

## **FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION AS STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS: AN APPRAISAL OF DOGO NAHAWA MASSACRE IN POST-CONFLICT SITUATION**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the aftermath of an act of community cleansing at Dogo Nahawa of Barkin Ladi Local Government Area of Plateau State and the recent trend of the escalating explosion of anger and bitterness exhibited by some of the survivors. In an effort to underscore the underlying factors that causes the regret and bitterness among survivors of the cleansing, the paper seeks to consider a strategy for a healthier healing and forgiveness. The paper observes that the massacre of March 7<sup>th</sup> 2010 which led to killing of over 500 members of the community has had lingering wounds of the heart among survivors. The paper considered how the people of Dogo Nahawa think about and make use of forgiveness in their lives? It also considered if religious beliefs promote forgiveness, and if so, how. This paper affirms that community cleansing and ethno-religious conflicts have affected mutual relations among Christian and Muslims and have brought untold hardship among survivors especially in Dogo Nahawa community. Thus, this paper argues that forgiveness and reconciliation can contribute to the emerging relationally based theory of Christian-Muslim relations in post-conflict situation. It understands forgiveness as a process of moving from ill will to goodwill toward offenders, and as compatible with various forms of justice. Forgiveness is often the basis of reconciliation, the restoration of right relationship. Both of these depend in some ways on the acknowledgment of truth. Forgiveness and reconciliation play a vital role in efforts to promote mutual relations among Christians and Muslims with restorative justice, which seeks to address harms suffered by victims, wider communities, and even perpetrators. This paper further argues that an ethic of forgiveness can support the political and social goals of reconciliation and restorative justice for the promotion of Christian-Muslim relations in Northern Nigeria and Africa at large. Through qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with survivors of the attack in Dogo Nahawa community numbering twenty people, data were collected. Consideration was given to the ways the people think about forgiveness and make use of forgiveness to*

*deal with hurtful experiences, which befell them. Results indicated that for all participants their motivations and strategies to forgive reconcile could be classified as both secular and sacred. The results also highlight the implication and benefits of forgiveness to the community.*

**Keywords:** Christian-Muslim Relations, forgiveness, reconciliation, conflict and massacre

## **Introduction**

Forgiveness is a very useful strategy for promoting peaceful coexistence as it focuses on the future; it connects itself equally with the past and the present. Forgiveness and reconciliation put together is a good strategy for use in building mutual trust and peaceful coexistence. It gives room for reconciliation to flourish among individuals or communities that have experienced ethnic cleansing and community extinction, especially in Northern Nigeria. In any discussion about forgiveness, it is important to make it clear that forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciling with the wrongdoer. There may be good reasons why a victim may forgive but may not wish to reconcile. Reconciliation is an additional choice. On the one hand, it is nearly impossible to reconcile with someone you have not gone some way to forgive (Morris 94). Here, forgiveness may require relinquishing something important to you, such as giving up your moral indignation, your desire for retaliation or your attachment to being right. Forgiveness is still useful to community building because people who forgive tend to be more flexible and less certain in their expectations; both in how life will be or how others will treat them (Tutu 72). Forgiving people have chosen not to perpetuate a historical grievance; they are somehow able to turn the page, loosen themselves from the grip of the past and reframe their story.

Reconciliation in the context of community building assumes a need, a will or an actual effort made on the part of an individual or a group of people to live side-by-side in peace with a person or another group they had considered to be their adversaries in the past, however, granting that forgiveness may aid reconciliation, it is not always a condition for the latter to unfold. There may be pragmatic reasons for communities to make a conscious decision not to seek to punish or retaliate (Philip 58). This is a form of “pardoning,” which may lead to reconciliation but is different from forgiveness. Just as a victim may forgive a perpetrator serving a prison sentence but still sees the necessity for them to be incarcerated, equally a victim may still feel resentment towards a perpetrator but see the practical sense of not doing anything about it in order to end a cycle of violence. Reconciling with others who caused harm to someone is an outward gesture made to re-connect with others and to renew relationships (Trudy 46). In this sense, reconciliation lies at the heart of building and maintaining peace in a community, especially in promoting local reconciliation initiatives between divided communities and the reintegration of people who have been displaced back into their community.

## **Clarification of Terms**

### **Literature Review**

In an effort to forgive, it is the principled decision to give up your justified right for revenge and accept the perpetrator in spite of what was meted out to you. Enright opines that:

It is an act of generosity on the part of the victim(s). There can be many different motives; for instance, it may stem from compassion for an offender, the wish to free oneself from pain, or simply a pragmatic means of moving forward (143).

It is important to recognise that if you attach too many conditions to forgiveness, it may become almost the opposite with characteristics akin to being vengeful or vindictive. It is important to note that forgiveness does not exclude a passionate or painful response to being hurt, or witnessing others being hurt. Enright further argues that:

Anger, sorrow, rage, and despair are a part of the process, and may be the launching pad for forgiveness. Essentially, this means that we do not endlessly replay past gripes and grievances; it is rather the ability to live with the hurt without being held captive by it; it means not being defined by those who have hurt us and not being broken by our own victimhood (144).

Memories of past wounds are presumed to disappear once the underlying issues are resolved; however, it is now widely recognized that communities that have experienced violence of serious proportions either from different identity groups or from an ethnicised state cannot achieve sustainable peace without a process of social healing. Joseph argues that “healing and reconciliation in violent ethnic and religious conflicts depend on a process of transactional contrition and forgiveness between aggressor and victims” (112). Despite the fact that it is not easy to let the past behind us, human beings have the capacity to do so. Andrew also argues that “it is this capacity to let go of the past, to forego the quest for revenge, which is at the heart of forgiveness” (3). Hatred and the search for vengeance can consume people and unless people manage to forsake their determination to get even, there can be no new beginning, no transformation of relationships, no possibility for a shared future, thus the need to tow the path of forgiveness.

When people choose to forgive, it can bring new insights, it can help transform attitudes, and also help repair broken relationships as well as help to break the cycle of violence. Forgiveness liberates people from the resentment and anger that they have carried with them (Blackaby and Blackaby 106). Some feel inspired to forgive because they experience compassion for those who have hurt them; others see a spiritual value in forgiveness because they recognise that we are all connected and therefore each individual is in some

way responsible for the pain in the world (Luskin 227). In considering forgiveness as a strategy for promoting peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria, it is important to consider these propositions: a. Forgiveness can contribute to creating a foundation for dialogue. b. It can help release bitterness and anger and facilitate the re-humanisation of the “other.” This is key to the reconciliation process, which cannot happen without eradicating dehumanisation. c. It can induce a shift in mindsets and transform harmful attitudes. d. It can build bridges between opposing parties and help repair fractured relationships. e. It can help break the cycle of violence, aid post-traumatic reconciliation, build a more peaceful common future and ultimately sustain peace (Luskin 229-230).

Many communities have difficulty in coming to terms with the traumatic loss that they have experienced in history through ethnic cleansing and community extinction. The researcher understands from the field research that most people who experienced ethnic cleansing and community in Northern Nigeria often wanted not to revive memories of such trauma and created a form of forgetfulness as a defensive strategy. This has not however truly helped some of them as they still nurse hurts and hate for the perpetrators of the acts. At the same time as it is important to use forgiveness as a strategy for promoting peaceful coexistence, it is also good to recognise that victims must not be forced to forget. Trudy opines that:

It is said that only those who remember can forgive and that memory and not forgetting is the necessary condition of forgiveness. A forgetful person cannot forgive because he or she cannot remember. Without remembering, forgiveness as a conscious act is impossible. The slogan, therefore, is no longer forgive and forget, but remember and forgive. Collective turning from the past does not mean ignoring or forgetting the misdeed, but recognizing the humanity of the commissioning agent. Forgiveness is on when that comes from the victim (74-75).

President Nelson Mandela was quoted to have said that “South African people must remember their dreadful past in order to be able to deal with it, to forgive when it is necessary, but never to forget” (Mahmood 144). In the same vein, Archbishop Desmond Tutu argues that “There is no future without forgiveness, but to forgive, one must know what happened. In order not to repeat what happened to others, we must remember” (110). It is also very important to note that for any meaningful forgiveness to be effective; separating the deeds from the perpetrators is needful. Trudy also argues “We do not forgive deeds; we forgive people who have committed deeds. When we forgive, it is another person we forgive” (103). From her submission, it is unnecessary to talk about forgiving deeds as such ethnic cleansing and community extinction, but to forgive the perpetrators of the crime which led to the displacement and the destruction of lives (Tutu 87). Only persons can be forgiven -perpetrators of the acts. In support of this position, Trudy argues that “No deed ever expressed remorse, apologized, asked for forgiveness or faced the challenge of moral transformation... it is persons who are the subjects and objects of forgiveness; persons who

forgive or do not forgive” (105). Deeds and doers are separable in a significant way because people are capable of a moral transformation that distances them from their deeds.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are often sub-processes for promoting peaceful coexistence and should be intentionally integrated into the resolution process of deep-rooted ethno-religious conflicts. It is not a one-shot process or act. It could be part of an ongoing process or the culmination of a process of previous attempts at reconciliation. Its value to break the cycle of violence, hate and despair is particularly pronounced in protracted conflicts. Recognising this and in order to stress the importance of forgiveness among people in Plateau State, the government had declared February 7 every year as a Day of Forgiveness and Reconciliation. The Governor, Simon Bako Lalong noted that although acts of criminality must be swiftly investigated and punished by Government and its relevant organs, the long-term ambition of every Nigerian who desires peace is to tow the path of forgiveness and reconciliation. He argues that:

The bloodshed, destruction of property and cycle of violence in the country will not abate except Nigerians learn to forgive one another and foster peaceful coexistence in communities. Unless Nigerians learn to forgive one another and avoid revenge and reprisals, the nation will continue to witness needless bloodshed and destruction of properties. As a government, we are very conscious of the fact that the process of restoring peace and confidence among the people cannot succeed without forgiveness and reconciliation. On this day therefore, we do not try to trivialize or gloss over the trauma, pain and agony that many people have undergone on account of the various crises that took lives and properties. Others are still bearing physical scars of their experiences (Vanguard 2).

He made this known during an inter-denominational service at St. Louis Catholic Church, Jos to mark the State’s third Day of Forgiveness and Reconciliation. He further stated that “this day emphasises how to make the best of the past ugly experiences and chart the way forward. If truly we want to move forward, then there is every need to encourage healing that makes us do things differently” (Vanguard 2). Below is a picture of the garden of Peace and Forgiveness as created by the Plateau State government to encourage peace and forgiveness on the Plateau.



Plate 43: A Picture of the Garden of Peace and Forgiveness Created by the Plateau State Government to Encourage Peace and Forgiveness Among her People. Source: Researcher 16/08/2021

Forgiveness can work not only towards conflict resolution but also for post-settlement peacebuilding. It plays a connecting role in transforming transitional communities emerging from conflict. Tutu says “Forgiving means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim” (10). The plea for forgiveness may be perceived as an act of humiliation and subsequently hurt the pleading party’s status. On the one hand, the victim who is asked to grant forgiveness may feel that “to forgive is to relinquish the victim role and the rewards that go with it” such as “the power to induce guilt, to demand apologies and reparations or to seek punishment of the perpetrator” (Sabina, Rupert, and Emanuele 363). The ultimate purpose of forgiveness and reconciliation is restoration of relationships and the reestablishment of connections with the affected communities. Public apologies and seeking and granting of forgiveness create a new dimension to repairing fractured relationships especially between Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria where ethno-religious conflicts have ravaged the mutual trust amongst people of different ethnic and religious identity. As a result, forgiveness and reconciliation remain the key strategies for promoting peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims and they should be carried out with utmost sincerity. Apologies, when carried out at the appropriate time, are useful. The sincerity of such apologies should also be felt by the victims and forgiveness should be pursued at all cost.

It is imperative to note that forgiveness in Christendom is becoming more difficult now than some centuries ago. Darmani postulates that people who constitutes the church today come from different backgrounds and understand matters differently, in spite of common

Christian beliefs. Friction is bound to arise among church members and in the leadership necessitating regular reconciliation (146). Kulign confirms that on this point many Christians have failed and need to learn from Jesus himself as he hung on the cross. He prayed, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). He raises a question: "If this is the example he set for us, how can we, who due to our own sinfulness often play a part in the alienation and confrontation we experience with other sinners claim that we need not be forgiving people?" (Kulign 163-164).

Using forgiveness and reconciliation as strategies for promoting peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in this context is therefore about shifting and even transforming people's attitudes, prejudices and perceptions about the "other" (Luskin 230). Forgiveness is not an act of kindness born out of the victim's generosity but rather a re-humanising gift emphasising the humanity of the perpetrator. In other words, it is about reducing fear through the recognition of the human being in "the enemy." In the softening of positions comes the acknowledgement and possibility of each side's complicity. Another way forgiveness and reconciliation promote peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims towards community building is that they allow people who were once hostile towards one another to live together again (Luskin 233). Forgiving past wrongs may be a key to reconciliation between friends, family members, spouses, neighbours, races, cultures and nations. More complete reconciliation means that we engage co-participants honestly and respectfully in the construction of a newer world through meaningful and faithful relationships. The process results in decreased motivation to retaliate or maintain estrangement from an offender despite his or her actions. Forgiveness can be a critical ingredient in rebuilding broken relationships and repairing damaged communities. It can be an important part of any peacebuilding process and sometimes the only thing that can help divided communities move towards reconciliation.

### **Research Method/Scope of the Research**

The qualitative method was used in the research with writer's observations and semi-structured interview as instrument of data collection. This includes purposive sampling, oral interviews and FGDs, which was conducted by researcher in Dogo Nahawa of Barkin Ladi, Plateau State Nigeria. Structured questions were designed and used for interview, and simultaneously administered in the community for 20 twenty people; both Christians and one Muslim in the community; Men and women; the Aged and the Young; Religious and community leaders; the educated and the less educated; as well as farmers. Also, data from related materials and scholars were collected and used, while descriptive statistics were also employed in data analysis. To make this study meaningful and avoid any complexity, the research covered only the affected community, Dogo Nahawa, which happens to be the scene where the massacre happened.

## **Results And Discussion**

### **Dogo-Nahawa**

Dogo Nahawa is a village in Jos South LGA of Plateau, which shares a boundary with Jos East LGA is one of the communities that was targeted by the perpetrators for total destruction of an ethnic group living there. This community (Dogo Nahawa) came under heavy attack by suspected Fulani herdsmen on 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2010. Rasat, a neighbouring village to Dogo Nahawa was also attacked on the same day. Berom are the majority inhabitants of the village. The villagers buried dozens of bodies, including those of women and children, in a mass grave on Monday after attacks in which several hundred people were feared to have been killed. Armed police and soldiers stood guard as residents of Dogo Nahawa, about 15 km (9 miles) South of the central city of Jos, carried bodies wrapped in multi-colored cloth from trucks and lowered them into a large open pit in the red-brown earth. Some residents of the small village; Rev. Gyang Chuwang (Religious leader), Mr. Elisha Bot (the Youth leader), Mr. Bitrus Danjuma, and Iliya Danjuma who interacted with the researcher all said that Fulani herdsmen from surrounding hills attacked in the early hours of Sunday, opening fire to force them out of their homes before slashing them with machetes. Rev. Gyang Chuwang, a survivor of the attack orates that:

Fulani Herdsmen came from Jos East LGA and attacked the village and were not caught at the crime scene. Over 500 bodies were buried at the mass burial that took place. Part of the grave was the grave of a General in the Nigerian Army who was also killed. Government did not offer any assistance after the incident. Assistance came from private individuals and NGOs (Interview 18/06/2021).

Nigerian villagers wailed in the streets as dump trucks carried hundreds of bodies past burned-out homes towards a mass grave. This was the scene of insurmountable grief after rioters armed with machetes slaughtered more than 500 people in a revenge attack following religious clashes near Nigeria's city of Jos. In an interview with a survivor of the Dogo Nahawa carnage who managed and returned to the community after the attack, Mr. Choji Ayuba, recounted how his wife and two children were killed by the attackers. He narrates thus:

What I thought was a joke flashed on me and made me a widower, after losing two children and my car to the attack among other valuables that were destroyed when my house was set ablaze by the attackers. My wife, Deborah was killed in a room adjacent to the one I was hiding in. I almost ran out to fight the assailant, seeing how he slashed her throat like an animal and opened her stomach with a very sharp knife; but I had to control myself, though in severe pain and tears. I saw when the attackers broke down the door by kicking it. They used machetes to butcher our two children who were sleeping in the same room with my wife (Interview 27/2/2020).



Narrating his own ordeal in the hands of the attackers, Mr. Barnabas Gyang, in an interview with the researcher lamented that it was a sad day for them when their village was attacked by some Fulani herdsmen. He orates that:

The attackers were not Berom, but Fulani herdsmen who were singing in Fulfulde and shouting Allahu akbar. When they entered our house, they shot my brother who was running helplessly in the room, with no escape route as the only door out was blocked by them. They also shot his wife who was in the other room with their three children. They also killed my neighbor and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Barry John who was sleeping in a room a few feet away from their children which shares walls with that of my brother. I heard gunshots and voices of their dying children being hacked down but I was helpless as I watch from my hiding place. I managed to escape by climbing the roof and hanging upon the rafters. When they were done, they sang songs of victory before moving to the next compound. They were singing in Fulani language and I could not pick the words but I believe they were celebrating because they sounded happy as they sang and fired shots in the air. I lost over 10 members in different houses in the same pattern of attacks (Interview 14/03/2020).

Narrating his ordeal in the hands of the Fulani herdsmen in Dogo Nahawa, Mr. Charles Amos laments that their attackers had warned them before the attack that they will come and kill all the *arnas* (infidels) of this village soon. He narrates thus:

Few days before the attack where we lost most of our people, we had heard from some of our people who met with the Fulani herdsmen around our village that we should be ready that they are coming to kill all the *arnas* in the village. They alleged that we have not allowed them to graze freely in our land, so they are coming to kill every *arna* and take over the village. When we heard that, we did not take anything serious because we have been living peacefully with our Muslims brothers in the village for more than 5 decades. When the issue persisted, we formed a joint vigilante group with the Muslims as members. However, a few days before the attack, we noticed that they stopped coming out for the watch and some of them sent their families away. When we confronted them, they said there was no problem. On that fateful day, some of them were the ones showing the houses of our people to the Fulani herdsmen who came from Bauchi sides to attack us. We could hear some of them shouting, “Where are the *arnas* who said they are ready for us?” They first labeled our people as *arna* before destroying our houses and killing us (Interview 18/06/2021).



Plate 2a: Burying the dead bodies in a mass grave: These were the people that were killed during the attack of Dogo Nahawa. Source: SaharaReporters 22/03/2010 (online 4)

The above picture shows a sad situation which is also evidence of this systematic and deliberate act of ethnic cleansing and community extinction in Dogo Nahawa. This has become so due to the fact that such gruesome killings and the vicious acts of perpetrators do go unabated. It was a gory scene as the victims of Sunday massacre in Dogo Nahawa were buried in a mass grave on Monday by indigenes of the state. Human bodies were dumped in tersely opened ground without coffins or obituary dressing associated with traditional burial in local communities. Bodies of the dead were moved in vans to locations of burial by relatives. The perpetrators had shown no mercy. They did not spare women and children or even a four-day-old baby from their machetes. In one area alone, five babies and 28 children aged five or less were killed. The violence in three mostly Christian villages appeared to be reprisal attacks following the January unrest in Jos -when most of the victims were Muslims (SaharaReporters 3). The then Acting President, Goodluck Jonathan, in a national broadcast said:

Security agencies would be stationed along Plateau state's borders to keep outsiders from coming in with more weapons and fighters. "We will undertake strategic initiatives to confront and defeat these roving bands of killers," he said in a statement. While it is too early to state categorically what is responsible for this renewed wave of violence, we want to inform Nigerians that the security services are on top of the situation (Premium Times News 08/03/2010).

Another survivor, Mr. Elisha Bot, the youth leader of Dogo Nahawa interviewed by the researcher lamented that the attack came as a shock to them as they were all living peacefully without any crisis recorded in the area. He orates that:

I came back from Bauchi on that fateful day, the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2010. During the night, I heard heavy gunfire around my compound and went out to check what was happening and I was attacked by four Fulani herdsmen who were armed with guns, machetes and knives. Luckily, they did not enter my room. When I saw them, I jumped over the fence and ran away, but I suddenly met another group who were also armed and ready to attack me too. I tried to fight them to defend myself but they were very much in number which I could not count. They first used cutlasses on me, but with the help of God, I ran to my neighbour's house where I met with another group of herdsmen. They had just killed my neighbor and his wife unknown to me. At this point, I was not that lucky as before, they shot me with a gun and hit me on my right arm. With the gunshot I ran to a house which was already burnt down thinking they will not come to the spot again. That was how I was saved. The security came but they stayed at the outskirts of the village and refused to come to the area, until damage had been done much and the herdsmen had also left. I lost my father; his body was found around the neighborhood. However, my wife and children and the wife of my brother were all safe (Interview 18/06/2021).

When asked if they sent the Muslims away after the attack; the Youth leader, Elisha Bot said that they left on their own saying there is no problem. He postulates further that:

We were living peacefully with them, eating, sleeping and playing football together. There is still a single Muslim living in the village. He refused to go along with the attackers and they tried to kill him, but they could not succeed. Some Fulani are still coming into the village for grazing today. And we still receive threats from the Fulani herdsmen that we have not seen anything yet, as they are still coming back until they take over the land. These threat messages are always reported to the security personnel for necessary action. The sector commandant is aware of the threats. He said the attack also affected their king. He lamented further that, assistance came from individuals and organizations, but not from the government when the attack happened, except for the construction of roads the government did (Interview 18/06/2021).

Narrating his account, Mr. Bitrus Danjuma, a student of Federal College Kuru, studying soil conservation. He avers that "I came home for the weekend on that fateful day when the incident happened. My mother was killed in the attack. Since she was the one who was paying my school fees, I could not return back to school. All our food was burnt and my brother, David Danjuma was stabbed in the head. He was rushed to the Jos University Teaching Hospital where he was treated and he spent several months in the hospital. With the help of God, he recovered. At least 500 people were buried at the grave and no single Muslim was buried along" (Interview 18/06/2021).

In a similar way, Mr. Iliya Danjuma also recounted how he escaped when the Fulani herdsmen attacked them. He recounted that, “When I heard gun shots, I ran out while they were shooting sporadically at people. Some people we were running for safety together were killed. I managed to get to our primary school nearby, but there also. I met people killed there as they were stabbed and some slaughtered with knives. I quickly lay down with those that were stabbed, and rolled myself in the blood of the slain. So, when they came there, they thought I was also dead, that was how God saved me” (Interview 18/06/2021).

Following the interaction established in the community with the observations made by the researcher, it was clear that the perpetrators intended to remove the ethnic group living there so they could occupy the village. A careful observation on how the Muslims who were living there before the attack occurs show that they were asked to leave the village before the said day of the attack that was why they all left few days before the unfortunate incident occurred. However, for the quick intervention of the security personnel, their plan was aborted but not without living scores of people killed and many with life threatening injuries and property destroyed. Similar attacks were witnessed in the following villages: Rakweng; Dashugu; Diyan-Hei; Maseh Kampwas; Kasa and Zere all in Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State. Investigations into some of these communities revealed that the ethnic groups that were the original inhabitants of the communities have been targeted and sent away with many killed. Some of the communities are now being occupied by people from another ethnic origin.



Plate 2b: Rev. Ajijiga Timothy of COCIN Dogo-Nahawa and the Researcher at the Site of the Mass Burial. Source: Researcher 18/06/2021

In the pictures above (plates 1 and 2), the Reverend of COCIN Church Dogo-Nahawa, Rev. Ajijiga Timothy, the Youth leader, Mr. Elisha Bot and other members of the community narrated how they were called names by their attackers, killed over 500 people and houses razed down. The mass grave where the victims were buried is seen in the picture above.

### **Implications Of Forgiveness And Reconciliation In Dogo Nahawa Community Tolerance**

The world needs reconciliation and the biblical gospel of reconciliation remains “good news to a world fractured by alienation and estrangement. Unfriendliness, indifference and hostility are everywhere and evident in our global society” (White 56). Tibbits and Halliday explain some misconceptions about forgiveness: Forgive and forget, forgiveness that implies ‘It is ok’, forgive and make up, and forgive and set others free. To forgive and forget contains the idea that if you have not forgotten then you did not forgive. But forgiveness is developing a new relationship with what hurt you. The one that implies ‘it is ok’ is simply assuming that it will turn out right. However, forgiveness is what measures our maturity. Forgive and make up involves one person to forgive even if the other person is unwilling. Forgive and set others free, is forgiving without removing accountability (3).

Following the mayhem unleashed on innocent lives in Dogo Nahawa and some of the surrounding villages such as Timtim in Barkin Ladi and Jos South LGA respectively among many others, it has left the survivors wondering what they did wrong to have deserved the kind of senseless and gruesome murder meted out to them considering the fact that they have lived together for decades without any conflict. A visit to these two villages (Dogo Nahawa and Timtim) by the researcher reveals that no Muslim is left in Timtim and Dogo Nahawa except this old man, Mallam Inusa Bello who is seen in the picture below with the researcher. However, Muslim have been going to Dogo Nahawa for business purposes and on visits to members of the community. Some, especially the Fulani herdsmen still graze in the community without being hunted for or any attack by the Christians in the community.



Plate 37: Mallam Inusa Bello, the only Muslim still at Dogo Nahawa After the Attack.  
Source: Researcher 18/06/2021

In an interview with Mallam Inusa Bello, he lamented the heinous attack against the community by people he called foreigners. He avers that he will not leave the village he has come to know as his home. He currently lives alone as all his family members were evacuated a few days to the attack. He is being assisted by other people around him. He orates that:

I have no other place to call my home besides this place (Dogo Nahawa) where I have been for over 70 years. I lived here with my family until these foreigners came and attacked our community. They did everything possible to carry me along with them, but I refused, insisting that I have no other place or people to call my own besides here. I am grateful to my people here who did not attack me after it was alleged that the attackers are Muslims and I am a Muslim too. Currently I am the only Muslim in Dogo Nahawa and nobody has harassed me. The Christians here allowed me to practice my religion freely and they are the ones feeding me most of the times (Interview 18/06/2021).

This indicates the fact that in spite the attack which resulted to ethnic cleansing with the aim of displacing the entire community, the people were tolerant and forgiving of one another. In spite the menace of ethnic cleansing and community extinction in some parts of Northern Nigeria caused by incessant ethno-religious conflicts, women from different religious faiths

came together to protest. Women (both Christians and Muslims) in Plateau state all dressed in black clothes protested against the systematic agenda of ethnic cleansing and community extinction on the Plateau and other parts of the nation.



Plate 38: Women Protesting the Senseless and Systematic Acts of Ethnic Cleansing and Community Extinction in the Plateau State. Source: Premium Times 11/04/2018

## **Benefits of Forgives and Reconciliation for Dogo Nahawa Community**

### **a. It has helped them enjoy peace with God, themselves and one another**

Forgiveness is one of the keys to peace. When we cannot forgive other people for what they do or say, we keep ourselves in a state of war with them. Timothy Gyang in an interview posits that, “ever since the ugly incident, we have long forgiven our attackers and have since moved on with our lives. We still see some of the around, but we have never thought of taking revenge at them. This has helped us enjoy peace with God, ourselves and others” (Interview 18/06/2021). Simi Dusu collaborated his statements when she said that, “Although we were pained by the loss of our loved ones and property during the attack, we have long forgiven them. Initially, some of our people suspected some insiders from amongst our own people, but we later resolved to leave each man to himself and his God. Since then, we have enjoyed the peace of love and love amongst us and even one of the Muslim men still living here with us has been cordial.” She further submits that initially, we battle over how right we are, and how wrong these people were when they attack us because they wanted to take over our land. That thought alone affected everything in a very negative

way to the extent that we never wanted to see any Fulani herdsman around us. But as you can see for yourself today, they are still grazing here today” (Interview 18/06/2021). As at the time of conducting this research, the researcher saw Fulani herdsmen grazing in the area without any intimidation. A sign of true forgiveness from the parts of the people of Dogo Nahawa. It is imperative to note that crises, whether big or small has great consequence. Usually, the consequences involve the loss of time, energy, happiness, relationships, property, relations among many others. Therefore, one of the benefits of forgiveness, and experiencing peace instead of war, includes things like gaining time, gaining energy, gaining happiness, and gaining relationships with God, yourself, and others as seen among the people of Dogo Nahawa.

### **b. It has brought Development to the People and the Community**

Whenever there is no forgiveness, there will be no meaning development and progress. Even among couples, forgiveness and reconciliation often bring about the development of the family. Following the attacks on Dogo Nahawa, which led to the killings of lives and property, the community was left like a desolate. Having let go all the emotions of pain, regret and of any possible reprisal, the community witnessed the blessings of God. In his words, Dara Choji Pwajok submits that, “following what happened to us, we thought we would never survive as a people in the same community. All those who saw us immediately after the attack would not believe that we are the same people today” (Interview 27/2/2020). He further alludes to the fact that the community was visited by different Non-Governmental Organisations and philanthropists as well as the government which brought about the new face being witnessed. In his words, he avers further that, “Our road which has been untarred for years was tarred, new buildings were erected by different NGOs and other philanthropists. We did not seek to retaliate what was meted to us, but accepted our fate and left everything in the hands of the Lord. Today, we are still moving doing our things without any molestation. We have seen development restored in our community again. Although we are not celebrating this on the account of the lives we lost, but are grateful to God that in spite all that happened He still blesses us” (Interview 27/2/2020). Dogo Nahawa has since received a new touch which has brought the community closer to the town due to the road network connecting it with other towns among many other social amenities that have been made available there.

### **c. It has made them More Compassionate Towards others**

When you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, you can see things differently and will develop compassion for the offenders knowing that they do not know what they are doing. Jesus saw those who crucified Him and the entire world in the same manner, thus He prayed the father to forgive them for they do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34). According to Augsburg, Jesus took it upon himself to reconcile us with God. He proposes that “forgiveness is acceptance with no exception. It accepts not only the hurt you have



received, it accepts the one who did the hurting, and it accepts the loss caused by the hurtful actions or words” (27-29). It is important to note that having forgiven your offender, you will see and discover his folly in all he did against you. Philip Thomas posits that “Forgiveness requires you to see things from another point of view, which helps you become more understanding and sensitive to other people. It is important to see that they were not happy when they did what they did to you. They were confused, upset, hateful, or in a state of negativity. When you can see that in someone who has hurt you, then you can see that in everyone” (32). A survivor posits that, “Having forgiven those who massacred our loved ones and destroyed our property, we have learned to see life from a different perspective. We see the perpetrators as people who lack love, people who do not have the light of God and are in dire need of the mercy and love of God. We have since been praying for them to repent and have salvation as we do today.” Looking at people through compassionate eyes is rewarding. It helps you relate to other people, which improves your relationships. It helps you avoid confrontations and negative feelings, which we all know feels better than getting into fights and feeling angry with someone.

#### **d. They have Become More Present in Life**

When you do not forgive your offenders, they will become the centre of your discussions. You will begin to focus on them more, complain about them and what they did to you; and eventually, you will begin to think about revenge. This will become the cycle of your imprisonment. Philip Thomas opines further that “Often not being able to forgive means stalking, especially now when we can access other people’s lives online. We stalk our exes, old friends, and everyone who has done us wrong. And that takes a lot of time. It takes time to search through their profiles or drive by their house. That time that could be spent doing much better things” (39). However, when you are able to forgive and sought for reconciliation, you can focus on yourself and your life, not on what other people are doing. Kaneng Dalyop avers that, “When the Fulani herdsmen attacked us, we felt very bad and always had the thought of revenge. The Fulanis became our vocal point of discussion even in the Church, on our farms, in the market place and in our homes. Much time was given to discussing them and how bad they treated us. This affected our healing process. Things changed differently after some of us attended a Trauma healing program, we began to talk less about them and what happened. We began to focus on our lives and how to move on with life having lost so much” (Interview 27/2/2020). This truly is a great benefit that people can derive when they forgive their offenders. You can only focus on yourself, the people that matter and activities that matter most to you when you have truly forgiven. Grace Palmer posits that not only do you have more time to create the life you want, you are more present and capable of experiencing life fully, unlike when you are unable to let go. Holding on to anger keeps you stuck in that moment. Becoming more present in your life has a whole list of benefits itself, including more creativity, less stress, and less regret. And, of course, it is a way to really experience every moment in your life and not waste a second stuck somewhere that has no benefit for your life at all. The clearer forgiveness becomes,

the more useful it is to people who will be transformed. “The sinner does not initiate forgiveness, it is offered by God who takes the initiative to clear our past and open a new relationship of love” (Leon-Dufuor 138).

## **Conclusion**

The study discovered that the use of and competition for land has triggered many of the violent clashes among communities, resulting to killing of lives, destruction of property land grabbing. The growing presence of pastoralists from the Northern Senatorial District of Plateau State seeking grazing pastures for their livestock and the increasing cultivation of land by local farmers have resulted, in a number of cases, in violent inter-communal conflicts. Availability and exploitation of natural resources, quest for economic and political dominance have been recognised as key issues that propels some of these attacks and wanton killings.

That while different evidences abound on the existence of the massacre of the people of Dogo Nahawa as reflected in this paper, it is quite disheartening to note that when such heinous acts are meted out against such community and its inhabitants, it often reported to have been carried out by “Unknown gunmen” or by “Faceless miscreants.”

## **Recommendations**

In a bit to finding solution to some of the crises that have bedeviled some communities on the plateau and to promote peaceful coexistence, the paper thus made the following recommendations:

1. Religious leaders should encourage Christian-Muslim dialogues and support local peace initiatives. Dialogue between Christians and Muslims, particularly at the local level, is crucial to ending the ethno-religious crisis by strengthening mechanisms already existing at state and local levels.
2. Improve security and end impunity: government at all levels should improve security arrangements by boosting the numbers of security personnel, particularly in the most vulnerable communities. Security services must also improve on their ability to gather intelligence and predict attacks, including through closer engagement and communication with local residents in order to ensure the safety of lives and property, hence promoting a peaceful and safe communities.
3. Governments at all levels should also hold perpetrators of crises accountable. For persons already arrested and are in custody, the government should make special arrangements to expedite trials, provide justice for victims and send a strong signal against impunity. Leaving perpetrators to move round the streets freely will deepen grievances and the risk of further reprisals.

4. Governments at all levels should also hold perpetrators of ethnic cleansing and community extinction accountable. For persons already arrested and are in custody, the government should make special arrangements to expedite trials, provide justice for victims and send a strong signal against impunity. Leaving perpetrators to move round the streets freely will deepen grievances and the risk of further reprisals.

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#### LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

SN	NAME	AGE	PLACE	OCCUPATION	DATE
1	Mr. Choji Ayuba,	58	Dogo Nahawa	Farmer	27/02/2020
2	Rev. Gyang Chuwang	46	Dogo Nahawa	Clergyman	18/06/2021
3	Mr. Barnabas Gyang	39	Dogo Nahawa	Civil servant	14/03/2020
4	Mr. Charles Amos	41	Dogo Nahawa	Civil Servant	18/06/2021
5	Mr. Elisha Bot	43	Dogo Nahawa	Youth Leader	18/06/2021
6	Mr. Bitrus Danjuma	28	Dogo Nahawa	Student	18/06/2021
7	Mr. Iliya Danjuma	47	Dogo Nahawa	Farmer	18/06/2021
8	Malam Inusa Belo	52	Dogo Nahawa	Business	18/06/2021
9	Timothy Gyang	28	Dogo Nahawa	Student	18/06/2021
10	Simi Dus	56	Dogo Nahawa	Civil Servant	18/06/2021
11	Dara Choji Pwajok	63	Dogo Nahawa	Community Leader	27/02/2020
12	Kaneng Dalyop	43	Dogo Nahawa	Business	27/02/2020