due largely to the conflict victimization experience that ethnic groups' members suffered during the conflict. Experiences ranged from witnessing fighting fought not only with bow and arrows, but also with sophisticated rifles to destruction of properties. In the process many families have lost breadwinners and loved ones. These leave lingering memories that make some to contemplate revenge. Many other have not only avoided interaction with members of other ethnic groups but have also spread 'hate words' that created adherents among upcoming generation. This is like what Hjort (2004) found in Bosnia-Herzegovina; and such 'hatred' if not control may result in ethnic groups drawing sympathy from their kits and kins from elsewhere. Already the Fulani cattle herders are said to be supported financially and with sponsored mercenary from the *Mayetti Allah* (Association of Cattle Breeders, dominated by the Fulanis with branches in Chad and Niger Republic) each time they have conflict with the farmers (Nathaniel, Agbese, Tahire, & Isa, 2017). In reaction other ethnic groups, especially the Eggon has formed local vigilante group (Ombatse boys), with support from local leaders. Vigilante groups' formation is not without consequences. The more successful they are in awarding away enemies of their village, the harder it will be to demobilize them, and ones they become entrenched, the likelihood of forming sub-violent culture of violence and recruit other youth will be high. In the circumstance, vigilantes can metamorphose into predatory, quasi-criminal organizations (Odemwingie, 2014). The findings in the study area confirmed increase armed robbery and theft of farm products.

As seen in the study area, inter-ethnic conflict is not only intractable (figure 1), but also widespread. The implications of incessant conflict on security (safety of life and property) in the study area was found to be widespread among the ethnic groups especially on 'meeting strangers', a situation described during the FGDs as 'not knowing who a friend or an enemy is actually'. In

this context, each village or settlement resorted to profiling residents and visitors to their village. It elevated fear to a high level such that walking at night and sleeping at night becomes difficult. Many of the youth serve as vigilantes and keep watch of their villages at night. Fear is also shown in the freedom of movement: going to the farm, nearest market, and nearest village. The Fulani herders are said to exhibit not only criminal tendencies but also the prevalence of conflict subculture. Insights from Focus Group Discussion revealed incident of gang rapings of women at farms. As many IDIs confirmed, the Fulani are fond of saying:

Komai na Allah ne. kowonaifilina Allah ne, banakuba (meaning “everything belongs to Allah. Every piece of land belongs to Allah and not yours”).

Such words from Fulani herdsmen to Eggon farmers on August 14th 2014 were enough to spark renewed fighting which lasted for several months in the study area. To avoid such misunderstanding, only few respondents would want to stop a Fulani herder from grazing on his farm; but would rather use preventive measures such as poisoning or spreading the crops with poisonous substance that may affect the cattle later. In many instances the Fulani would want to retaliate. It suggests the existence of uneasy peace in the area.

As Brounéus (2003, p.3) would argue, reconciliation is seen as a societal process that takes cognizance of “past suffering” and sees the need to change from such “destructive attitude and behaviour into constructive relationships toward sustainable peace”. This study has brought to fore the causes of the conflicts and the destructive attitude that resulted in ugly victimization experience. The process for reconciliation starts with understanding the values of reconciliation: renewing friendship, absence of violence, unity and cooperation, being loved by neighbours, and forgiving and forgetting. These would necessarily lay the foundation for the germination of the ethos of peace (Bar-Tal 2000) and building of social bridge across the warring ethnic groups.

Interestingly conflict between ethnic group members is largely seen in terms of ‘resource control’. This is within the ambit of the adopted theory of this work: the needs-based-resource theory. The struggle for land, and the expansion of farmland and the fight against cattle grazing on farms to prevent crops’ destruction suggest a connection between the resource control and needs-based these. No predominant perpetrators exist; similarly, no predominant victim exists, as conflicts cut across the ethnic groups, and a victim at one incident of violent turned to be a perpetrator at another event during retaliation. Suggestion for reconciliation across the ethnic group was particularly high when measured on socio-economic, cultural and religious factors. It suggested a shift from past animosity towards more positive perceptions, feelings, and perceived future relations opposing ethnic groups. The findings show an interactive process of social exchange with overture from all groups (table 5). Most importantly expression of ‘forgiveness’ and ‘renewal of friendship’ open them up to social relations. This then suggests the important of social exchange.

The importance of exchange with respect to shared socio-economic, cultural and religious variables identified here is shown in ‘reciprocation in Kind’ which (Foa & Foa, 1976. p. 22) observed are particularistic and likely to exchanges within the same resource. Living in a multi-ethnic settlement and village, going to same market, same church and same mosque can enhance

both social and economic exchange. For instance, Fulani, for instance need land on which to settle and graze, the ethnic farmers need the beef which is the major source of protein. The sale of cattle provides income not only to the Fulani, but also to the beef sellers (from another ethnic group). Selling and buying in the same market therefore would not only enhance interaction and hence friendship but also economic cooperation in the sale of meat and dairy products, between the Fulani cattle herders and other ethnic groups in the area. Just as the Fulani need to graze and sell his cattle, the farmers need to realize bumper harvest and to sell the crops for income; even as the Fulani also need to food crops for daily survival. Realization of the need for co-existence where interest of the different ethnic group is served satisfactorily will promote enduring social interaction between and among the different ethnic groups.

Reconciliation: Implications for peaceful co-existence

The incessant and intractable nature of the conflict in Obi LGA has negative consequences on peaceful co-existence of the seven ethnic groups identified here. Conflict victimization experiences reported by community members have not only affected social relations but have also exerted serious stressful and traumatic psychological impact on the people. The fear of safety has been rated in this study (fig. 2). Reconciliation is therefore mooted as a panacea resolution to the incessant conflicts, and for peaceful co-existence in the study area.

One way of understanding the usefulness of reconciliation in the inter-ethnic conflict in Obi LGA is to identify the situation that created it, and hence the need for reconciliation. The conflict which can be categorized into three phases: farmers-farmers related, farmer-pastoralists related, and farmer/pastoralists-farmer related tends to be driven by 'resource-economic nexuses. Many scholars have delved into this phenomenon either as indigene-settler conflict (Alubo, 2005) or herder-farmer conflicts (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). The missing link is in the indigene and or supposed settler ethnic group teaming up with the pastoralists to fight another indigene or settler ethnic groups, and the consequences on peaceful co-existence.

Land remains at the center of the conflict whether for the Fulani cattle herders or the predominantly farming ethnic groups of Eggon, Migili, Tiv, Alago, Gwandara, and Kambari. It is therefore the major source of livelihood. Land conflicts are intimately related to discussions on strangerhood and the prime rights to land (Bruijn, et al, 2011). Land can therefore be productively utilized if interaction between the ethnic groups is extended beyond economic cooperation to socio-economic, cultural, and religious cooperation. The reasons are informed by justifiable findings elsewhere (Sherif, 1967). The land-economic nexus see land as capital and scare commodity and therefore considers economic profit above all (Hyden, 1980). In such a context, cattle herders will only think about grazing not minding whether the cattle enter a farm and destroy crops or not; and the farmers will also only think about his farm and can attack the cattle and herders at the slightest provocation. In contract to the economic cooperation, socio-economic, cultural and religious variables seek to engage the relational aspect of harmonious existence; what community members stand to benefit collectively by being one-another's keeper (Tavuchis, 1991). Respondents identified such socio-economic, cultural and religious related variables in the study area to include,

living in multi-ethnic village, living in close neighbourhood, going to same market, church, mosque, having same source of water, attending same school, encouraging cross-ethnic marriage, and paying compensation (ransom) for killing a community member. Such variables address the relational aspects of conflict where memorandum of understanding (MoU) is entered into by the ethnic groups themselves with the 'dos and don'ts' clearly spelt out. It helps to provide a social space, where people, ideas and stories can come together (Lederach, 1997). In this context all ethnic groups will understand that grazing on farms and or unauthorized places, will affect the source of livelihoods of other community member. Equally, the farmers would know that attacking cattle and headers will offend socio-economic and religious cooperation that weld the community together.

Another advantage that 'socio-economic, cultural and religious' cooperation has above 'socio-economic' cooperation in bringing about peaceful co-existence is in the creation of ethos of peace. During the conflicts, conflictive ethos helped to fuel the conflict, and strengthen ethnic identity and groups' members to cope with the conflict. In Bar-Tal (2000, p. 16) observation, embracing socio-economic, cultural and religious' cooperation will help to bring about five core changes, viz: the justness of one's own goals, legitimizing the needs of other ethnic groups, admitting responsibility for past wrongs during the conflict, beliefs about peace and admit compromise. It will also help to reconstructed collective memory of the past, so that beliefs about the past are objective and balanced; beliefs about present relations to the former enemy would be normalized; and beliefs about the future would emphasize mutual dependence between the ethnic groups (Bloomfield, Barnes & Huyse, 2003).

Conclusion

The study examined conflicts among seven ethnic groups in Obi LGA of Nasarawa State in North Central Nigeria. The specific objective was to understand their perception of reconciliation and what can be done to realize peaceful co-existence among them. We found that the ethnic conflict was not only intractable but also widespread, in different episodes, with damaging socio-economic and psychological impacts on community members. These impacts created conditions that negate safety, and continuation of friendship with members of opposing ethnic groups.

Recommendations and implication for Social Work Practice

1. Social Workers should facilitate reconciliation process between relevant stakeholders among the various communities toward peaceful co-existence.
2. Social Workers should facilitate Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) between ethnic group members for sustainable peaceful co-existence as the central component.
3. The study recommends that Social Workers should encourage multi-ethnic settlement, go to same market, having same source of water, attend church, same mosque, encouraging cross-ethnic marriage, and attend same schools.

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