

## THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS DYNAMICS OF INTERNAL MIGRATION IN NIGERIA: THE FULANI PASTORALISTS AND MIDDLE BELT INDIGENES

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### **Abstract**

*Internal migration is the internal movement of people and goods from one place to the other. In Nigeria, the Fulani pastoralists have in recent times been migrating from the north to other parts of Nigeria, especially the north-central preferably called middle belt by the indigenes. These migrants have a distinctive feature of violence, killing inhabitants of the middle belt in their large numbers, women and children largely displaced. It was discovered that these militant Fulani pastoralists continuously molest their host community due to Religious differences, grazing law, boundary disputes and expansionist tendencies, among others. It is on this base, with the usage of the descriptive phenomenological research, this paper examines the social and religious implications of domestic migration on Nigeria's development. It assesses methods and strategies in which these violent domestic movements could not hamper the achievement of the sustainable development goals.*

**Keywords:** Migration, Fulani in Nigeria, Middle Belt and North Central, Conflicts.

## Introduction

The spate of killings being witnessed in the middle belt area of Nigeria has multiplied in recent times. These killings mostly affecting the middle belt of Nigeria is believed to being orchestrated and actualised by the Fulani herdsmen. These herdsmen usually carry their cattle from one place to another, preferably from the north to the middle belt region otherwise known as north-central states in search of pastures. Little wonder, the crisis between nomadic Fulani herdsmen and “farming communities in Nigeria is centred on land use for agricultural production” (Anih & Björkqvist, 2018, p.3).

In the present 21<sup>st</sup> century, pastoralists engage in grazing fields (ranching). They engage their cattle and their feeds in a particular location. The herdsmen are predominantly Fulani, a primarily Muslim people scattered throughout many parts of West Africa (Olalekan, 2018). This is what is obtainable in developed and enlightened societies. In Nigeria the matter is different. Due to the fact the Fulani’s move from the north to the middle belt regions and their movement not questioned, they have gathered the courage to engage in destruction of lives and properties of their host community as a showcase of their grievances. Sad enough, since the inauguration of Buhari’s administration of the fourth republic, the activities of herdsmen has gone haywire.

Fulani herdsmen which initially began their violent pastoral life in the southern part of Nigeria diverted their activities to the north-central of Nigeria. The north-central is preferably known as the middle belt by its inhabitants, hence, the researchers’ ideal to adopt middle belt as the working nomenclature. Apart from killings of man and animals, destruction of property of mostly the poor and unprotected in rural areas, there is the rape of the old and the elderly women, destruction of farm crops, chanting of spiritual incantations as a curse on the indigenes and blatant abuse of security measures and intelligence gathering by security forces. It is on this premise that the paper examines the Fulani assault on the middle belt inhabitants and the dynamics of domestic migration abuse in Nigeria.

Due to the fact that the situations on the ground on the activities of Fulani pastoralists and the middle belts inhabitant has become an affair of a daily base, the situation will be described and the questions become: What really informed this change of behaviour of Fulani pastoralists? Is Nigeria

ready to keep abreast with the globalisation being witnessed by world countries? Are the Fulani pastoralists legally empowered to decide which area to graze their animals on? With the none arrests of any of this militant Fulani's, could it be that the military have been the ones carrying out this disastrous act, or the Fulani herdsmen are being backed up by the Fulani soldiers in the Nigerian army? It is on these questions that the descriptive phenomenological method of qualitative research was employed. This is because situations and better described and based on the findings, conclusions could be drawn.

### **Theoretical framework**

The theoretical underpinning in which this work is based is the Karl Marx's class conflict theory of 1922. According to Parkin (1971), individual's position within a class hierarchy is determined by his or her role in the production process and argues that political and ideological consciousness is determined by class position. The struggle between the classes is the causative factor to a change in this structure. The conflict theory has been used to explain a wide range of social phenomena, including wars and revolutions, wealth and poverty, discrimination and domestic violence (Investopedia 2018). According to Rummel (2018), there are six elements in Marx's view of the class conflict.

- Classes are authority relationships based on property ownership.
- A class defines groupings of individuals with shared life situations, thus interests.
- Classes are naturally antagonistic by virtue of their interests.
- Imminent within modern society is the growth of two antagonistic classes and their struggle, which eventually absorbs all social relations.
- Political organization and Power is an instrumentality of class struggle, and reigning ideas are its reflection.
- Structural change is a consequence of the class struggle.

There is the struggle between the Fulani pastoralists (herdsmen) and the indigenes of middle belt considered to be of a different class. Each class or groups claim ownership of the means of production of the middle belt. The Fulani feel that the middle-*beltans* are a threat to their existence while also the middle *beltans* feel the same. Furthermore, religion and ethnicity

determine who belong to either to pastoralists' side or the inhabitants of the middle belt.

### **Conceptual framework**

Cattle rearing are done all over the world. It involves the raising of cattle for meat, milk and for hides. According to Moran (2002, p.3), cattle rearing is "aimed at good animal performance, optimum growth rate, and the maximum utilisation of existing facilities such as sheds for rearing and pastures for grazing."

Grazing involves the repeated consumption of smaller amounts of food over an extended period of time (Carter & Jansen, 2012). Animal grazes by consuming predominantly herbaceous forage (Allen, 2011). Grazing is done on grazing land. Grazing land is any vegetated land that is grazed or has the potential to be grazed by animals (domestic and wild). This term is all-inclusive and covers all kinds and types of land that can be grazed (Allen, 2011, p.4). A grazing land may be a cropland (land cultivation forage crops, forestland (dominated by trees) or pastureland (dedicated to the production of forage for grazing by animals, or rangeland (growing of natural grasses, forbs and shrubs).

All over the world, cattle grazing is carried out in much of a way that the human community is not affected. This is ensured in the ranching of their animals. In these ranches, the vegetation of the grazing lands may be a monoculture, a mixture of two or more species of grasses. In developed societies, there is grazing management and also grazing land used to support grazing animals over a defined time, generally a year. Grazing management is the manipulation of grazing in pursuit of a specific objective or set of objectives (Allen, 2011). In the United States, for instance, Holechek (1981, p.17) reveals that:

Toward the end of the 1970's and into the present, concern over the world population explosion has generated renewed interest in using public rangeland for livestock production. This is because lower energy inputs are required to produce red meat from rangeland than cropland. In addition, range forage can only be converted into products usable by man with grazing animals. Range improvement on private lands accelerated during the 1970's because of improved information and education programs by state and federal agencies. Another factor of considerable importance

was that the 1970's rancher was much better educated than those from previous periods. Watershed and wildlife aspects of range management attracted more public attention and research dollars than in the 1960's. It appears that range watershed management will receive more and more emphasis in the future because of restricted water supplies and increasing human population.

Much of the grazing land in the United States can be used more efficiently for livestock grazing on rangelands. Rangelands are a type of land on which the natural vegetation is dominated by grasses, forbs and shrubs and the land is managed as a natural ecosystem (Rinehart, 2008). Renewed interest in rangeland is due to a number of reasons. It is covered by natural vegetation and provides grazing and forage for livestock. In the United States there are about 312 million hectares (770 million acres) of rangelands (U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, 1989). Rinehart (2008) writes that these rangelands based livestock production systems can naturally maintain soil and plant integrity while growing healthy ruminants.

### **Fulani pastoralists in Nigeria**

The Fulani pastoralists practised the nomadic system which is based on the extensive movement of their cattle in search of forage and other grass species. Glew (2001, p.730) explains that the Fulani of northern Nigeria is “semi-nomadic pastoralists who consume a diet rich in saturated fats, do not use tobacco, are lean, and have an active lifestyle.”

The Fulani pastoralists lack a clearly defined family system. More captivating is their inability to maintain the extended family style. Sutter (1987, p.201) reveals that the various “conditions of pastoral livelihood militate against the formation of extended kinship groups.” These Fulani pastoralists are cultured in the form of a man, wife and their children, especially the dependent children.

In northern Nigeria, due to the acclaimed lack of good forage or green grasses, the pastoralists are forced to migrate to the middle belt region which is believed to have better precipitation of rainfall and humidity. These migrant pastoralists in Nigeria are made up of many ethnic groups and the largest being the Fulbe or Fulani; constituting over 90% (Abbass, 2014, p.331). Also, Tarig (2011) reveals that these pastoralists are traditionally a nomadic, pastoralist, trading people, herding cattle, goats

and sheep across the vast dry hinterlands of their domain, keeping somewhat separate from the local agricultural populations. Also worthy of mentioning is the fact that the Fulani were the first people in West Africa to convert to Islam through jihads hence becoming a political, economic, and a religious force. It is believed that the nomenclature Fulani is given by the Hausa to these Fulbe immigrants. Adebayo (1995) explains that the Fulani are well integrated amongst the sedentary Hausa farmers, who immigrate to Northern Nigeria from the Senegambia Valley several centuries ago.

### **Fulani and Middle Belt clashes**

The middle belt region of Nigeria is populated by minority ethnic groups. Johannes (2008, p.38) recalls that it draws a “separation between the principally Islamic North and the mainly Christian south.” It states include Benue State, Plateau State, Kwara State, Kogi State, Taraba State, Nasarawa State, Niger State, Adamawa State, and Abuja.

Due to the different and very controversial cultural, religious, social and religious histories, the middle belt has continued to be the victim of mass killings due to struggle over land, cultural or religious identity and political power. Blench, (1988) lucidly observes that the region continues to hold an attraction for these herdsmen as a result of the promise of vast, arable grazing lands.

The Fulani pastoralists are made of two types. They are the nomadic herdsmen and the religious herdsmen. The nomadic herdsmen are only involved in their cattle grazing on available forage and others grasses and weed around while the militant herdsmen are usually armed heavily with guns, machetes and charms. They are the ones that use force on anyone that tends to stop their animal grazing on their land. In the descriptions of the second category of herdsmen, Uhembe (2015) disclosed them as terrorists disguising as pastoralists with the primitive motive of the forceful acquisition of the land of the host communities through the re-launch of jihads or by acting out the script of the Boko Haram group.

The mayhem the militant herdsmen have done to the middle belt region cannot be underestimated. On January 1, 2018, 70 persons were killed in attacks on Logo and Guma LGA of Benue (Biodun, 2018). On the 7th May 2018, in the Agatu LGA of Benue State, Mr. Andrew Ataboh and his son, Benjamin, while they were working on their farm at Inahem were killed

by herdsmen (Aluko and Charles, 2018). On May 1, 2018, No fewer than 10 persons have were killed and 15 persons injured in Tse Iortyer, near Yelewata community in Guma LGA of Benue State (Ameh, 2018). On April 19, 2018, Anyiin community in Logo LGA of Benue State, the militant Fulani herdsmen killed several people, also set over 30 houses on fire and destroyed farm produces worth millions of naira (Ameh, 2018). On the 12th April 2018, 56 persons were killed by suspected herdsmen in last Thursday's attack on Gbeji town of Tsaav ward, Tse-Akaanya and Tse-Hiityo of Lumbuv council ward of Ukum Local Government Area of the state (Duru & Udama, 2018). On the 24th April 2018, in Ayar Mbalom village in Gwer East local Government Area of Benue State, 19 persons were killed and over 35 houses were burnt. Among those killed was Rev Fathers Gor Joseph, Felix Tyolaha of St. Ignatius Quasi Parish Ukpor-Mbalom (Ameh, 2018). Other middle belt states have also had their unfair share of the militancy of herdsmen. On the 11th April 2018, over 66 people were killed in Taraba (Daniel, Duru & Mkom, 2018). On the 16th January 2018, a monarch in Taraba State and 28 others were killed (Fanen & Uja 2018).

### **Triggers of Fulani herdsmen and Middle Belts fracas**

So many factors have been put forward and motivators in the wanton destruction of lives and property by the militant Fulani herdsmen. They are hereunder enumerated.

1. *Religion and grazing law:* The Fulani herdsmen see to the propagation of their Islamic religion whether peacefully or violently. They see the middle belt region as a conquered territory by Usman dan Fodio. Stopping them from behaving anyhow they want on the soil of middle belt region is a call for war. This is the reason why the introduction of anti-grazing law by the Ortom administration in Benue State was seen as an opposition to Islam, which signalled the commercialisation and mass destruction of lives and property by the herdsmen. Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association reveals that anti-open grazing law in Benue State aimed at regulating cow grazing in the state must be modified for peace to reign in the state (Seun, 2018). On the 25th of January 2018, Minister of Defence, Mansur Dan-Ali blatantly and obscenely identified the implementation of anti-grazing law in some states as the immediate cause of the killings.

2. ***Boundary disputes and expansionist tendencies:*** Benue state, for instance, has been revealed to be a conquered territory of the Fulani. Professor Umar Labdo Muhammad of the Faculty of Humanities, Northwest University, Kano has alleged that Benue State belongs to the Fulani by right of conquest. According to Seun (2018) Umar boasts that:

Benue State belongs to the Fulani people by right of conquest. This is because half of the state is part of the Bauchi Emirate and the other half is part of the Adamawa Emirate. Benue is therefore part and parcel of the Sokoto Caliphate. So no one has the right to expel the Fulani from Benue under any guise. Second to the Arabs, perhaps the Fulani are the most benevolent and merciful conquerors in history. If they had applied the Nazi final solution to the natives, or if they had treated them the same way the European settlers treated Red Indians in North America or the Aborigines in Australia, the story would have been different today. The Fulani are the largest single nation in West Africa and, perhaps, on the whole continent and they have remained unbeatable throughout their history. You can hate the Fulani, you can call them all sort of names, you can blackmail their spineless political leaders, you can conspire to wipe out the entire Fulani leadership in a single day, you can stage a coup and “orkarize” (excise) the core Fulani states from Nigeria, you can hate them to he’ll, but you can never beat them. Fulani’s main problem remains their meek, spineless, incompetent leaders that have lost all sense of responsibility and abandoned their people. But this problem, thank God, is not insurmountable.

However, Prof Akintoye in an interview with Omoniyi on June 12, 2018, refutes this. He stated that

...the theory is very different from what we know about the history of the Tiv, the black African people generally and the people who now live in Nigeria. What we know about the Fulani is that they originated in the far West of West Africa, in the areas of the Futa Jalon and Futa Toro and then migrated slowly eastward. By the time of the Empires of Mali and Songhai, they had reached the centre of West Africa in what is now known as the Republic of Mali.

He further revealed that until the 18th century, they were not part of the country called Nigeria. Until this time, there were no Fulani in the area called Nigeria. They migrated into Nigeria and established themselves in Hausaland. They can claim right over Hausaland because they became

the rulers of the Hausa people. When they began to bring pressure to bear on the people of the Middle Belt, destroying their farms and villages like what they are doing now, a few of the ethnic nationalities there tried to make peace with them, but they soon discovered that the peace didn't pacify them. This forced many of them to move away from their homes to part of the grassland where the Fulani could not easily reach them. But for the large nationality like the Tiv, nobody conquered them. They were too strong to be conquered. They are one of the most warlike people ever in black Africa. Nobody ever conquered them. Though the Fulani raided the fringes of the Tiv territory, they could not conquer the Tiv people. When the Tiv march out with their poisoned arrows, nobody can stand in their way. Even when the British came in 1900 to invade the Tiv land and they marched out with their poisoned arrows and faced the British, the British had to withdraw. They couldn't face the Tiv. The Tiv are one of the most developed people in Northern Nigeria (Omoniyi, 2018). Expansionist tendencies are expressed in circumstances where the pastoralists either move to claim ownership of the lands which were allocated to them by the indigenous groups on trust and based on predetermined agreements (Genyi, 2014).

**3. *Politicking Strategy*** Politicians have hijacked some of the gruesome activities of herdsmen to further their political popularity. Some opposition party members in the bid to place a state governor in the bad light and as incredible and unfit to hold that office, resort to this cheap political campaign of calumny, with the aim of gaining political points. They give information and shed these Fulani terrorists from security agencies. They don't mind that their kinsmen are the ones affected. Their political career is of utmost importance to them. Thus political cleavages, scramble for insufficient political gains, weak state structures, feelings of deprivation and thirst for power has continued to sustain this ugly development (Justino, 2007 in Nanji 2017, p.17).

**4. *Religious Solidarity and Sympathy of the Nigeria Security Agencies and Outfits:*** The Nigeria security agencies like the Nigerian Army, Navy, Airforce, DSS, FSARS, Police, Civil Defence, amongst others, have been suspected to be shedding Fulani herdsmen. Some locals have insisted that the Fulani soldiers aid and abate the activities of herdsmen. It is even believed in some quarters that the soldiers and police are the ones carrying out these blatant activities of ethnic cleansing. On Saturday,

March 24, 2018, a former minister of defence, Gen TY Danjuma (retired), said:

The armed forces are not neutral, they collude with the armed bandits that kill people, kill Nigerians. They facilitate their movement. They cover them. If you are depending on the armed forces to stop the killings, you will die one by one. The ethnic cleansing must stop in Taraba State. It must stop in all the states of Nigeria, otherwise Somalia will be a child's play. I ask everyone of you to be at alert and defend your country, defend your territory, defend your state. You have nowhere else to go (Magaji, 2018).

Furthermore, the military according to locals in Benue and Taraba states were in the act of disarming the indigenes, while the Fulani militants' herdsmen move without molestation.

### **Socio-religious implications of these clashes**

The implications of these unabated clashes include:

1. **Religious bigotry:** Indigenes of the middle belt region have now seen the Fulani as a dangerous group to the practice of their Christian religion. Furthermore, their acts have polarised the nation along religious and ethnic affinities. Christians in Nigeria see the Muslims as an accomplice of the rampaging. The Fulani mayhem is polarising Nigerians along religious and ethnic lines and putting the spotlight on the federal government for failing to curb the violence (Updated, 2018).
2. **Social disintegration:** There is a high level of suspicion among the religious groups. Christians are suspicious that the Muslims may join the Fulani herdsmen in fermenting attacks at any point in time. Furthermore, there is the mass movement of people from places populated by Muslims or from places that have continued or suspected to be affected by the Fulani rampage. For instance, according to Channels (2018) residents of some communities in the southern part of Nasarawa State have fled their homes due to killings and attacks by armed men suspected to be herdsmen. This has led to overpopulation of certain areas.
3. **Famine and starvation:** Food crops and farms are burned down by herdsmen militants. Most of those affected are commercial farmers. With the destruction of farmlands and its produce, there is the shortage of food crops in the market. Farmers, whose source of

livelihood is their farm produce, may face starvation in the succeeding year. This famine is possible because these attacks were accompanied with the burning of the homes of the farmers, destruction or looting of their food storage facilities or the occupation and grazing on their farmlands by cows and herdsmen (Okogba, 2018). Chijioke (2018) elucidates that the renewed attacks on Benue communities are coming at a time when farmers are harvesting their produce and the crops are being used as feeds for cattle after invading and displacing farmers.

4. *Bad image to the international community:* The international community now sees Nigeria as part of the countries being ravaged by Islamic fundamentalist. Nigeria is not recognised as a safe haven for investors. Little wonder the number of companies and industries that have shut down or have refused to stay in the country due to the security challenges orchestrated by Fulani unchecked rampage.

## Recommendations

*As part of the way forward, it is advised that:*

1. Herdsmen should be made to have a distinct area of land which they can use in the growing of forages to feed their animals. This is known as a camp.
2. If getting a camp is problematic, they should get a grazing area which is enclosed and separated from other areas with a fence.
3. The federal or state government should stop playing politics or religious solidarity with the lives of the ordinary Nigerian. Security should be beefed up to forestall any actions or militancy of the Fulani herdsmen in both affected and unaffected communities.
4. There should be the checking of the number of migrating Fulani herdsmen into a locality. When they are allowed in large number, they tend to be a source of security challenge to the community in question.
5. Farmers in agrarian communities in the middle belt should be guarded the same way that farmer in the north eastern part of Nigeria is being guarded.
6. There should be the arrest and sincere prosecution of herdsmen caught. Since the marauding herdsmen began their activities, the federal government paid lip service, which many Nigerians interprets as hypocrisy.

## Conclusion

The migrating of Fulani herdsmen to the middle belt regions has been a source of the security challenges in this region. The impacts of their activities on the locals have affected their total livelihood ranging from economy to education and to social integration. The government needs to avoid this I-don't-care attitude of protecting the herdsmen. There should be serious checks on herdsmen activities and those found wanting should be publicly tried, molested and imprisoned. Since the Fulani began their onslaught no arrest had been made and it is very disheartening. When arrests are made, it will, in the long run, serve as a deterrent to other militant herdsmen.

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