

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cattle rights versus human rights: herdsman–farmer clashes in Nigeria

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Abstract

Climate change across West Africa has provoked recurrent herdsman–farmer clashes in the subregion. In Nigeria, the frequency and magnitude of the clashes and the resultant destruction of lives and property has become a cause for concern to both government and citizens. This is especially so because of the danger it poses to society and national security. Accordingly, the need for a close study of the problem can hardly be over-emphasised. This study historicises this unsavoury phenomenon in Nigeria as well as its social and economic cost to society. The research contends that the activities of the herdsman in various Nigerian communities represent a contest between the values the nomads attach to their cattle and the farmers, to their crops/land. These values were overheated by the political undercurrent in Nigeria in recent times. Our study shows that, contrary to insinuations that herdsman rein all the havoc in most Nigerian communities, some were the handiwork of criminals; hence, religious and ethnic bigots who have taken advantage of the crisis. Our analysis is partly descriptive and quantitative, and is based on secondary data and information culled from direct interviews from the field, as well as newspaper reportage.

Introduction

Herdsman–farmer clashes have occurred in the West African subregion for some centuries. In earlier times, such face-offs were usually settled amicably with little or no destruction of property and lives. This is no longer the case, with such conflicts now especially problematic in Nigeria. A combination of factors, notably economic and political instability in the Maghreb, encroaching desertification, and the plurality of the identity of the herders (usually Fulani), has upset the traditional ‘table-of-peace’ pacifist settlement model in many West African states. Setting out from Senegal, the Fulani herders have found Nigeria as their most attractive destination. This is because of the availability of a huge land mass very rich in all-year fodder and a huge market for cattle. As would be expected, the herders’ extensive appetite for grazing land has brought them into conflict with sedentary farmers, owners of the same land.

In Nigeria, there are various forms of land tenure systems ranging from communal ownership, inheritance tenure system, leasehold tenure system, rent tenure system, gift tenure system, freehold tenure system, and tenant at government will. In the 1960s, while the Northern Regional Government created grazing routes for cattle to avoid herdsman–farmer crises, in southern Nigeria, the inheritance tenure system prevailed. Land ownership structures in Nigeria had evolved over the years until a single land policy document, otherwise known as the Land Use Act of 1978, was established. The Act with its socialist bent attempts to harmonise and regulate land ownership in the country with arguably excessive state control of land ownership, use and development (Udoekanem, Adoga and Onwumere, 2014). The state did not take cognation of the prevailing realities of customary land law and informal markets forces (Oluwatayo, Omowunmi and Ojo, 2019). Nigeria’s Land Use Act abolished all existing freehold systems and standardised

land administration systems across the country. Power over all urban land within a state was now vested with the state governor, while all non-urban land was now regulated by respective local governments. The Land Use Act made it possible for the government to obtain land for development where it deems fit. It empowers state governors to issue certificates of occupancy (C of O) to applicants, thereby conferring greater authority over land matters than the Federal Government. It also empowers the state governor to compulsorily acquire private rights over land without the willing consent of its owner or occupant, for public good, subject to compensation. In distinction to most other African states, the state ownership of land in Nigeria depended on the governors of the composite thirty-six state-structure, unlike what obtains in most other African states, where usufruct rights were given to farmers by the Federal Government (Lavers, 2018; Mersha and Githinji, 2005).¹ In principle, the state government, not the federal government, gives rights of ownership to lands within her jurisdiction and determines when such lands are needed for public good. Often when the state and the federal government have divided political interests, they can hardly agree on issues bordering on the protection of federal government interest especially with regard to land. This is why there are no agreements between the states and the Federal Government on how to deal with the crisis generated by herders.

This study focuses on southern and central Nigeria, comprising four geopolitical zones: south-east, south-south, south-west and north-central. The area has guinea savannah, rain forest, and mangrove vegetation zones. Farmers in this area primarily produce tuber crops that take many months to mature. The study focuses specifically on Benue State, generally regarded as the 'Food Basket of the Nation'. This state recorded the most tragic cases of herdsmen–farmer clashes during the period of the study, 2012–16. The 2006 national census of Nigeria had a population of 4,253,641 for the state, with a land area of 34,049 km (NPC, 2007). The state comprises twenty-three local government areas (hereafter LGAs). This study focuses on ten of the LGAs, specifically those that were the arena of the conflicts in the state.

Farming is the lifewire of the economy, engaging more than 70 per cent of the working population. The food crops include yam, cassava, sweet potato, beans, maize, millet, guinea corn, vegetables, etc. The clashes have caused a food price crisis, and the FAO has suggested that to meet the growing global food need, food production would need to double by 2050 (Borras Jr, 2009). Much of this required increase would have to happen in developing countries where the majority of the world's rural poor live, and where 95 per cent of the estimated population increases during this period are expected to occur. Unfortunately, herdsmen–farmer clashes have significantly increased food insecurity in Nigeria.

Approach

The study investigated the causes of the frequent herdsmen–farmer clashes in Nigeria and the human and material costs. The patron-client theory has been adopted to explain the impudence of the herders who wield sophisticated weapons instead of clubs; and, the relative deprivation theory to explain herders' attachment to cattle and farmers' attachment to land; a situation that has ignited herdsmen–farmer contests over grazing fields and farmlands. The traditional means of amicably settling the herdsmen–farmer impasse is also examined. The activities of the herdsmen in various Nigerian communities suggest a contest over the herders' right to graze and the farmers' right to farm. The last two sections expose the duplicity of chiefs who receive gifts from ignorant or, perhaps, tricky herders, in utter disregard of traditional land tenure system. An assessment of the cost (human and material) of the clashes is made and also suggestions on how to stem the rifts.

Data was collected from newspaper reports on herdsmen–farmer clashes, from secondary sources such as journals and books, as well as through interviews with fifty herders and fifty farmers in Benue State. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been employed in analysing the data. Five farmers in the ratio of two female to three male farmers were selected from the ten LGAs of

Ado, Agatu, Apa, Buruku, Guma, Gwer, Gwer West, Logo, Tarka, and Ukum where the crises were most severe. Locating participants within their specific localities was problematic, in part because they had been displaced by the crises engendered by the nomadic character of the herders. For this reason, the researchers used non-probability sampling techniques, and in particular snowball sampling (Earl Babbie and Lucia Benaquisto, 2002: 166). Thus, data was collected from available informants through whom we located other informants, including internally displaced persons (IDPs). Some of the IDPs were too traumatised to open up to us at the camps. We were able to interview fifty herders located within the ten LGAs. The herders were all men, and we did not deem it fit to interview their wives because of cultural inhibitions and suspicion on the part of their husbands. We had group discussions with displaced farmers at Abagene, Daudu, Mbawa camps and obtained information on the traditional mechanisms for peaceful resolution of conflicts among the herders and farmers that had once proved successful. What follows analyses the human and material losses suffered during the period to assess the cost of the clashes and suggests ways of avoiding future occurrences.

Review

An established body of work exists on herdsman–farmer conflicts in many West African countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Benin Republic, Togo, Ghana and Nigeria. In Nigeria in particular, herdsman–farmer clashes have become acutely topical in both academic and political discourses. Benue, Plateau, Kogi, Nasarawa, Enugu, Kaduna, Taraba, and Delta States, have experienced scenarios reminiscent of the Darfur massacre. Fasona and Omojola (2005) in their study of herdsman–farmer conflicts in Nigeria between 1991–2005 found that the conflicts accounted for 35 per cent of all major clashes reported by leading Nigerian newspapers. The International Crisis Group (2014) reported that pastoralists habitually migrate from the northern parts of Nigeria to the southern parts in search of pasture. In the process, their cattle often devour farmers' crops. This development has occasioned numerous herdsman–farmer open clashes. Reports have asserted that Fulani herdsman provide logistics and camouflage to Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria. Many authors (Olayoku, 2014; McGregor, 2014; Audu, 2014; Abass, 2012; Krause, 2011; Blench, 2010) are of the opinion that the fluidity of international and domestic state borders has encouraged the pastoralists to operate as if these did not exist at all.

Ifatimehin and Tenuch argue that in central Nigeria these conflicts have led to land and water degradation, as trampling herds of cattle despoil the soil thus in turn precipitating local crises (2009: 360–4). The conflicts have their roots in the land tenure system, which the migrating herders do not understand or care to respect, hence the contest over land use. Abiodun Alao (2007) gives a detailed account of how claims contest over natural resources have nursed several conflict situations. He examined herdsman–farmer conflicts in the Benin Republic in 1999 and a particular case of cattle running into a trap set by a farmer and how the herders subsequently laid ambush and killed the farmer by way of retaliation. The farmer had set the trap for 'bush meat' but the herders took his life because it caught one of their cows. In Ghana, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, and Nigeria, cattle encroachment on agricultural farms has also been a source of worry (Moritz, 2010; Hussein, 1998; Chukwuma, 2020; Campbell, 2019).

Breusers et al. (1998) attribute herdsman–farmer clashes in Burkina Faso to the herders' search for pasture southwards during the dry season, the herders becoming entangled with farmers when the herds trampled on their crops. Tonah (2006: 33–45) attributes the southward movement of the herdsman and the numerous herdsman–farmer conflicts to the Sahelian drought. This view is in agreement with that of Blench (1994: 197–213) with regard to Fulani herdsman–farmer relations in Nigeria. Other writers (Ofuoku and Isife, 2009; Moritz, 2010) have argued that the introduction of irrigated farming and prolonged dry season months in the northern parts have combined to reduce pasture areas in the region and driven the herders to scour even the southern coastal areas

for pasture and water. Such diminishing agricultural resources have necessarily acted to intensify conflicts between herders and farmers. In the Jos area of central Nigeria, the conflict attained such a significant dimension in 2004 that the state declared a state of emergency (IRIN, 2004). The conflict also exposed religious and ethnic differences as mediating factors in the resource access versus resource control dynamics: the herders had the backing of the Muslim faithful, while farmers had support from locals and Christians. Strikingly, while most of the herders are animists whenever a crisis erupts between the Moslem Fulani Gida and a third party, invariably the Bororo plunge into it for ethno-political reasons. This makes the herdsman–farmer conflicts multi-causal and more complex than popular generalisations purport. In some instances, it seems to be an economic struggle, in others it appears to be engineered by ethnic or religious sentiments.

Higaz and Ali's (2018) study on pastoralism and security in parts of West Africa and the Sahel acknowledges the complexity of the problem and suggests the need for further thorough field research on the matter, especially in the Middle Belt, South-East and South-West states. That challenge is part of what the present study is set to address. Their study did not, however, cover Benue State, the current hotbed of herdsman–farmer conflicts in Nigeria.

Polly Hill (1972) discusses the symbiotic herdsman–farmer relations that had existed in Hausaland when farmers provided open land to herders and herders' cattle droppings helped to fertilise the soil for farmers. Hill's characterisation of herdsman–farmer relations is contradicted by the countless Fulani herders' wanton depredations of the farms of sedentary peasants in many states in West Africa. Herdsman depredations in Ghana became so traumatic, that a member of parliament (herein MP) thought it appropriate to order his afflicted constituents to kill any cattle that invade their farms (Network for Peace Building, 2014). The frustrated MP spoke for his people when he said:

We will not sit there for these Fulani herdsman to use their cattle to destroy what we have used our hard earned money to establish. So, I am admonishing that if they come to your farm, shoot and kill them (Bokor, 2014).

The MP spoke to mobilise his constituents against the herdsman who went about the rural environment destroying lives and property. Azeez Olaniyan *et al.* (2015: 53–67), however, believe that the instruction by the MP would escalate further the impasse between the herders and the farmers without the intended peaceful resolution. The herdsman have been brutal in their search for grazing land, a situation that reminds a historian of the activities of the Vandals in southern Europe in early medieval times.

In Yoruba land, Fulani herders' depredations reached such a frightful height that Frederick Fasehun, the leader of the Odua People's Congress (OPC), a pan-Yoruba organisation, instructed his people to rise up and fight the herdsman. This order followed the abduction of Chief Olu Falae, a former Secretary to the Federal Government of Nigeria (*FirstAfricaNews*, 2015). Many cases of herdsman attacks (Table 1) were in response to allegations by herders that farmers had killed their cattle, which had ravaged their farms.

It is not in doubt that the herders and the sedentary farmers have the right to eke out a living. However, two issues arise. First, there is the question of where one's rights end and another's begin. The second is the fundamental issue of personal property rights. In a liberal capitalist economy, such as Nigeria, the right to private property is a fundamental human right. Herders' invasion of the sedentary farmers' property (land) thus constitutes a grave assault on their established human right.

In sum, in interrogating the herdsman–farmer conflicts in Nigeria, the following questions are pertinent: the root causes of the persistent herdsman–farmer clashes; the values the herders attach to cattle and farmers, to land; how farmers and herders settled their disputes in times past; the social and economic costs of the confrontations; and a solution to recurring confrontations.

Table 1. Some incidents of Herdsmen attacks in Nigeria, 2012–16

S/N	Date	State	Community/LGA	No. of deaths	Remarks	Official Response
1	July 2012	Enugu	Ozalla	–	Herdsmen contest grazing land and farms	No arrests
2	July 2012	Imo	Ohaji/Egbema	–	Women and youths protested Fulani takeover of their farmland	The government assured them of support only
3	7 th July 2012	Plateau	Maseh	110	A senator and a member of House of Assembly were killed	No arrests
4	November 2012	Ogun	Oja Odan	40	Houses and crops set ablaze	No arrests
5	23 rd April 2013	Benue	Guma LGA	10	Houses and farmlands destroyed	No arrests
6	7 th May 2013	Benue	Agatu	47	The Fulani attacked mourners who were burying two policemen killed in a Nassarawa community	No arrests
7	12 th May 2013	Benue	Okpanchenyi and Ekwo (Agatu)	83	Several villages were destroyed	No arrests
8	14 th May 2013	Benue	Ekwo-Okpanchenyi (Agatu)	40	Two hundred herdsmen sacked Agatu Local Govt Secretariat	No arrests
9	11 th June 2013	Benue	Ichama, Okpokwu LGA	1	Forty cattle belonging to the Catholic Church Otukpo were rustled by Fulani herdsmen	No arrests
10	1 st July 2013	Benue	Okpanchenyi, Agatu	40	More than one hundred displaced	No arrests
11	5 th July 13	Benue	Nzorov, Guma, LGA	60	Farmers and herdsmen clash	No arrests. The police promised to fish out the perpetrators

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

S/N	Date	State	Community/LGA	No. of deaths	Remarks	Official Response
12	28 th July 13	Benue	Agatu	8	Herdsmen invaded two villages in Agatu	No arrests
13	29 th September 2013	Benue	Agatu	15	More than two hundred displaced	No arrests
14	7 th November 2013	Benue	Ikpele and Okpopolo vil- lages in Agatu	7	More than six thousand were displaced	Established camps for the displaced
15	9 th November 2013	Benue	Agatu villages	36	Seven villages overrun in Agatu	Established camps for the displaced
16	20 th November 2013	Benue	Guma LGA	22	Property destroyed by herdsmen	No arrests
17	31 st December 13	Plateau	Maikatako, Bokkos LGA	2	Sixteen injured during a church service	No arrests
18	3 rd January 2014	Kaduna	Jere	4	The Emir of Jere escaped death nar- rowly	No arrests
19	3 rd January 2014	Plateau	Riyom	30	Arson	No arrests
20	8 th January 2014	Ogun	Ketu, Yewa LGA	5	Arson and brigandage	The police promised to investigate
21	13 th January 2014	Benue	Guma	25	Two soldiers inclusive and about three thou- sand displaced	Governor said it was not herdsmen but crimi- nals
22	20 th January 2014	Benue	Agatu	15	Made up of five soldiers and seven civilians and three other civil- ians died at Adeke village	No arrests
23	20 th February 2014	Benue	Gwer West LGA	35	Eighty thousand dis- placed, six villages sacked	Opened camps for the displaced
24	24 th February 2014	Benue	Naka	8	The attack on a Tiv community	No arrests
25	6 th March 2014	Benue	Katsina/Ala and Logo LGAs.	30	Six villages sacked	No arrests

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

S/N	Date	State	Community/LGA	No. of deaths	Remarks	Official Response
26	10 th March 2014	Benue	Umenger	–	Governor Suswam's convoy attacked	No arrests
27	12 th March 2014	Benue	Ukпам. Guma LGA	28	Yam barns and farms burnt	No arrests
28	12 th March 2014	Benue	Logo LGA	22	An entire village sacked	No arrests
29	23 rd March 2014	Benue	Gbajimba, Guma LGA	25	Over fifty injured	No arrests
30	25 th March 2014	Benue	Agena village	7	Many displaced	No arrests
31	29 th March 14	Benue	Agatu LGA	19	Attacked four villages, destroying property and more than one thousand displaced	No arrests
32	29 th March 2014	Benue	Shengev, Gwer LGA	15	The suspected use of chemical weapons	No arrests
33	30 th March 2014	Benue	Agatu	19	Households displaced, property destroyed/looted	No arrests
34	10 th April 2014	Benue	Logo LGA	6	Many property destroyed as more than one hundred assailants stormed four villages	No arrests
35	15 th April 2014	Benue	Obagaji, Agatu LGA	12	Households displaced, property destroyed/looted	No arrests
36	16 th April 2014	Taraba	Nwokyo, Wukari LGA	10	Forty houses burnt, eighteen people injured	No arrests
37	12 th June 2014	Enugu	Ezeagu	2	Three women raped. Farm crops destroyed	The Police Commissioner, 18 th June 2014, refuted the crisis in Ezeagu even after two people were killed

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

S/N	Date	State	Community/LGA	No. of deaths	Remarks	Official Response
38	23 rd June 2014	Edo	Ozoro/Isoko North	–	Ozoro women protested against rape, murder and robbery by Fulani herdsmen	The government assured them of positive action
39	24 th June 2014	Kaduna	Kabamu and Ankpong in Sanga LGA	38	Houses and farm crops set ablaze	No arrests
40	20 th July 2014	Benue	Owukpa, Ogbadibo LGA	2	Houses and farm crops set ablaze	No arrests. Proposed the anti-open grazing bill
41	10 th September 2014	Benue	Five villages in Ogbadibo LGA	40	Property and farm crops razed	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill
42	27 th January 2015	Benue	Abugbe, Okoklo, Ogwule and Ocholoyan in Agatu LGA	17	More than two hundred households displaced, property and farm crops razed	No arrests. Proposed the anti-open grazing bill
43	30 th January 2015	Benue	Five villages razed in Logo LGA.	9	More than two hundred herdsmen went on a rampage	No arrests. Proposed the anti-open grazing bill
44	15 th March 2015	Benue	Egba, Agatu	80	Houses set ablaze	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill
45	27 th April 2015	Benue	Three villages in Mbadwem, Guma LGA	28	Houses and farmlands razed	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
46	11 th May 2015	Benue	Ikyoawen community, Turan Kwande LGA	5	Eight wounded as herdsmen invaded	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
47	24 th May 2015	Benue	Iorja, Gaambe-Toev, Logo LGA	100	Fifty settlements destroyed	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
48	7 th July 2015	Benue	Imande Bebeshi, Kwande LGA	1	Many injured	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
49	July 2015	Adamawa	Densina	28	Two-and-a-half thousand displaced	Provided displaced person camps
50	October 2015	Ondo	Ilado, Akure North LGA	–	Chief Olu Falae abducted	State Government paid N5 million ransom

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

S/N	Date	State	Community/LGA	No. of deaths	Remarks	Official Response
51	5 th November 2015	Benue	Buruku LGA	12	Twenty-five others injured	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
52	December 2015	Benue	Idele/Oju LGA	6	More than one hundred displaced	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
53	18 th February 2016	Benue	Okokolo/Agatu LGA	5	Many households displaced	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
54	8 th February 2016	Benue	Tor-Anyiin and Tor-Ataan in Buruku LGA	10	More than four hundred households displaced	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
55	29 th February 2016	Benue	Edugbeho, Agatu LGA	11	The dead included a police inspector	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
56	5 th March 2016	Benue	Aila, Akwu, Ugboju, Adagbo, Okokolo, Obagaji, Egba/Agatu LGA	500	More than ten communities displaced	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
57	9 th March 2016	Benue	Ngorukgan, Tse Chia, Deghkia and Nhumbe in Logo LGA	8	More than four hundred households displaced	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
58	10 th March 2016	Benue	Obagaji, Agatu LGA.	2	The attackers were repelled by security forces	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
59	11 th March 2016	Benue	The convoy of Senator David Mark attacked	–	He managed to escape	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
60	13 th March 2016	Benue	Tarkaa LGA	6	More than fifty households displaced	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
61	13 th March 2016	Benue	Dokunola, Agatu	100	Several settlements wiped out	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
62	8 th April 2016	Ondo	Ilado, Akure North LGA	1	Attack at Falae's farm killing the security guard	Anti-open grazing law. Arrested some herdsmen
63	12 th April 2016	Taraba	Gashaka	15	More than one hundred displaced	Anti-open grazing bill

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

S/N	Date	State	Community/LGA	No. of deaths	Remarks	Official Response
64	19 th April 2016	Delta	Along Onitsha-Benin Rd	23	Police recovered twenty AK-47 rifles, seventy dane guns, thirty double barrel guns, over one thousand live ammunition	Set up a stakeholders forum. No arrests
65	26 th April 2016	Enugu	Ukpabi/Nimbo- Uzo Uwani	50	More than two hundred displaced and one hundred injured	The government set up a Peace Committee
66	May 2016	Imo	Orlu Road	–	Governor's convoy blocked by cattle	No arrests
67	17 th May 2016	Benue	Buruku	60	Over one hundred households displaced	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
68	22 nd May 2016	Ekiti	Oke Ako, Ikole LGA	2	Several wounded	Anti-open grazing law. No arrests
69	June 2016	Benue	Ugondo, Turan, Nenzar/ Logo LGA	59	Hundreds displaced	Proposed the anti-open grazing bill. No arrests
70	16 th June 2016	Delta	Ossissa/Ndokwa East LGA	1	Many houses set ablaze	Set up a stakeholders forum. No arrests
71	October 2016	Kaduna	Godogodo/Jemare LGA	50	More than one hundred displaced	No arrests
72	25 th August 2016	Enugu	Attakwu/Nkanu West LGA	3	More than one hundred displaced	Set up a peace committee
73	16 th July 2017	Kaduna	Kajuru village	33		
74	August 2017	Ondo	Ore, Odigbo LGA	–	Seventy-two-year-old farmer gang raped	They escaped arrest
75	October 2017	Nasarawa	Tudun Lambaga, Egon LGA	–	Forty-year-old gang raped	The two were arrested
76	20 th November 2017	Adamawa	Bachama	30–50	Farmers in a reprisal attacked the Numan District	A Commission of Inquiry was set up

Source: Newspaper reportage of herdsmen attacks in Nigeria during the period and corroborated by fieldwork accounts taken in some of the places mentioned.

Theorising herdsman–farmer clashes

Scholars have employed various theories to explain herdsman–farmer clashes in Africa. Thomas Bassett (2007) and M. D. Turner Bassett (1988) employed the theory of herders' migrations based on the herder's notion of space and place. Rita Y. Barre (2012: 18–41) employed the theory of politics of space and power in explaining why the phenomenon has become a social dilemma in many West African countries. Ofuoku and Isife (2009), Moritz (2010), Kriesberg (2007), Mitchell (1981) and Pruitt and Sung (2004), have employed the conflict theory to proffer possible resolution to the problem. However, the present study opts for the Patron-Client and Relative Deprivation theories as most apt for the Nigerian case.

The patron-client theory explains issues concerning competing factions within a given polity. Using Southeast Asia, as an example, Scott (1972: 91–113) describes the theory as

a special case of dyadic ties involving a largely instrumental friendship in which an individual of higher socioeconomic status (patron) uses his own influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, for a person of lower status (client), who, for his part reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron.

Often, there is an imbalance in the exchange between the client (the poor) and the patron, this imbalance reflecting the disparity in their relative wealth, power, influence and status. Allen (2011) and Schmidt (1977) view the relationship as an alliance between two persons of unequal status, power or resources, each of whom finds it useful to have as an ally someone superior or inferior. As Shoemaker and Spanier (1984) note, patron-client relationships are primarily aimed at enhancing the respective security of patron. The patron has three different but important goals that he wishes to pursue: ideology, international solidarity and strategic economic advantage. All these goals have been associated with herders in West Africa who in their quest for international ethnic solidarity and common transhumance ideology, seek more grazing lands and water bodies for their cattle in Nigeria. Literatures state that kinship and patronage networks were the primary building blocks for communities in both pre- and post-revolutionary Cambodia (Ledgerwood and Vijghen, 2002; Nhean, 2010). As in Cambodia, so it is in some African states, as Berman (1988: 305–41) and Joseph (1987) suggest, 'even as they ritually denounce "tribalism", African politicians sedulously maintain ethnic networks of patronage that are the basis of their power'. Thus, the intersection of the literatures on patron-client theory is the benefit of the relationship for the client, which is often in response to envisaged freedom from hostility and inequality.

This study postulates that the herders' patron-client alignment has made it possible for them (clients) to audaciously wield guns and wantonly destroy lives and property, with official connivance. This suspicion is popular among other Nigerian ethnic groups who blame the Fulani and some non-Fulani elites for patronising the herders who tend their cattle. The herders do not own cattle but make their livelihood by working for their patrons, who own most of the cattle and perhaps provide them the wherewithal to cow the landowners into acquiescence.

The study also views the herdsman–farmer relations from the deprivation perspective because migrating herders prey on the meager environmental resources of their host communities. It refers to the recognition and the associated feelings that go with the denial of one group's resources by another group. A group may see themselves from a wide variety of angles, including economic well-being, living standard, political power and social status. A wide variety of referents may be chosen when people make comparisons, including ideal standards, other persons, in-groups, or out-groups (Seepersad, 2009: 12). The recognition of deprivation is referred to as cognitive relative deprivation while the associated feelings, such as disappointment, frustration and anger, are referred to as affective relative deprivation (Crosby and Hennigan, 1977; Dube and Guimond, 1986; Walker and Pettigrew, 1984: 301–10). Deprivation may be in relation to a group, which is referred to as fraternal relative deprivation (Runciman, 1968: 69–76). Relative deprivation has been associated with revolutions and militancy (Abeles, 1976: 119–37; Davies, 1962: 5–19;

Mutran and Stryker, 1980: 191–213); crime (Baron, 2004: 457–83; Mazerolle *et al.*, 2003: 131–57; Rosenfield, 1986: 116–30; Stiles *et al.*, 2000: 64–90), and anger (Mark and Cook, 1979: 13–17). Both farmers and herders believe that they do not have what they deserve from the available natural resources. Thus, herders continue to resist eviction, believing that their cattle are entitled to pasture and water sources, whatever the right of the farmers who own the land. Thus, the struggle for land resources pitches them with daggers drawn against each other.

Right to graze vs right to farm

As noted, farmers' and herders' attempts to protect their respective interests in land and grazing fields constitute the crux of their mutual antagonism. Cattle-rearing societies in Africa (Nuer, Kikuyu, Maasai, Fulani, *etc.*) attach utmost much importance to their herds and live to protect them from extinction. As Evans-Pritchard (1953: 181–96) states:

All Nuer cattle are their great treasure, a constant source of pride and joy, the occasion also of much foresight, of much anxiety, and of much quarreling; and they are their intimate companions from birth to death.

This observation is also true of the Fulani cattle herders of Nigeria who have repeatedly gone to all lengths, including war, to protect their cattle. Al-Mustapha (2016), a Fulani herder and Abass (2012: 331–46) related that:

Our herd is our life, because to every nomad, life is worthless without his cattle. What do you expect from us when our source of existence is threatened? The encroachment of grazing fields and routes by farmers is a call to war.

Sale Bayari, Chairman of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), shares the above view. He emphasised that:

Cattle are an ancestral and generational wealth. So, for a Fulani man the cattle (is) worth fighting for because without the cattle there is no life. And cattle are worth fighting for more than a mother, a wife or a child (Bayeri, 2012: 50).

To the sedentary farmer – Igbo, Tiv or Idoma, for instance – land is an inalienable prized possession; the abode of his ancestors; the most important economic resource; an index of autochthony; and the final resting place (Chuku, 2005; Chubb, 1961; Bohannan and Bohannan, 1968; Odey, 2009).

As indicated earlier, before contemporary times, herdsmen–farmer conflicts were usually amicably settled through traditional conflict resolution mechanisms (Farouk Ahmed, 2015). However, in recent times, a conjuncture of natural and human factors has raised herdsmen–farmer confrontations to heights that have rendered the traditional peaceful resolution mechanisms unworkable. First, desertification, arising from climate change and other human activity, has resulted in dwindling of pasture/grazing land and water sources, compelling the herders to range increasingly more southerly than before; at first to north central Nigeria and thence south-east, south-south and south-west geopolitical zones where sedentary farming is the modus (Tonah, 2006: 33–45). Second, rising human and cattle populations *vis-à-vis* static land size, urbanisation coupled with infrastructural developments have confounded the problem. As Emmanuel Onucheyo (2011) states:

The nomadic system was appropriate when human and animal populations were small and land was huge; just as the system of shifting cultivation was appropriate. But over the last couple of decades, populations of both have exploded, fallow periods have been drastically reduced and weather patterns changed.

Third, modern veterinary science means that cattle are no longer vulnerable to forest diseases. Thus herds are able to stay permanently in the forest area, contesting the use of dwindling water and land resources with local sedentary farmer communities. Fourth, the porosity of Nigerian borders has encouraged the easy entry of cattle herders from neighbouring countries, especially because of their physical and linguistic affinity with Nigerian Fulani herders. Incidentally, the ECOWAS Protocol provides for a ninety-day free movement and residence of citizens of member nations without a visa. The Fulani from Senegal, Niger, Chad, and Mali take advantage of this provision and bring their cattle down to Nigeria to graze and market.

The insecurity of the farms due to herders' attacks has made farming precarious, imperilling food production, while the Fulani herders adoption of guerrilla tactics acts to create fear and anxiety on farmers and their local communities. The rise of ethnic politics and religious fanaticism has also tended to stiffen herdsmen–farmer prejudices. This ominous combination of factors has come starkly to the fore in Benue State. Relations between the herdsmen–farmer populations in Benue State go back to remote antiquity. An intern at the IDP camp in Zaki-Ibiam, recalled the following narrative of his grandfather:

In distant past, a group of herders were moving through a Tiv village when one of the cattle died. The villagers who begged to allow them to eat the dead cattle surprised the herders. The herders derogatively began to call the area Munchi (I will eat) and when the colonial masters came, they named the area, Munshi Province, not knowing that it was derogatory of the people (Tekrur, 2016).

Munshi Province comprised many communities in Benue, Kogi and Plateau States of present day Nigeria. The area has been the hotbed of herdsmen–farmer contestations in recent times. On 7th July 2012, a number of herdsmen attacked Maseh community in Plateau State, killing about one hundred people. While the dead were being interred, the herders invaded the burial venue, killing many mourners, including Dalyop Dantong, a serving Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Hon. Gyang Fulani, a member of the Plateau State House of Assembly (Tajudeen, 2012: 49–50). In Benue State, the herders killed more than thirty farmers in a raid on Yogbo community on 14th October 2012. In Gwer LGA, the herdsmen invaded sixteen villages, wrecking havoc on both humans and property.

Surprisingly, in the face of the atrocities, the Benue State Governor, Gabriel Suswam, reportedly absolved the Fulani of any wrongdoing. Rather, it is said, he claimed, 'we discovered that criminals are the ones attacking Benue communities, not Fulani herdsmen' (*Premium Times*, 2013). Seemingly as if to prove the governor wrong, the herdsmen attacked his convoy going to inspect the extent of damage in Minda. The governor only narrowly escaped. Similarly, the Emir of Jere, Dr Usman Sa'had, following an attack by Fulani herdsmen early in 2014, spent months in a hospital.

Herdsmen–farmer conflicts have become a familiar occurrence in several Nigerian communities, especially since 1999, and have been jeopardising greatly the food and overall security of the nation. In 2015 Nigeria spent nearly \$2.9 billion on domestic food importation and \$4.1 billion in 2017 (*BBC Africa Business*, 2019). In 2018, the figure had spiralled to more than \$22 billion, representing 10.93 per cent of total merchandise imports (World Bank, 2018). Governor Ayo Fayose of Ekiti State argued that any effort to stem the tide of declining agriculture would be futile as long as herdsmen callously destroy farmers' crops with impunity while government looks the other way (*Premium Times*, 2016). Fulani Gida in the army, police and other law enforcement agencies are suspected to be patrons of the herdsmen and consider the interests of their kins over those of other Nigerians. It is no sheer coincidence, then, that since 2015, the year Muhammadu Buhari, a Fulani, became president of Nigeria, the Fulani herders have acted repeatedly in complete disregard of the law, with no official reprimands and no arrests.

Against the backdrop of government connivance, herders wielding AK-47s gunned down a serving senator in Plateau State. None of the herders was arrested; rather, the army disarmed

the locals who owned only cutlasses and knives. The audacity with which the cattle herders have regularly pillaged other Nigerians with government acquiescence, thereby gives credence to the allegation that what has been going on is a replay of the nineteenth-century 'Fulani jihad', which was at once religious, ethnic, social and political. In order to secure grazing land for their cattle, the Fulani herdsman have sacked whole communities, burned down their houses, raped their women, slaughtered many others and occupied their most prized heritage, their land. Fulani-Hausa bourgeoisie – both civilian and military – own the over twenty million cattle in Nigeria, valued in trillions of Naira. The herders make their peasant living through looking after the cattle, a typical patron-client arrangement.

Elite complicity

In the unending struggle between Fulani herders and sedentary farmers in the central and the southern parts of Nigeria, the traditional rulers are implicated over the central issue of land. While in the Emirates in northern Nigeria, the Emirs have authority over land matters, in the farming societies of central and southern Nigeria, land is communally owned. Though the head of the landowning unit/community holds the land in trust for his unit, he has no authority to rent the community land single-handedly to outsiders. However, in many of the communities, local chiefs, hands in glove with some elites, have breached this tradition and rented community lands to herders who approached them for permission to rent land to graze their cattle. Often, the herders make gifts of money and cattle to the chiefs and their accomplices for the permission sought and granted (Ogenyi, 2016).² Having secured the permission of the chiefs and of some of the elites, the herdsman assume it their right to graze on the land agreed upon, and are ready to kill and maim anyone that challenges them. It is against this backdrop that Ramalan Giwa (2016) indicted both the elite and traditional rulers for the clashes between farmers and herders in Nigeria; a view which Ahmed Shehu, a herder (2016) corroborates.

Against this background, the northern patrons who own the cattle illegally provide their clients with AK-47 assault rifles with which they battle cattle rustlers and anyone challenging their presumed grazing rights. Further, because they occupy the highest echelons of the administrative, security and policymaking positions in Nigeria, they use those positions to provide official cover for the herdsman's atrocities. It is pertinent to observe that in Africa, boundaries are a thing of the heart, and herdsman move through the bushes and forests and may never pass through border control posts for checks. Even then, the border control posts are usually manned by Fulani Gida kinsmen of herders who do not stop them from entering Nigeria.

Elite political interests have continued to influence the interpretation of government actions, which critics see as primordial and designed to placate a certain culture. As Adakole Idoko (2016) relates, Fulani herders addicted to transhumance culture are yet to realise that twenty-first-century Nigerians may neither compromise their farms nor succumb to the intimidation of the herders. The proposal by the present Fulani-controlled Federal Government of Nigeria to establish grazing reserves in the country seems likely to set up a time bomb, given the polarised political setting of modern Nigeria. Southerners and Christians in general would have reasons to see it as a strategy to actualise the dream of the Sokoto Jihad to deepen the Koran in the Atlantic Ocean in the south (Ojukwu, 1969: 148).

Counting the cost

In Nigeria, the menace of herdsman in different communities brings to mind the gory tales of the humanitarian crisis in the Darfur Region of Sudan, which informed guesstimates say, claimed over 460,000 lives and rendered over a million homeless (Aljazeera, 2013). Two studies that quantified the economic costs of the farmer-herder conflicts during the period, show that states affected lost

47 per cent of their internally generated revenue (IGR) and the average household would have experienced at least a 64 per cent increase in income, and potentially 210 per cent or higher increase in income, if these conflicts were reduced to near zero (Mercy Corps, 2015).

Governor Samuel Ortom of Benue State gave a United Nations delegation the following breakdown of the material, human and economic tolls of the Fulani herdsmen depredations in his state during the period 2013–16: residents killed, 1,878; peoples missing, 200; individuals critically injured, 750; houses destroyed, in excess of 99,427. In 2014 alone, the estimated cost of destruction recorded across ten LGAs in the state exceeded N95bn (Ebhomele Eromosele, 2017). In addition, the state experienced abnormal food scarcity and expectedly an astronomical rise in food prices. For instance, a bag of maize, which used to cost ₦5, 500 (\$16) rapidly rose to between ₦15, 000 (\$42) and ₦18, 000 (\$50). An estimated 40 per cent of the rural dwellers, most of them farmers, fled their villages, abandoning their farms (Isa Sa'idu, 2017). By Patrick Okigbo's (2016) calculation, peace between farmers and pastoralists could have produced a gain of up to \$13.7 billion annually. Of the thirty-six states in the country, only three, Benue, Taraba, and Ekiti responded to this development by passing anti-open grazing laws prohibiting the open grazing of cattle.

The confrontations have had their tolls on the herdsmen, too. In a herdsmen–farmer clash in the Mambilla plateau area of Adamawa State, about one thousand herds and ten herders were killed. The thousand herds of cattle destroyed were estimated to be worth nearly \$1 million (Ngelzarma, 2016). It was against this backdrop that Baba Ngelzarma, General Secretary of MACBAN called for a lasting resolution of the various crises.

Apart from clashes with farmers over land and water resources, herdsmen have been implicated in kidnap, armed banditry and rape. In the first half of 2017, many cases of herdsmen engaged in rape were reported in some national dailies. Women who account for over 50 per cent of the farming population feared going to farm because of the herders. The implication of this situation for food availability and food security in Nigeria is easily predictable. Besides, by engaging in the above dastardly acts of moral and social depravity, the herders make it more problematic for their host communities to accept them as welcome guests.

The cases related in Table 1 represent the tip of the iceberg compared to reports of the ravages of the herdsmen in many rural communities in Nigeria. It needs to be stressed also that the above presentation of the cost of herdsmen–farmer clashes in Nigeria has concentrated mostly on its quantitative, economic and political aspects. Such unquantifiable impacts as psychological traumas, individual and collective agonies and the like, must have very telling effects on those who experienced the outrages. It can stand repetition to say that federal government response to the outrages has been nonchalant and sometimes openly compromising. If common criminals, masquerading as herdsmen, have committed illegalities, as some sources allege (Onwughalu and Obiora, 2017) this may be because of the government's patronising stance to the herders.

The hand of Esau; the voice of Jacob

It is worth reiterating that herdsmen–farmer clashes are an age-long conflict and the disputants had ways of settling the palavers amicably. Since 1999, the political class seems to have infiltrated the two opposing interests and fuelled the contestations. Sheikh Dahiru Usman Bauchi (2018), an Islamic cleric, implied this when he said:

Fulani are not killers; Fulani are known to have sticks, bow, and arrow but you are saying the killers have guns. Who gave Fulani herdsmen gun? Fulani lived with people across the world, they live peacefully, why should they take up arms against the people they are living together with hundreds of years ago? The basic responsibility of every government is to protect life, to protect the shedding of blood, to protect human joints, to protect families, to protect and human dignity.

Because of the turbulent nature of the Nigerian political landscape, some politicians recruit hoodlums into their pay rolls to commit violent actions, to discredit a particular government or ethnic nationalities. Politicians of opposing parties use the hooligans, who disguise as herders and cattle hustlers, to cause mayhem in every part of the country (Akerjiir, 2018; Akiri, 2018).

Romance with bandits by people in official positions is usually a two-edged sword. Recently, some criminals who were arrested in connection with a bank robbery had pictures they took during a party with the senate president, Bukola Saraki. There were insinuations that some of the criminals were under the ‘protection’ of the senate president (Sahara Reporters, 2018). Today, highway robberies have been attributed to herdsmen. A victim of one robbery attack testified that, ‘the robbers spoke French’ (Okeke, 2017). This is implied as it has been difficult for the Police to go for the robbers and arrest them. Since the demise of the Libyan leader, Col Muammar Ghadafi, the security situation in Africa has changed for the worse. Dissident loyalists absconded with their rifles and have infiltrated into several African countries, including Nigeria, pretending to be herdsmen. Also, the political elite who own most of the cattle in Nigeria may have provided the AK-47 rifles to their political thugs, who disguise as herders and cause mayhem in many communities in Nigeria. This may explain why herdsmen nowadays are seen with AK-47 repeater rifles instead of clubs.

Conclusion

Kollock (1998: 185) observes that ‘the compelling and perverse feature of these dilemmas is that there is no ambiguity about what one should do to benefit oneself, yet all are hurt if all follow this “rational” decision’. Herdsmen–farmer relations in Nigeria have become a social and economic dilemma with each side of the fence minding the immediate benefits, and feigning to be oblivious of the long-term losses to their neighbours. Herdsmen–farmer relations have been greatly politicised and have fanned the embers of most communal/ethnic violence in Nigeria. The prevailing tension may not be unconnected with the rising political unrest in Nigeria and the transfer of the same to the unsuspecting herders and farmers by the political elite, who blow the skirmishes out of proportion through hate speeches, and perhaps to discredit the Nigerian government presided over by a Fulani. Competition between the local population and herders over grazing land and water bodies has often been the immediate cause of crises. Herdsmen–farmer crises in Nigeria arise as a result of problems or differences between farmers and herders when herds graze on farm land and destroy crops. When such dispute was not resolved, it is often elevated to a group dispute orchestrated by killing and destruction of property. When this is exacerbated, the government often instituted a curfew and follows this by setting up a Commission of Inquiry who submit their findings afterwards. The ensuing reports have invariably been set aside and nobody prosecuted. This is arguably why most communities began to rely on non-state armed actors for protection. Official attitude to herdsmen activities in Nigeria tends to suggest that their patrons are in positions of power. It is the elite who own most of the cattle being herded across Nigeria and may have provided the herders with sophisticated weapons.

While Nigerians debate the actions of the herdsmen, a further critical inquiry about the ownership of the different herds of cattle in transhumance in Nigeria is also germane. Free-range grazing is no longer an acceptable practice. When ranches are established, it would complement crop farming by providing organic manure to increase soil fertility and drive biogas production as an alternative source of energy.

There are more than 570 million farms worldwide, most of which are small and family-operated (Lowder *et al.*, 2016: 16–29). In Nigeria, the average farm size has continued to decrease while the population that depends on it continues to grow. This dichotomy has raised contestations over land to unprecedented heights. Cattle herders’ invasion of poor sedentary farmers’ lands, the *fons et origo* of their existence, has triggered stiff resistance of the farmers. The scenario fits perfectly into Alfred Toynbee’s conflict theory, which states that a culture can expand only at the expense of other cultures. There can be two possible responses to the challenge of aggression.

The victims of the aggression can seek accommodation with the aggressor or cling more tightly to their ancestral heritage. The herders' aggressive and insatiable encroachment on farmers' dwindling land to graze their cattle is at the centre of the disagreements. Africa is awash with struggles for natural resources and has become a victim of that malady variously termed 'the tragedy of endowment' (Alao, 2007); 'the new landscape of global conflict' (Klare, 2020) and 'Conflict of Resources' (Harsch, 2007). Discussion on herders–farmer crises in Nigeria is an aspect of the general discourse on the on-going resource conflicts in Africa, coded variously in ethnic, religious and environmental hues. However, herders–farmer clashes in Nigeria are rooted in resource control *problématique*, arising from environmental degradations.

The research has examined the cause of the herders–farmer conflicts in Nigeria and the cost of the conflicts on the farmers and herders. A combination of natural and human factors explains the conflicts. The herders are mostly Muslims and Fulani, like the current president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari. Christians in Nigeria see the attacks as essentially religious and reminiscent of the Fulani Jihad of 1804. Some Nigerians have characterised the events as a form of ethnic cleansing (Ojukwu, 1969: 148). Some states have enacted anti-open grazing bills to stem the conflict; and in reaction, the herders have gone haywire in their attacks to demonstrate anti-compliance. Farmers and non-Fulani rejected the federal government proposed bill for establishment of the rural grazing areas (RUGA). However, the federal government's compromising posture in relation to the cattle herders' depredations tends to give credence to suspicions. Cattle herders need to be educated to recognise that their own (assumed) freedom must end where that of others begins. The cost of the conflicts has been incalculable, from the perspective of the agonies and traumas they have left in their wake. The ultimate solution to the recurring imbroglio is the introduction of a modern scientific cattle-rearing system, as is the vogue in modern economies the world over. This is not an impossibility, provided the political will exist.

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Notes

- 1 This is obtained in Ethiopia where there is a uniform land tenure practice.
- 2 Many of my informants from Adoka, Otobi, Gboko, Abako, Gbagir, Chito, Zakibiam, Kyado, Seyi, Ugba, Katsina-Ala, all lent credence to this.

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