

RELIGIOUS COLORATION OF HERDSMEN AND CROP-FARMERS CRISES IN NIGERIA

NNORUGA, THERESA NKIRUKA
Department of Religious Studies,
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education,
Science and Technology Ikere-Ekiti,
Ekiti State, Nigeria
E-mail: nnoruga.theresa@coe.edu.ng
Tel: +2348035762121,

&

OSHOMOH, TITUS OJO (PhD)
Department of Religious Studies,
University of Ibadan,
Ibadan, Nigeria
E-mail: oshomohtitusojo2016@gmail.com
Tel: +2348060614882

&

OGUNBADEJO, ADEBAYO VICTOR
Department of Religious Studies,
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education,
Science and Technology Ikere-Ekiti,
Ekiti State, Nigeria
E-mail: adevictory81@gmail.com
Tel: +2348075769344

Abstract

A long-running internecine conflict between Crop-farmers and Herdsmen is increasingly assuming a dangerous dimension for human security in Nigeria. The limited access to land, climate change, and population growth, among other factors, have created a fertile ground for a fierce competition between the two livelihood groups in Nigeria. This situation has resulted to irreparable loss of human and material resources needed for social integration, political and economic development of the country. Also, the conflict between the two warring groups has shortchanged Nigeria, as the country expends millions of naira to manage the menace at this critical period of economic recession, when the country is working assiduously to diversify the economy. However, it is observed that religious coloration of herdsmen/crop-farmers' violence in Nigeria has not been given adequate attention by researchers, scholars and even governments, this development has consequences on the social integration and the development of the country. This paper therefor eexamines the implications of religious coloration of Herdsmen/Crop-farmers crises and the challenges it poses to social integration and economic fortune of Nigeria. The work adopts the method of

Social media, journal articles, books, newspaper and magazine to elicit information. It established that herdsmen/crop-farmers violence does not only undermine the security system, but also threatens peaceful coexistence among Nigerians. The paper therefore recommends that there is need for the pastoralists and crop-farmers to see one another as team-players and needed stakeholders in federal government's aspiration and efforts to achieve economic prosperity for the country through the diversification of her economy, and most especially, through agriculture. Security operatives too need to be proactive and remain apolitical in order to be able to mitigate the numerous security challenges bedeviling Nigerian society.

Keywords: Herdsmen/Crop-farmers, Social-integration, Religious coloration, Nigeria, Security.

Introduction

Conflict is inevitable in every known human social setting, hence, the concern of conflict sociologists is how and why this normal social interaction has become detrimental and dangerous to human life and human societies in the 21st century. More than a decade, Nigeria has witnessed different crises ranging from ethno-religious, political violence, land dispute, chieftaincy tussle, terrorism, militancy, agitation for secession and now herdsmen/crop-farmers clashes. Hardly can there be a day or week without records of killings, maiming, armed robbery, banditry and even extra judicial killing(s) by the armed forces entrusted with the protection of lives and properties. Be that as it may, Nigeria is an agrarian society where large proportions of the population are farmers who rely heavily on land for cultivation of crops, rearing of animals, and also for other economic purposes and survival. Ogunbadejo (2020: p.380) lend credence to this view when he argued that the primary source of economic life of most rural dwellers in Nigeria is agriculture, and it is these rural populations that produce the bulk of the foods that the entire country feed from, including industrial raw materials. Eniola, cited by Ndubuisi (2008: p.1) observed that the Fulani herdsmen indisputably represent a significant component of the Nigerian Economy, they constitute the major breeders of cattle, and the cheapest main source of meat consumed by Nigerians. Corroborating this, Bello (2013: p.129) opined that over 90% of the Nation's livestock, which accounts for one third of the agricultural gross domestic product (GDP) and 3.2% of the nation's GDP are owned or controlled by the Fulani extraction of the country.

Over the years, before the current imbroglio, there was a symbiotic and a very cordial relationship between the herdsmen and the crop-farmers along the grazing routes in the country. The host communities who were mostly crop-farmers, usually received herdsmen as friends, they exchanged ideas of hunting, religion and culture. Children in the host communities would always welcome Fulani herdsmen into their communities with one song or the other immediately they set their eyes on cattle. The crop-farmers would give out farm produce such as yam, garri, corn, beans, and oil, among other gift items, as gifts to the pastoralists, while animals reared by the herders were periodically sold or even given out for free to the farmers for domestic consumption. Iyang, cited in Fajoyomi, Fatile and Ejalonibu (2016: p. 227) pointed out that the host communities, usually crop-farmers, derived organic manures from cow dungs, and proteins from the beef and dairy products, while nomads relied on the farm produce for food.

However, in recent time, the hitherto symbiotic-cordial relationship between these two livelihood groups is being threatened by the manifestation of hostilities and conflicts, which often result into incessant killings, maiming, destruction and burning of economic properties such as farmlands, houses, cars and many others in some communities of Adamawa, Gombe, Enugu, Nasarawa, Plateau, Benue, Ondo, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, Katsina, Delta, Kaduna, Zamfara, Taraba and Edo State. However, this crisis between the two groups negates their huge contributions to the economic development of the country. The point being made here is that, the crises sow the seed of disunity and intolerance among different ethno-religious groups, and increased the level of insecurity in the country. Meanwhile, the level of insecurity caused by the Boko Haram insurgence made many Fulani Pastoralists to move to the south to continue their nomadic grazing and as a result, many pastoralists changed their dry seasonal migration to raining season movement. However, due to the shortage of grazing lands occasioned by increased crop-farming activities and other factors in the South and some parts of North Central, the frustrated Fulani herders embark on encroachment of farm lands in order to sustain their pastoral activities at all costs. Whereas, the level of insecurity, suspicion, marginalization, and intolerance in the country now make many communities, mostly in the South and North Central parts of the country to vehemently reject the Fulani Herdsmen's penetration into their communities. This is more so, because, many southerners now see the Fulani Herdsmen's penetration as a plan not only to extend Fulani community, but also as a strategy to forcefully take over, and convert the lands they inherited from their ancestors to a 'Muslim community'. This is the development this study considers as a 'religious coloration' of the herdsmen/crop-farmers conflicts in Nigeria, which this paper intends to x-ray. The paper therefore focuses on the impacts of religious coloration of herdsmen/crop-farmers crises on economy, politics, religious relation and the whole corporate existence of Nigeria. In order to achieve these aims, this study explores the various Perspectives of Herdsmen and Crop-farmers conflicts in Nigeria, causes of herdsmen/crop-farmers crises, religious coloration of the clashes, and the implications of herdsmen/crop-farmers crises in Nigeria. The paper finally suggests ways out of the menaces occasioned by herdsmen/crop-farmers crises in Nigeria.

Perspectives of Herdsmen and Crop-farmers Crises in Nigeria

The conflict between herdsmen and crop-farmers in Nigeria predates the 1960 independence. As noted by Frantin (1997: p.26), since the beginning of farming in Africa, there have been conflicts between herdsmen and crop-farmers. The above submission contradicts Fatoyonmi, Fatile and Ejalonibu's (2016: p. 230) view that the clash between the two groups started early year 2000 in Nigeria. The 1992 crises between Fulani herdsmen and Igbira (Okene) migrant crop-farmers in Ikiran-Ile (Afeye) community of Akoko Edo Local Government Area of Edo State, led to the amputation of Yusuf Sani Yahaya's hand, and many others too were injured. This simply shows that there were conflicts between the two groups in different communities of Nigeria before the 2013 herdsmen attack on some villages in Nasarawa State, which led to the killings of 10 people and displacement of over 5000. This attack did not only shake the world, but also drew the attention of scholars, governments and non-governmental organizations to the menace of herdsmen/crop-farmers violence in the country. Since then, there have been a recurrent decimal and pockets of violence arising from the daily movement of cattle by the Fulani nomads in search of water and green pasture. In attestation to this position, Fasona and Omojola (2005 pp.1-13) stressed that out of 100 percent records of

different kinds of violence in Nigeria, conflicts over agricultural land use between crop-farmers and herdsmen accounted for 35 percent. By implication, these conflicts have become pervasive to the extent that herdsmen and crop-farmers now carry out their lawful grazing and farming activities with sophisticated weapons to defend themselves, and to maim and harass their opponents.

The destruction of lives, farmlands, residential houses, churches, mosques, cars, markets and other valuable properties by herdsmen Marauders further aggravate the violence in the country. Shortly after the 2013 attack mentioned above, there was another killing in which about 33 lives were lost in some villages of Nasarawa state in 2014 (The Nigerian Observer Newspaper,2019: p. 25).This was subsequently followed by the gruesome attack on Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State in February 2016, where over 200 people were killed, and about 7000 people displaced from their ancestral homes, houses were also razed across six villages. According to the Global Terrorist Index Report of 2019 cited in The Nigerian Observer Newspaper(2019: p. 25), herdsmen/crop-farmers conflicts have led to the killing of over 1229 people, and with this, the herdsmen are now gradually assuming the second terrorist group in Nigeria. The consequence of this is that the agrarian communities are left with no choice than to result to self-defense through the use of local vigilante to protect and secure themselves. Whereas, when sophisticated weapons fall into the hands of untrained civilians, attacks and countered attacks on innocent citizens would not only be expected, this will also showcase the vulnerability of the country's security system. The table below captures some cases of clashes between pastoralists and crop-farmers in Nigeria.

DATE	PLACE	CASUALTIES
January 2002	Bakin Ladi Local Government Area of Plateau State	More than 30 killed in conflicts between farmers and herders over grazing land
February 2003	Yunga community in Adamawa State	More 100 people killed in clash between farmers and herders over grazing land.
May 2003	Adamawa and Gombe State	63 killed, 34 farming villages burned and over 500 people injured in an attack by herdsmen
February 2004	Yelwa community in Plateau state	45 farmers killed
February 2005	Adamawa state	Dozens of people killed in clash between herdsmen and farmers of land grazing
December 2009	Nasarawa and Borno State	32 people were killed, several houses and farmland destroyed in a clash between farmers and herdsmen. This led to the sending away 700 pastoralists from Borno state and 2,000 from Plateau state.
March 2010	Three villages of Dogo Na Hauwa, Ratsat and Jeji in Jos South LGA of Plateau State	Many people, mostly children and women were massacred
November 2011	Benue state	Conflicts between farmers and herders, two soldiers, 50 men, women and children killed.

March 2012	Gwer West LGA of Benue State	30 people killed as a result of conflicts between Fulani Pastoralists and sedentary farmers
March 2012	Kardako community of Giza LGA of Nasarawa state	The clash between Tiv farmers and Fulani herdsmen led to the killing of 16 people and 5000 displaced
July 2012	Matse and Kakuru in Plateau state	About 200 persons including a serving Senator of the federal republic of Nigeria, GyangDantong killed.
April 5, 2014	Galadima Village	Over 200 people killed, houses burnt 500 displaced.
March 2015	Oyo State	Farmers's hand was cut off, siblings raped and farmland destroyed
May 24, 2015	Attack on villages and refugee camp in Ukura, Per, Gafa and Tse-Gusa LGA of Benue State	100 farmers and their family members massacred
February 18, 2016	Okolo village in Aguta Local Government Area of Benue State	5 person killed and many houses destroyed
March 5, 2016	Alla, Akwu, Adagbo, Okoloko, Odugbento, Ogbaulu, Egba and Ogbaganji communities in Agatu LGA of Benue State	Over 500 people died, many houses razed, many houses and farmland worth millions destroyed
April 12, 2016	Attack on two villages in Gashaka LGA of Taraba State	15 people killed
April 19, 2016	Delta State	23 persons died
April 25, 2016	UkpabiNimbo in Uzo-Uwani LGA of Enugu State	40 people killed
April 12, 2017	Two Villages from in Gashaka LGA of Taraba State	15 persons killed
April 21, 2017	Lagun Village in Iyana Offa, Atagba, Lapata and surroundings in Lagelu LGA of Oyo State	A night guard killed villages ransacked at night and valuables carted away
January 16, 2018	Ossisa community in Ndokwa LGA of Delta State	A 45 year old farmer was shot dead

June 20, 2018	Ugondo, Turan and Gabo-Nenzev in Logo LGA of Benue State	59 Persons were killed
---------------	--	------------------------

Source: Adopted from Fajoyomi, Fatile & Ejelonibu (2016: 223) and Aliyu, Ikedinma and Akinwade (2018: 121) with additions and modifications by the authors. They are by no means exhaustive.

However, efforts are being made by governments at all levels, and non-governmental organizations to mitigate security challenges caused by herdsmen/crop-farmers violence in the country. A clear example of this is the anti-grazing amendment bill enacted by Ekiti state and Benue state governments to end crop-farmers/herdsmen menace in the states. Besides this, the federal government is making moves to introduce 415 designated grazing reserves and cattle ranches across the country as part of efforts to contain herdsmen/crop-farmers' embarrassment. In each of the states where there are activities of herdsmen/crop-farmers violence, reconciliatory committees are being set up to mitigate and dialogue with warring factions to achieve peaceful coexistence in the community. However, despite the various efforts made by governments to contain the menace, the conflict remains unabated, and is even fast spreading to other parts of the country free from herdsmen/crop-farmers crises. It is on the basis of this that we turn our attention to the major causes of this violence in Nigeria.

Causes of Herdsmen/Crop-farmers Crises in Nigeria

Different factors are responsible for the unending confrontations between herdsmen and crop-farmers in Nigeria. One of the notable factors of this perennial controversy, as has been pointed out earlier in this discourse, is the unavailability of sufficient lands for farming and grazing. Land is an important and very crucial asset to economic development of any nation. Meanwhile, the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria has prompted the federal and state governments' policies of economic diversification in the country, from the monolithic oil based economy, through agriculture, and this has made many Nigerians, both the educated and the uneducated to embrace farming. The implication of this is the drastic reduction of available lands for potential farmers and herders to carry out their legitimate farming businesses. Also, the increase in human and animal populations from 1970 to 2020 has also constitutes to the competition for the little available lands for farming in Nigeria. Apart from this, significant portions of Nigerian lands have also been used for the construction of industries and residential buildings. Oduoko, (2019: p. 112) observed that Nigerian human and animal populations have increased greatly from what they were in 1987 but Nigeria's geographical land mass is fixed. According to him, the increase in human and animal populations is as a result of improved access to better medical and veterinary facilities in Nigeria. The activities of animal health extension workers aid increased animal population and this in turn led to competition for the little available grazing lands. Ngbea and Ngbea (2019: p. 3), also attested to this observation when they argued that increase in the population of people across the country with little land left for farming and grazing of animals by both herdsmen and crop-farmers is responsible for the crises between the two groups.

The increase in crop-farming activities directly affects, and led to a reduction in availability of grazing lands for animals. Meanwhile, for an average Fulani pastoralist, he would rather die than allow his cattle to die of hunger. It is more important to feed his animals than to live and

watch his animal die because of shortage of pasture. This attitude made many Fulani herdsmen to forcefully encroach on farmlands to feed their cattle, an act which does not go down well with the crop-farmers. An obvious inference that can be drawn from the above submission is that the crop-farmers' total resistance of Fulani herdsmen's encroachment and destruction of their farms, aggravate the problem between indigene crop-farmers and the migrant pastoralists in the country.

The claims and agitations by Fulani herdsmen that every land in Nigeria belongs to them since they have the majority of the population, and are more widespread than every other ethnic group in the country, also creates a fertile ground for their rejection by the local crop-farmers. For instance, the citizenship claim and claim of ownership of land in Plateau state led to incessant conflict between Hausa/Fulani herdsmen migrants and Berom indigenous ethnic group of the state. The Fulani herdsmen exhibit this same attitude in every other community prone to herdsmen/crop-farmers crises in Nigeria. The local crop-farmers always feel embarrassed whenever the Fulani herdsmen claim ownership of the lands they inherited from their ancestors, on which they have lived and farmed for many years. The point being made here is that, the level of discrimination against fellow Nigerians who migrate to settle in communities different from their own immediate communities of origin, fans the ember of rivalry and discord between indigene and settlers in the country.

Again, the Fulani immigrants often time acquire lands clandestinely from the traditional rulers of their host communities without the knowledge of the ordinary citizens who often feel cheated and unlawfully dispossessed of their inheritances. This idea of secret acquisition of lands by Fulani Herdsmen from traditional rulers, without the consent of the real ordinary owners has also been considered as a major factor responsible for the rivalry between the two groups in Nigeria. This act of deceit exhibited by the traditional rulers is often rejected violently by the community peasant farmers. The late Tor Tiv Alfred Akawe Torkula as quoted by Ngbea and Ngbea(2019: p.3) stated that:

He regretted the heavy loss of lives and properties as a result of Fulani attacks and warn the chiefs who monetized certain portions of land with Fulani without the knowledge of the public to desist from doing so.

In most cases, people's land and farms are forcefully seized and handed over to the herdsmen to graze by the traditional institutions without considering the feelings and survival of their subjects. On this note, many affected persons, their friends and relatives, work hard to sustain violent fight against the traditional rulers and the herdsmen benefiting from the lands. This development do result into violent rebellion against the traditional rulers by the local community members, and in order to make their voices heard, the local crop-farmers create problems that would make relevant authorities intervene or even dethrone culpable traditional rulers, so as to enable them get back the land they inherited from their ancestors from the intruding herdsmen. Meanwhile, the attempts by the herdsmen to defend their benefactors (traditional rulers), and continue grazing without any restriction or attack, more often than not, do result to crises situation. The Fulani Herdsmen would also contact people from neighboring communities to acquire lands for them without the seller knowing that the

land he sold was being bought on behalf of the Fulani herdsmen as grazing land for the Fulani herdsmen's cattle. However, the moment the trick used in acquiring the land by the Fulani herdsmen became known to the owners of the land, violence ensued as a result of the owners' intention to forcefully collect the land back by refunding the money he had earlier collected. The porosity of Nigerian borders also exacerbates the upsurge of the conflict between herdsmen and crop-farmers in Nigeria. Migrants from neighboring countries such as the well-known notorious and violent Bororo Fulani ethnic group of Mali, Chad and Niger come into the country unchecked with sophisticated weapons such as AK 47 rifles, pump action guns, cartridge dan guns and cartridge ammo to torment, harass, maim and kill crop-farmers whom the herdsmen see as unbearable threat to their pastoral activities. Even though the Fulani herders often claim that they only use the sophisticated weapons to defend themselves against cattle rustlers and other illicit activities carried out by crop-farmers against them, it is very obvious that they only carry these weapons to resist the crop-farmers' resentments to encroachment of their farms. The former Inspector General of Police, Solomon Arase attested to this position when he said that the Nigeria's porous borders led to the influx of foreign herdsmen from Mali and Chad into the country to cause violence. According to him, most of the herdsmen's killings in the country are not carried out by Nigerian herders (Nigerian Tribune 2014: p. 31). It is pertinent to mention at this point that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)'s protocol on free movement of goods and persons 1998 in West Africa, led to manipulation and exploiting of the loopholes in the system by herdsmen from other countries. For instance, article 5 of laid down protocol specifically states that "all transhumance and livestock shall be allowed free passage across point of entry into another country without restriction as far as the migrant processes ECOWAS International Transhumance Certificate (ECOWAS Protocol Guide 2020). This act of manipulating the system contributes tremendously to the persistent deterioration of security in Nigeria. As argued by Chikodiri and Chukwuemeka (2019: p.9), the implementation of the Land Use Act of 1978 in Nigeria allows the state the right to lease land, and also give indigenes the right to apply and be given a certificate of occupancy to claim ownership of their ancestral lands. This according to them, places the pastoralists in a difficult position because recurrent trans human movements will inadvertently lead to encroachment on the properties of others.

However, despite the creation of grazing reserves and routes by government, the herdsmen still feel cheated, as they believe that there is imbalance in the constitution of Nigeria which favours crop-farmers at their own detriment. According to them, despite these unfavorable provisions of the constitution, some states in Nigeria still went ahead to introduce Anti-Open Grazing Laws which do not only have adverse effects on cattle rearing, but completely deny pastoralists the rights to have legitimate free access to land to feed their animals which happens to be their source of income and survival. For them, these laws are anti-human, targeted at Fulani herdsmen. With this, many frustrated herdsmen are left with no choice than to result to violence by carrying sophisticated weapons to force their ways into communities along grazing routes in search of pasture lands to sustain their cattle and families. It is obvious that the longstanding clashes between herdsmen and crop-farmers have increased exponentially across Nigeria since the introduction of anti-open grazing laws in Ekiti and Benue states in May 2017.

Finally, the perceived inaction of the Nigerian government to deal decisively with sponsors of herdsmen and crop-farmers crises attests to the culture of impunity in the society. Many Nigerians see the government of President Muhammadu Buhari as an accomplice in herdsmen's violence against crop-farmers. They feel the president is supporting his fellow Fulani Kinsmen to wage war against people from other communities. This conviction made many opinion leaders in Nigeria to call on the President to change his style of leadership and protect every law abiding citizens of the country as he is president of Nigeria, but not that of any single ethnic group. A clear example of this is the open statement made by General Theophilus Y. Danjuma that the government of President Muhammadu Buhari colludes with Fulani herdsmen to completely wipe out members of other ethno-religious groups from Nigeria. He therefore called on every community to defend themselves from Fulani herdsmen marauders sponsored by the government and shelve the idea of relying on the security system of the country (The Nation Newspaper 2018: p.17). The former President of Nigeria, General Olusegun Obasanjo, equally maintained same position in an open letter he addressed to the President. He urged President Muhammadu Buhari to be fair, just, and provide good leadership to the people, and use the security apparatus of the country to protect all law abiding citizens irrespective of their ethnic and religious background (The Punch Newspaper 2018).

Nigeria is a complex society with diverse ethnic nationalities, where every action of the government and her agents is subject to scrutiny by a public of conflicting religious and ethnic sentiments. Members of the public interpret government policies and decisions with religious and ethnic biases. Under this circumstance, any religiously and ethnically suspicious action and inaction by the government and her agencies is greeted with public resentment. For instance, the statement credited to the police public relation officer, Mr Jimoh on Channels Television that the Governor of Benue State, Samuel Ortom is a drowning man immediately after the killings of over 70 people in Guma and Logo LGAS of the state was seen as been expository of the volume of police support to the Fulani herdsmen (Channels Television Sunrise Daily News 2018). The inaction of the concern authority (federal government) to arrest the Secretary General of the Fulani Socio Cultural Association, "Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore" when he openly said that if the president fails to stop Anti-Open Grazing Law in Benue State, herdsmen will be left with no choice than to fight and defend their rights and lifestyle. One wonders the temerity or power of an individual or association to cajole and forcefully stop a government from making laws beneficiary to her citizens. With this boldness, many Nigerians are of the opinion that the activities of Fulani herdsmen which seem to be targeted at ethnic cleansing based on religious affiliations have federal government backing. On the basis of this suspicion, many communities have decided to defend themselves against the invasion of the Fulani Herdsmen.

Religious Coloration of Herdsmen/Crop-farmers Clashes in Nigeria

Nigeria is a country with over 200 million populations, and as a pluralized country, adherents of different religions including Christians and Muslims live side by side in the country. Nigeria is also considered as one of the world's greatest countries. But a sad story about Nigeria is that, in the recent time, violence is periodically experienced in the country. Meanwhile, the identical ethno-religious interests and, the complex nature of ethno-religious interactions in the country make it very difficult for anyone to be able to separate problems caused by other factors other than religious and ethnic biases from the ones precipitated by

ethno-religious sentiments. In as much such problems involve people of different ethnic and religious affiliation, citizens easily associate problems with ethnicity and religion. Due to her complex ethno-religious formation, Nigeria constitutes a very good example, and an ample opportunity for understanding inter-religious relations in a typical diverse society. Lending credence to this view, Akinlade (2002) pointed out that Nigeria is not only an important test case for developing patterns of inter-religious relations, but also provides a rich context for understanding the cultural, social, economic and political issues that are involved in the Christian-Muslim encounter in Africa. For example, Kaduna state is notable as one of the north western states where major issues are vigorously or violently contested along the lines of the complex ethnic and religious sentiment. By the virtue of its complex identical ethno-religious sentiments, Kaduna state can be rightly described as one of the deeply divided states in Nigeria where ethnic, religious and political crises are staged. The point being made here is that, the close link between ethnic and religious sentiments made it difficult for many Nigerians either educated or illiterate to be able to differentiate and separate religious violence from herdsmen/crop-farmers dispute, inter-cult groups clashes, ethnic and political clashes in the country. This corroborates with Ajamu's (2013: p.69) position that in Nigeria society today, religion and ethnicity are interwoven to the extent that conflicts between groups tend to be simultaneously interpreted as religious violence.

In view of the foregoing, it is important to point out that aside the difficulty of differentiating conflicts with religious connotations from herdsmen/crop-farmers conflict, there is also the unwillingness among Nigerians to disassociate religion from any crises outbreak in the country. Hence, reactions and countered reactions against any outbreak in different parts of Nigeria either in public discussions or on the pages of Newspaper, social media, television and radio programs tilt towards religious affiliations. This simply explains the report carried by Radio Nigeria in Kaduna, accusing Christians of killing Muslims and burning copies of Holy Quran without adequate investigation of the actual causes of confrontations among the college of Education students in Kafanchan (Newswatch Magazine 1987: p.25). After assuming office as the governor of Kaduna state in 2015, Malam Nasir El-Rufai responded to the herdsmen/crop-farmers killings in Christian dominated Southern Kaduna by sending a message to the foreign Muslim Fulani herdsmen in Chad, Cameroon and Niger that one of them, a Fulani Muslim was now the governor. He also went further to pay them as a compensation to stop killing in Kaduna state (Vanguard Newspaper 2017: p.8). This move by the governor attests to his bigoted mindset and discrimination against other religious groups in the state. However, in reaction to the governor's action, the Christians and their leaders in southern Kaduna and other parts of the country see this action of the governor as a preferential treatment and support for the killings of southern Kaduna Christians by Fulani herdsmen in 2017. This made Apostle Johnson Suleiman to threaten the government when prominent Muslim leaders in the country called for his arrest after criticizing governor El-Rufai's ethno-religious discrimination in the state. As reported in Vanguard Newspaper (2017: p.8), Apostle Suleiman observed that:

There is no end to the killing of Christians in Southern Kaduna by Fulani Muslim herdsmen. Those behind the heinous crime are known to the Governor. Yet no one has been charged for murder. Instead, people like us who speak against the unjust treatment of Christians in Kaduna are

being persecuted. The compensation of Fulani Herdsmen indicates that religious solidarity trumped his constitutional obligations to protect southern Kaduna Christian citizens. He therefore, asked his Church members to kill and cut off the head of any Fulani Muslim who either intentionally or by mistake attack them. If they are busy killing Christians and nothing is happening, we will kill them in self-defense and nothing will happen. He equally threatened to lead a religious war against the government if he is arrested.

The point being emphasized here is that, many Nigerians and even foreigners, including academics, religious, and political leaders alike, are of firm belief that the herdsmen/crop-farmers' conflicts are targeted at putting an end to Christian religion in Nigeria because the conflicts are most often staged in Christian dominated communities. Nigerians are so religious to the point that they interpret any negative or attempt of negative treatment of fellow members/adherents of their religious faith as an attempt to, and a process of Christianization or Islamization of the country. Meanwhile, whenever adherents of religions in Nigeria form the impression or are of the conviction that their religion is been mal-treated by members of other religions, they find it difficult to change their mind, even if they later discover that the information they got was not true. This problem of religious coloration of herdsmen/crop-farmers conflicts in Nigeria is further compounded as a result of the appointment of security chiefs by President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015. The appointments include: The chief of army staff (Gen. Tukor Buratai, Muslim North), Chief of Air Staff (Air Marshal Abubakar Sadique, Muslim North), Chief of Defense (Mansur Dan Alli, Muslim North), Inspector General of Police (Ibrahim Idris, Muslim North), Director General, Department of State Services DSS (Yusuf Magaji Bichi, Muslim North), Commander General, Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corp NSCDC (Abdullahi Mohammed, Muslim North), Chief of Defense Intelligence Agency (Muhammed Usman, Muslim North), Comptroller General of Nigeria Customs Services (Hameed Ali, Muslim North) and Comptroller General of Immigration Services Muhammed Babadade, Muslim North). This appointments according to Adetiba (1999: p.138) are not only capable of disintegrating a diverse society like Nigeria, but negate the federal character principle as enshrined in section 14 article 3 of the 1979 constitution and section 14 article (3) of the 1999 constitution as amended. All calls to the president to draw his attention to this section of the constitution fell in deaf hear. Hence, the Christians who felt marginalized and maltreated by this current administration of President Muhammadu Buhari are left with no choice than read religious meanings to the killings of Christians in different parts of the country. For instance, Father Amos Mbachie- the parish priest of St Theresa Parish in Makurdi believes that the violence being witnessed by farmers now has a religious motivation. "Fulani people come, occupy and start building mosques in their host communities. They know these are indigenous Christian communities, but they come here, they send people away, they stay and then they start practicing their own religion...They burn churches, they kill priests" (Mayeni: 2018).

On the basis of the above explanations, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) accused the federal government and the security chiefs of aiding Muslim Fulani herdsmen's onslaught against the Christians. The ideology of the herdsmen attacks in Benue, Southern Kaduna, Taraba, Enugu and other parts of the country dominated by Christians according to CAN, is

based on the conviction of the Fulani that all lands belong to Allah. For instance, the table below shows estimated killings and destruction of Christians' properties as a result of herdsmen/crop-farmers conflicts in a Christian dominated state of Benue.

Local Government Area	Number of Christian Killed	Number of Christians Injured	Number of Homes Destroyed	Number of Churches Destroyed
Agatu	979	1051	7,663	4
Gwer East	15	21	447	0
Makurdi	494	248	24,683	7
Guma	1426	606	63,718	5
Tarka	52	16		
Buruku	25	0		
Katsina-Ala	91	0	11,399	1
Logo	204	721	28,807	4
Ukum	42	24		
Gwande	72	6		
Obi	34	0		
Gwer West			37,416	7
Total for all LGAs	4,194	2,957	195,576	30

Source:Adopted from Ngbea and Ngbea (2019: p.3). They are by no means exhaustive

The above table attests to the fact that scholars also view herdsmen/crop-farmers conflicts as having religious connotation. This position is equally not different from a BBC writer- Mayeni Jones' (2018) opinion that "along-running conflict between cattle herders and farmers is increasingly assuming a religious dimension in Nigeria". According to him, the killing of Reverend father Joseph Gor, Reverend father Felix Tyolaha, 15 of their parishioners, stealing of communion wine and as well as burning of shops on the 24th of April 2018 in Mbalom of Benue State, sent ripples through the country. With these killings of religious leaders and their followers, many political and religious leaders all over the world responded immediately by reading religious meanings to it. For instance, the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari said that the attack was aimed at fueling the ember of religious violence between Christians and Muslims. The United States of America's President, Donald Trump did not only call the attention of President Buhari to the Killings of Christians in Nigeria, but also urged him to immediately stop the marginalization and the war against Christians in the country. On the other hand, while Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) organized a one day protest against the killings of Christians in Nigeria, their Muslim brothers known as the Muslim Rights Concern Group (MRCG) condemned the unending attack on adherents of Christianity by describing it as wicked, repulsive and barbaric.

The Christian's distrust in Federal government, and the impression that the federal government deliberately failed to protect the Christians and the local farmers against the onslaughts by Fulani Herdsmen are construed as an ethno-religious bias on the part of government against the Christians and the local farmers. However, it is pertinent to point out at this juncture that the activities of Fulani Herdsmen is not restricted to designated Christian

dominated communities as claimed by many Nigerians and foreigners. Both Muslim and Christian dominated states have all had their fair share from herdsmen/crop-farmers' violence in the country. If Christian dominated areas are the primary target of herdsmen, why are the herdsmen killing fellow Fulani Muslim crop-farmers in Zamfara, Katsina, Adamawa and many other states dominated by adherents of Islam? Moreover, there is no available record or empirical data that showcase the number of Christians and that of Muslims killed by Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria. The fact that Benue, Plateau, Enugu, Taraba, southern Kaduna and many other places in southern Nigeria are predominantly Christian dominated does not mean that there are no Muslim settlements and settlers in the states. It is true that the Fulani Muslims are the largest semi-nomadic group in Nigeria and West Africa generally. However, it is the contention of this discourse that it is not true that the conflict is between Christian crop-farmers and Muslim herders since there are Christian herders and Muslim crop-farmers, and most especially as both usually fall victims of the crises. Besides this, there are also cattle owned by non-Fulani from the southern parts of Nigeria. For example, in October 2017, some cattle entered into one of the lecture halls at the University of Benin (UNIBEN) and disrupted ongoing lectures. Few minutes after that occurrence, social media was awash by students accusing President Muhamadu Buhari of sending his cattle to disrupt their lectures. Investigation later revealed that the Vice Chancellor of the University, Professor Osasere F.F. Orumwense owned the cattle. On this note, it is erroneous to paint the conflict between herdsmen and crop-farmers in Nigeria as "a clash between Muslim herdsmen and Christian crop-farmers". Be that as it may, It is very crucial to mention here that Nigerians –generation by generation, have always been bequeathed with the mindsets of religious suspicion, and it is now extremely difficult for Nigerians to come together to fight a common enemy notwithstanding their religion and ethnic background, without reading religious or ethnic meanings to issues. The call by both the political and the religious leaders on their followers to defend themselves against the supposed Muslim Fulani herdsmen enemies has further polarized Nigeria along religious and ethnic divides. This now encourage the youths to secretly empower themselves with sophisticated weapons. According to Olatunji and Ayuba (2016: p.12) Nigeria is now divided to the extent that Christians and Muslims now live in separate quarters in some parts of Nigerian metropolis and other major towns, this thus create a greater security threat and challenges for ethnic integration in the country.

Implications of Herdsmen/Crop-farmers Crises in Nigeria

The major implications of the incessant herdsmen/crop-farmers' conflicts in Nigeria today is the distrust in government, and the hatred and intolerance it has created among religious adherents in the country. Despite the constitutional status of Nigeria as a secular state, the crises have successfully pitch Christians and Muslims against one another in the country. As argued by Oluwasuji, Omodia and Oyinloye (2018: p.878), the unwillingness of the Nigerian government to stop the cattle herdsmen who are predominantly Muslims from encroaching the villages and farmlands belonging to predominantly Christian areas has added to religious hatred and claims that the Muslims have the backing of the government to wipe away Christians, and grab their lands to spread Islam. This submission is equally not different from the inclusion of Nigeria in US watch-list as one of the countries where the governments have engaged in or tolerated "severe violations of religious freedom" (Mike Pompeo: 2019). Since the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, all government policies aimed at strengthening national cohesion, political and economic development of the country are fearlessly contested among

religious adherents. Due to the distrust the Christians have in the administration of president Buhari's intension to curtail the crises between the Fulani herdsmen and the crop-farmers without favoring his fellow Muslim Fulani herdsmen, many of his policies targeted at resolving the menace were rejected by adherents of Christianity and their leaders. For example, the move by the government to introduce grazing route, cattle ranches and cattle colony in all states of the federation for which the government budgeted over 10 billion naira was vehemently rejected by the Christians and their leaders. All the governors in the Christian dominated southern states and their Christian colleagues from the north rejected the federal government's move to take some portions of the lands in their state for the project. This total rejection simply shows the damage caused by herdsmen/crop-farmers' conflicts to religious tolerance and national integration of the country. Corroborating this observation, Oshomoh (2017: p.117) argued that the dichotomy between the Christian indigenes and Fulani Muslim migrants in different parts of the country is compounded as a result of the violence. Hence, many communities mostly from the south are not ready to accommodate Fulani herdsmen, and in most cases, communities bar their indigenes to sell or buy from Fulani herdsmen. The violence therefore, is not only a threat to the provisions of the constitution which empowers all Nigerians to buy, sell and move freely without restriction from one part of the country to another, but also threatens the very fabric of our nationhood to coexist peacefully.

Another important aspect to be considered as far as the issue of herdsmen/crop-farmers' conflicts is concerned is the challenge it poses to the Nigerian security system. For example, as a result of the incessant killings, rape, amputation of hands and destruction of farmlands and properties by herdsmen and crop-farmers, many communities introduced security system popularly known as "vigilante" to safeguard and protect the communities from invasions. With this, many peasant farmers who find it difficult to feed their families are forced into contributing money to buy ammunitions and make monthly payment to all members of the vigilante group. In some places, this sophisticated weapons that fall into the hands of untrained civilians increase social vices in the communities. This is so because some of the vigilante members see it as an opportunity to steal, intimidate, harass and kill people thereby, increasing extra-judicial killings in the country. In this connection, innocent policemen who are carrying out their constitutional duty of protecting lives and properties are also ambushed in order to prevent them from coming into the communities that have turned theatres of crimes. In addition to this, some states have established vigilante security and amended the state laws to give it a legal backing. For instance, while the six states in South Western Nigeria introduced a security outfit known as "AMOTEKUN" to protect the western region of the country, Edo State established Public Safety and Works Volunteers (PUWOV) for surveillance and community policing functions in the state (Premium Times, 2020). This move by some state governments of the federation to protect their citizens shows that the security system of the country is over stretched by the menace of herdsmen/crop-farmers' conflicts.

Obviously, the killings and displacement of innocent people from their ancestral abode, led to an increase in refugee camps across the country. Many house owners have been displaced from their hard earn properties to perpetually live in exile. Many communities that have existed for many years have now become history. Many innocent children have become orphans; women and men become widows and widowers respectively, all these result to

psychological and emotional trauma. Consequently, many orphans are left with no choice than to engage in all sorts of social vices such as armed robbery, cultism, prostitution, kidnapping and several other unscrupulous engagements, to fend for themselves. Kindhearted individuals, governments and non-governmental organizations have spent huge sum of money to provide food and other relief materials to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). According to Oluwasuji, Omodia and Oyinloye (2018: p.883), famine, starvation and hunger loom in the country since farmers cannot return to their farms. For Erundu and Nwakanma (2018: p.23), whenever a whole community is sacked and displaced, the burden of governments, groups and philanthropists in providing care and other necessities of life for them increases. Most of the time, the majority of the displaced persons are subsistence farmers who happen to be the bread winners of their respective families. The economic lifestyle of the IDP members have been shattered since they cannot produce food to feed their families, they rely solely on whatever the governments provide for them, and in most cases, what the governments provide are not always sufficient to feed them. The governments are equally hit by the violence because they spend huge amount of money in maintaining and sustaining the refugees' camp without financial return since many of the displaced persons who were tax payers before their displacement seized to do so due to their present economic predicament. The incessant fracas and continuous displacement of farmers led to shortage of food production and supply since most of the agrarian communities that are worst hit by the herdsmen/crop-farmers violence are the food baskets of the nation. The implication of this is the shortage and price hike of food items. This equally put Nigeria in a difficult situation to feed her citizens without importation of food items from other countries. The atmosphere of violence created by the two groups limits the developmental strides and achievements of the government. Nigeria is thus seen by both the citizens and international communities as a failed state, as the government cannot deliver on her primary responsibility and mandate of protecting lives and properties of her citizens. The former head of state –Abdulsalam Abdulbakar for instance puts estimated annual loss to herdsmen/crop-farmers' conflicts in the country at 13.7 billion dollars.

Lastly, the conflict poses a serious challenge to the social life style of the people. Many are scared to attend social gatherings such as weddings, burial ceremonies, religious services, birthday parties, political gatherings and other social functions for the fear that they could be attacked. When citizens who have no other community or country to call their own are not free to move about in their own communities, there is serious problem, and this is regrettable. Therefore, the inability of the governments to manage and find lasting solution to the menace calls for serious concern, it raises fundamental question on the survival of the country, hence, the agitations from different quarters for economic and political restructuring. The population sizes of the communities are affected because many inhabitants scampered for safety by relocating to neighboring areas free from violence. In this respect, the socio- cultural value system of the affected persons are changed to that of the communities that accommodate them, the education of the children is greatly affected, while the economy and the population of the host communities increase substantially. It is very unfortunate

Recommendations

Given the devastating effects of the episodic violence occasioned by Fulani herdsmen and crop-farmers' crises in Nigeria, there is need for a change of mentality among the diverse

ethnic and religious groups in the country. Adherents of different religions in Nigeria should preclude the internecine attitude of attributing religious biases to all issues. Both Islamic scholars and theologians, and Christian religious leaders/clergy men and women, should make efforts to educate adherents of both Christianity and Islamic faith in an objective manner, devoid of proclivities of fanaticism, such that average religious practitioners in Nigeria would have clear understanding of the pristine practices of the founders of their religions. This will enhance inter-religious peace among adherents of different religious faiths in the country. Both the Christian crop-farmers and the Muslim herdsmen should see one another as needed stakeholders in government's efforts to diversify the economy through agriculture.

There is also an urgent need on the parts of governments to put in place mechanism to check and contain the menace of fake news on social media in the country. Again, governments should make proactive efforts of making sure that the details about the cause of any outbreak is verified as soon as possible, and sensitize Nigerians on the implications of attributing to and adducing reasons of religious biases for every occurrences/violence without proper investigation. It is very important for political and religious leaders to be careful about their policies, and their utterances in public places. The way and manner some political and religious leaders are going about herdsmen/crop-farmers' violence in Nigeria is tantamount to inciting religious war and social unrest in the country.

The federal government must realize that Nigeria is a diverse society, all communities, whether Muslim minority or Christian majority have equal rights to state resources, therefore, all developmental strides of the government must be distributed equally, without discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or religion. Religious rights of all inhabitants of Nigeria must be respected and protected.

Security operatives in Nigeria need to be proactive in responding to distress calls. There is need to deal decisively with any erring individual irrespective of his or her status, religion and ethnic background. Rotation of political offices among diverse communities is needed to ensure tolerance and peaceful coexistence among the people. The interest of all religions in the country must be considered for any amendment to the state constitution. On a final note, there is also the need to implement policies at the local levels to encourage dialogue among major ethnic and religious groups. In this case, members of the communities prone to episodic herdsmen/crop-farmers violence must be selected to be parts of committees set up by governments to dialogue on conflict prevention, management and resolution.

Conclusion

The study has discussed in detail, religious coloration of herdsmen/crop-farmers' violence in Nigeria, and the serious challenges it poses not only to our hard earn democracy, but also to the very fabric of Nigeria's corporate existence. It argues that the unavoidable link between ethnicity and religion made any outbreak in Nigeria whether herdsmen/crop-farmers, political, communal or intergroup clashes wears the ember of religious coloration. The incessant herdsmen/crop-farmers crisis has further polarized the complex composition of the country along ethnic and religious lines. The unhealthy rivalry between the two dominant religions (Christianity and Islam) in Nigeria is the major reason for religious coloration of

herdsmen/crop-farmers violence as adherents of these religions adduce and ascribe reasons of religious biases to every issue and occurrence without proper investigation. The above situation further brings to the fore the need not to trivialize the work of governance by not putting into consideration the interest of all and sundry when decisions of urgent national concerns are to be made.

References

- Adetiba, T. C. and Rahim, A. (1999). Inclusive Governance in Ethnically Divided Nigeria since 1999: The Application of the Principle of Federal Character and Power Sharing System, *Greener Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 3
- Ajamu, T. K. (2013). "Implications of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Northern Nigeria on National Security and Nation Building" in: Ayantayo, J. K. and Fatokun, S.A. (eds.) *Religion and Security Issues: Proceedings of 2013 Biennial International Religious Studies Conference*, Vol. 5, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan
- Akinade A. E, (2002). The Precarious Agenda: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Nigeria, Lecture given in honor of Professor Jane Smith titled "Essentials of Christian-Muslim Relation".
- Aliyu M. K., Ikedinma H. A. and Akinwande A. E.(2018). Assessment of the Effects of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflicts on National Integration in Nigeria, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 8, No. 10
- Bello A. U.(2013). Herdsmen and Farmers Conflicts in North Eastern Nigeria: Causes, Repercussions and Resolutions, *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 5
- Channels Television Sunrise Daily News at 10: 00pm, February 6, 2018
- Chikodiri, N. and Chukwuemeka E.(2019). Nomadic Pastoralism and Human Security: Towards a Collective Action against Herders-Farmers Crisis in Nigeria, *AfriHeritage Research Work Paper*, 010
- ECOWAS Protocol Guide, downloaded from ECOWAS website on the 7 March, 2020
- Erondu, C. I. and Nwakanma E. (2018). New Dimension of the Farmers and Herdsmen Crisis in Nigeria and the Implications for Development, *International Multi-Dimensional Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 4
- Fajonyomi, S. O., Fatile, J. O. and Ejalonibu, G. L.(2016). Fulani Herdsmen/Farmers Conflicts: Implications for Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria, *International Journal of Development Strategies in Humanities, Management and Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, no. 2
- Fasona, M. J. and Omojola, A. S.(2005). Climate Change, Human Security and Communal Clashes in Nigeria, Paper presented at International Workshop in Human Security and Climate Change, Oslo: Holmen Fjord Hotel, October 21-23
- Frantkin, E.(1997). Pastoralism: Governance and Development Issues, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26
- Global Terrorist Index report of 2019, *The Nigerian Observer Newspaper*, 18 December, 2019 <http://naijagist.com/Fulani-gunmen-attack>
- Global Terrorist Index report of 2019
- Mayeni, J. How Nigeria's cattle war is fuelling religious tension, *BBC Report*, May 9, 2018
- Mike Pompeo (2019). US Places Nigeria on Watch-List of Countries that Violate Religious Freedom, *Vanguard Newspaper*, December 21, 2019

- Ndubuisi C. I.(2018). A Critical Analysis of the Conflicts between Herdsmen and Farmers in Nigeria: Causes and Socio-religious and Political Effects on National Development, HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies, 74, No. 1
- Ngbea T. G. and Ngbea T. J.(2019). Political and Religious Implications Herdsmen and Farmers Crises in Nigeria, International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies, Vol. 6, No. 2
- Odueko F. D.(2019). Panacea for Herdsmen-Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria, Journal of Dairy, Veterinary & Animal Research, Vol. 8, No. 2
- Ogubadejo, A.V. (2020). Doctrinal Supremacy Counterclaims of Living Faiths; the Case of Christianity and Islam in the Religiously Pluralized Nigeria and Sustainable Development (IJMSSPCS): International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 369-385
- Olatunji E. A. and Ayuba G. M.(2016). Kaduna State Sharia Crises of 2000: The Lessons and Challenges After Sixteen Years, IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (IOSR-JHSS), Vol. 21, No 10
- Oluwasuji C. O.Omodia S.M. and Oyinloye B.(2018). The Political Economy of Fulani Herdsmen Activities and Inter-Ethno-Religious Relations in Nigeria's Forth Republic: Issues and Prospects, Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (SJHSS), Vol. 3, Issue 7
- Oshomoh T.O.(2017). Ethno-Religious Crises as an Index of Social Instability in Jos, Nigeria, Akungba Journal of Religion and African Culture, Vol. 5, No. 1

NEWSPAPERS

- Newswatch Magazine, March 15, 1987
- Nigerian Tribune, Thursday 11-4-2014
- The Nation Newspaper, March 25, 2018
- The Punch Newspaper, October 12, 2018
- Vanguard Newspaper, January 30, 2017