

THE POROSITY OF INTERNATIONAL BORDERS AND THE SPREAD OF ISLAM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper discusses the porosity of international borders and the spread of Islam in Nigeria. Nigeria has suffered some suffocating smoking ruins in its public spaces and escalated injurious violations of human lives and property in the hands of Boko Haram insurgents for over a decade now. And for about half a decade the migrant Fulani herdsmen added gross injuries to the scenario by their trespass on lands with the consequent farmers' reverse-aggression in the native communities of the Middle Belt and Southern regions of the country. Nigeria has porous international borders that are open to Islamic migrants who enter the country without respect to international policy provisions. The findings of this paper include, inter alia, the correlation between the porosity of borders, weak foreign policy and the spread of Islam in Nigeria. This situation retards integral human development in the country in many ways. The methodology employed in this work is historic-descriptive which means that the migrations into and within Nigeria have been studied over time and presented with keen interest on its supportive Islamization agenda consequences.

Keywords: Porosity, International borders, Foreign policy, Islamization, Nigeria

Introduction

The porosity of Nigerian borders has excited scholars hugely overtime; these intellectuals in various fields of the academia have studied this phenomenon from different perspectives. Some did their investigations from political, social, cultural and economic standpoints while others made theirs from international relations, history and law perspectives; and so on. This paper takes a dimension to see the correlation between porous boundaries of Nigeria and Islamization agenda. Nigeria has been variously described as the giant of Africa for a good one, the global capital of human poverty for a bad one and as the hot pot of insecurity in West African sub-region for an ugly one. These last two afore-cited descriptions of Nigeria have links with human capital mismanagement, culpable

wastage of vast resources and bad governance. One of the evidences of this bad governance or absence of integral and sustainable human development manifests in religious intolerance found to exist in the country.

Nigeria “has an approximate total land mass of about 923,768 square kilometers and shares international boundary with mostly Francophone colonies. Nigeria shares about 773 kilometres boundary with Benin Republic; 1,690 kilometres with the Republic of Cameroun; 1,497 kilometres with Niger Republic; 85 kilometres with Chad Republic and with the Republic of Guinea at the Gulf of Guinea (Salifu, 2013 & Mongabay, 2013 cited in Mailbari & Hamidu, 2015: 155). According to Uyo Salifu (2012:1) “The porous nature of these borders heightens the potential spread of terrorist activities into the neighbouring countries. Their vulnerability to the spread of Boko Haram is compounded by the fact that Niger and Cameroon have borders with the northern Nigerian states, where Boko Haram already exerts a strong influence. The border with Niger, for example, stretches along Sokoto, Katsina, Jigawa and Yobe states. This proximity to northern Nigeria is therefore a particular threat to Niger’s already fragile security, given the relative ease with which terrorist elements can cross into the country.” The illegal migrations across these borders have implications for religion especially the spread of Islam in Nigeria. In 2019, the then Minister of information, Abdulrahmann Dambazau revealed that Nigeria had 86 border posts and 1,400 illegal routes “that are used for smuggling and all kinds of cross border criminal activities (Atume, Philip, 2019:2). Onyeiwu (2019:6-7) wrote on the corruption at the borders in these words: “There are many illegal paths through which smuggled goods can be transported. No travel documents are required on these routes and there are no checks.” It is true that we have the challenges of the porosity of borders but even more problematic is the human factor; the government officials like the custom officers who compromise the sanctity of their jobs and travelers who come into the country with contraband goods and weapons of destruction to advance the space and coast of Islam. On this note therefore, Sheriff Folarin (2019:2) is of the view that “Nigeria should exercise tighter control of its borders. The government should be dealing with corruption among its security agencies, particularly Customs and Immigration. The Nigerian authorities should be purging the agencies of corrupt elements and inculcating professionalism in the agencies.” It is on the side of injustice to work against the business of traders from non-Fulani tribes at the borders while the Fulani herders enter the country with their cattle with every encouragement from the authorities explained in the compromises that aid their massive influx into the country.

One of these border criminal activities was pointed out by President Muhammadu Buhari who “blamed the porous borders for the proliferation of arms in the country, after several complaints from government concerning the nation’s insecure entry points” (Atume, 2019:3). He (the President) “confirmed this that the killer herdsmen who have been responsible for the wanton killings in Nigeria were trained and armed by the late Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi (Nda-Isaiah, 2018 cited by Aver, 2020:77). In the words of Aver, T.T (2020: 77): “Thus, the killer herdsmen who wield guns escaped from Libya with their arms as a result of poor boundary delineation found their way in Nigeria. In the Northern part of the country, the boundaries are so porous that migrants enter without proper documentation. These foreign migrants are the ones bringing about small arms and light weapons in the country. These weapons are further used to cause security implications in various dimensions.” On this note, Eke, C.C. (2019:35) wrote: “The implication is that government has evidence that the killings in Nigeria by herdsmen militia are perpetrated by foreign militias, yet none of these foreign invaders has even been arrested by security forces.” Questions arise from this issue thus: Have the herdsmen been identified to be foreign yet none has been arrested? Is the government on the path of the truth with this piece of information or is it suppressing the truth and hiding the facts and figures from its citizens? Can the foreign invaders wield AK 47 across the length and breadth of Nigeria with the government turning its blind eye away from their deadly activities? Or is the government too weak that it cannot protect its territories and peoples? One critical sector affected adversely by this trend is the religious sphere where these alien militias have operated unabated by killing Christians, burning churches, destroying farm lands and vacating families and communities from their ancestral lands.

There are also porous borders with Benin Republic and Cameroon in the Southern regions of Nigeria. Illegal migrants use these areas as well for entry and exit at will into the country. When one talks about the huge population of Nigeria, a good part of it is explained by the presence of illegal migrants in the country.

Nigeria has the human capital in excess population of 200 million people. This figure that runs in dual hundreds of millions so quoted has to be interrogated because just before the canonization and reception of migrants of Fulani stock from all places under the sun into the country without recourse to international policy standards as “the automatic visa” was given to them on arrival we used to hear 180 million people as the Nigerian population which of course went without

formal census articulation and proper statistical computation. Going by this, one can safely say that 20 million people must have come from the illegal use of the country's porous borders. The "automatic visa" or "visa on arrival" is a violation of the constitution of Nigeria and international policy on travelers or migrants. This Buhari's order was condemned and seen as a vivid support for his tribesmen, the Fulani and for the spread of Islam in Nigeria. The Chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Benue State Chapter, Rev Akpen Leva was explicit on the matter. According to him:

"It is our belief that policies of the Federal Government should not go contrary to the provisions of the constitution. Those who disobey the laws of the land are dealt with in line with the constitution. Even at the international level, citizens of other countries do not disrespect the laws of their host country." He further noted a difficulty thus: "This explains why we find it difficult to understand the rationale behind President's policy of open visa or 'visa on arrival' policy. Fulani herdsmen from countries like Chad, Mali, Niger, Cameroun and Burkina Faso, among others, have continued to troop into Nigeria. These are the herdsmen that are carrying highly sophisticated weapons and are killing Nigerians on their ancestral lands" (Wantu, J., 2021, guardian.ng).

There are retrogressive indices coming from the porosity of Nigerian borders, we remark without any fear of contradiction that religious violence, overpopulation, food scarcity, small and light arms proliferation, insecurity and many more are consequences got from porous boundaries. It is factual that with the emergence of Boko Haram insurgents and Fulani herdsmen, one sees the foot soldiers of Islamic organization fighting against the state of Nigeria and the indigenous peoples of Nigeria and non-Muslims to Islamize the country.

Porosity of international borders and the spread of Islam in Nigeria

Border refers to "a form of the line that demarcates or divides areas, lands, or countries. In order words, a border is something which can be stick(s), or planted life stick(s), erected wall(s) among others used to form line(s) or countries" (Ogbe & Onyemekihiam, 2021:290).

Porous borders mean that Nigeria has a lot of routes within the spaces of its international boundaries that are not guarded properly and are therefore loose and unchecked, permeable, penetrable, accessible by illegal migrants and jihadists or people with criminal tendencies who migrate into the country with instruments of harm and havoc on the cultural, political, economic and religious well-being of Nigeria.

Porosity of Nigerian borders has helped in great measures to support the agenda of this terrorists' organization from the points of view of recruitment of members from other countries across borders, using the ungoverned geographical features of the country and close by countries to train their recruits, running into those unchecked places as safe havens in the face of attacks and so on. The tribe that is identified with this massive entry into the country through these routes is the Fulani tribesmen especially their herdsmen. They have the nomadic culture that has the capacity to hide other intentions. One of such intentions is Islamic religious advancements in absolute proportions either directly or indirectly. Directly is when their aim from their countries of origins is to go and fight non-Muslims and make them succumb to Islamic faith by subtle and corrosive jihad or indirectly which implies coming to Nigeria on purpose to pasture cattle and as Muslims contribute to the increase of Islamic presence in the country. The federal government of Nigeria has been accused of the triumph and the thriving of this group through various means. According to Ele (2020:244-245):

“It is believed in many quarters that the Federal Government of Nigeria whose helm of affairs is presently manned by a Fulani President, General Muhammadu Buhari (retd) has advanced the course of Fulanization-Islamization in this country through different government's policies advertently or inadvertently, by omission or commission, like RUGA settlements, the bill to take over the coasts of rivers and water bodies in the country or even the CAMA law which has been rejected by other faiths in the country yet the government went on to sign it into law. Boko Haram insurgency is not just to hoist a flag of an Islamic state that is political at its face value but it is also religious at its deepest level; hence it strives to increase the space of “Islamic State” in Nigeria and in West African sub-region. The space being struggled for if achieved would succumb to Islamic theocracy in its breadth and width, by peoples and institutions.” He went further to note that “Boko Haram has constituted a challenge to national security; it is a cog in the wheel of progress in Nigeria by its activities - kidnappings, usurpations, disruptions, killings, abductions, banditry, rape, maiming, arson et cetera. The recruitment of members by force and (dis)orientation within the country and across the boundaries of the country helped by the porosity of Nigerian borders that makes a Fulani from any part of the world to become a Nigerian citizen any time, any day are huge threats to national security. It is a multi-million naira question to ask whether the aliens who migrated into the country with their cattle and arms or for some other reason, legal or illegal without proper documentations would not be on the queue to register as Nigerians in the current exercise of National Identity Number (NIN)”.

He also wrote that “Population is critical to national security both in the traditional understanding of safety and in all its nuances that have acquired new referent values and meanings. Peace and social justice are necessary to national security. All these fundamentals have been variously compromised in the country”. In the words of Oludare Richards & Tina Abeku (2019:2 cited in Ele, *ibid*), “It is therefore no wonder that illegal migration into and even out of the country persists; it is even believed to be a major cause of insecurity issues such as farmers-herders conflict and Boko Haram insurgency bedeviling the country”. The Fulani herdsmen by their activities have disrupted some other conceptualized forms of security: food security, environmental security, peace security, among others as these have been diminished at some places and times and vacated entirely in some other spaces all in the quest to sack and supplant tribes and communities from their ancestral homes (Ele, 2020: *ijalbs* Pp.244-245).

With the porosity of Nigeria’s international borders, there is an influx of Fulani migrants into the country and it is implied that they have to be settled to attaining meaningful achievements on purpose; namely: the spread of Islam in the country. One sees this in these areas:

- i. The Federal Government’s policy that supports the Fulani tribesmen such as cow and human settlements like Rural Grazing Area (RUGA), Livestock Intervention Scheme, are some means of legitimatizing the Fulani herdsmen and giving them homes in Nigeria. Within these settlements, mosques are built and Islam spreads. The South West Pan-Yoruba socio-political organization described the Ruga project as “an expansionist policy in furtherance of Fulanisation project. It seeks to use the might of the FG to take over ancestral land across and hand it over to herdsmen. If the project is allowed, non-Fulani communities would experience what Hausas experienced when Fulani walked into their space and took over all their institutions”. The Organization went to assert that “The South West ill not concede an inch of our land to Ruga. To do so will be a betrayal of Yoruba Warriors who pushed the Fulani back to Osogbo in the days of Jihad. They would have enslaved Yoruba since that time but for our gallant fighters” (Dapo Akinferon, 2019). In the same vein, the Southern and Middle Belt Leaders Forum (SMBLF)) faulted and rejected RUGA in these words: “The ethnic domination programme seeks to create homelands for Fulani herdsmen all over Nigeria in spite of the terror

non-Fulani communities have been subjected to even when these herders are nomads. Southern and Middle Belt communities have rejected the internal colonialism agenda out rightly. We say no to Ruga.” Apart from socio-cultural organizations of the indigenous peoples of the Southern and Middle Belt regions of Nigeria, the rejection went across these areas by state governments and regional governors’ fora which maintained in strong terms that they have no land for ruga and that no inch of their land will be given out for Ruga. However, The Buhari administration saw the controversies and fierce resistance and suspended the project. Yet the alien Fulani who came into the country are yet to settled according to plan; they engage in banditry, kidnapping, murder, rape and violent escalations across the country.

- ii. The suspension of RUGA gave birth to National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP). This Plan is believed by many as Ruga in disguise. Femi Ibirogba reported that: “The herdsman however have been destroying farmers’ crops for years with impunity. Not only that, other categories of farmers have always been given subsidized inputs or loans. They had never been given other people’s lands, free building and social facilities by the Federal Government, as espoused by NLTP and the RUGA scheme. Farm settlements of the old regional governments were built on community’s land though; the same community people were the beneficiaries of settlements, not other people.” He went on to note that: “The Name National Livestock Transformation Plan suggests a broader and a more inclusive coverage, but its policy statement and implementation components actually point to one direction: a RUGA project in another form.

Cattle rearing are private business and the idea of the Fulani herders’ settlements in all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria with the tax payers’ money shows indices beyond the surface and one of which is the spread of Islam.

- iii. The Fulani herdsman have sacked some communities and taken over their ancestral lands, raping married women and girls, murder, kidnapping, and violating sacred institutions and culture. In all this, they are not arrested and none is under trial anywhere in Nigeria.

They go about with dagger, Ak 47 and other instruments of murder and violence unabated by Nigerian Law enforcement agencies.

- iv. The Boko Haram insurgents are Islamic jihadists who have hoisted their flags and collect ransoms from native where they occupy and sound it clear that they are working towards the Islamization of Nigeria.
- v. Nigerian borders are compromised in such a large measure that unchecked routes are multiple. These porous routes favour Fulani migrants and have remained so without customs, electronic monitoring and any other security measures to curb the illegal activities at the borders.
- vi. There is Mass Migration to the South. The Islamization of Nigeria includes too the phenomenon of co-ordinated exodus of young muslims from the North into Southern Nigeria. These young people engage in menial jobs, petty trading, low profile transportation activities such as *Keke Napep* and *Okada* riding, repairing pots and foot wears, suya selling, shoe-polishing, hawking on tiger nuts, kola nuts and dates, wrist watches, belt, clothes, sugar cane, traditional medicine and serving as watch/gate men, *et cetera*. Everybody knows that they outnumber their customers; for instance, 10 of them who are cobblers can pass in one street within 5 minutes. Therefore, their sustenance cannot be from their respective economic activities, they are maintained by their Islamic faith, religious lords and bigots who support them richly and variously.

With this familiarization of all the hooks and crannies of the hitherto strange communities, it becomes easy to conquer the local, indigenous population. On a large scale, Fulani/Islamic migrants enter Nigeria illegally due to its porous borders. These are not Nigerians but those who are *imported* or on their own come to nationalize for the sake of Islamization project. It is the culture of Fulani people to hail from wherever they settle unlike the Igbo people and other tribes who must go back, alive or dead, to their ancestral locations. This is part of the game in the citizenship/indigeneship debate in the country. Their indigeneship *everywhere* means Islam *everywhere* (Ele, 2018:16).

- vii. The secularity of the Nigerian constitution implies freedom of religion. The support of one religion over and above other faiths goes against the spirit and letter of the law in the country. The adherents of Islam see no difference between religion and politics

and therefore see both as two sides of same coin. It is against the constitution for one to use his office in government to promote his religion to the detriment of other confessions.

- viii.** The Federal Government's policy that supports the Fulani tribesmen such as "Visa on arrival" is an issue that does not fit into a robust foreign policy. As Jesmine Ahmed (2020:792) averred: "A sound and stable foreign policy requires an intelligent public opinion. The behavior of every nation in international environment is always conditioned by its foreign policy. While formulating its foreign policy the policy makers take into account the internal and external environment, its national values, the foreign policy goals and decisions of other nations and the nature of international power structure". The "automatic visa" given to the Fulani has not enhanced the national values of Nigeria and neither has its citizens known peace with the massive entry into the country by the Fulani herders. Hence, illegal migration "... is even believed to be a major cause of insecurity issues such as farmers-herders conflict and Boko Haram insurgency bedeviling the country. Thus, the influx of migrants into the country has necessitated an even greater need for proper record keeping and documentation of all migrants at a time that the nation is faced with security challenges" (Oludare, R. & Abeku, T., 2019:2). Many migrants in the country have no papers that make their stay in the country legal. And they are in the country causing troubles and religious crises. One sees the correlation between the porosity of Nigerian borders and the spread of Islam in the country. The construction of railway lines into countries from where the Fulani invade Nigeria is a weak policy construct in the same direction, intent and purpose.

Conclusion

Nigeria is a country that has different ethnic groups; some of these groups believe in indigeneship like the Igbo tribe of southeast Nigeria and other tribes – the Tiv, Ijaw, Idoma, Yoruba, Igala, Efik, Ibibio, Oron, Bini, etc believe in the possession and occupation of their respective ancestral lands but the Fulani propagate citizenship because they are Nigerians by virtue of their stay in Nigeria as they retain and maintain their links with their native roots of Mali, Chad, Niger, Mauritania, Angola to mention but these. When they move, they move with their cattle and Islamic religion; religion that would be forced down

the throat of non-adherents. This jihad has caused crises in the country. There is every need to allow equal space and freedom of worship for all religions in this Nigeria for there to be peace. The porosity of Nigerian borders favours the Fulani who migrate into the country with the intentions of usurpations, displacements and spread of Islam; this trend has to be checked in order to maintain law and order according to the best international policy practices.

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