

Roving terrorists or innocuous cattle grazers? Between herdsmen's economic survival and community annihilation in Nigeria

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Abstract: Clashes over land use between the semi-nomadic, cattle-herding Fulani people and more settled communities that practice a mix of farming and cattle rearing, claim hundreds of lives each year, but have increased in frequency in recent months. Though with occasional manageable conflicts, Fulani herdsmen have cohabited peacefully with their host communities and land-owners in parts of the country for ages. Thus, some pertinent questions posed by this study: Why the sudden upsurge of invasions and violent criminalities among these gangs of “herdsmen”? Are the aggressors Fulani herdsmen or terrorists masquerading as herdsmen? Or are the herdsmen adopting terrorist method to install fears in the heart of peasant farmers as a survival strategy? Is there a clandestine agenda of the herdsmen? Who are those arming the Fulani herdsmen to unleash mayhem on innocent and defenceless Nigerians? Why are the police incapable of protecting the farmers from violent attacks by Fulani herdsmen? Why is it that the Fulani herdsmen alleged to be behind the inhuman killings and destruction of property in the affected states and indeed across the country always get away with their crimes without being brought to justice? Drawing extensively from secondary sources with the aid of descriptive and narrative tools, this study seeks to provide answers to these posers.

Keywords: herdsmen, community, terrorists, economic survival, annihilation

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Introduction and problem statement

There have been serious and continuous threats to national and individual security in the form of organised crimes, election related violence, and violent extremism, including oil bunkering and kidnapping initially associated with the Niger-Delta Crisis but which later spread to the other parts of the country following the amnesty deal in 2009. There have also been alarming incidences of car snatching and ritual killings (Musa, 2013, p.60). The menace of the Boko Haram sect, that has killed thousands of people in the last six years, is yet to be finally tamed. In recent times, violent crimes, including armed robbery and kidnapping have been on the increase. And of more concern is the spate of violent inter- and intra-communal clashes leading to death and maiming of hundreds of citizens. As noted by Amuta (2016), itinerant herdsmen that have been part of our ancient cattle rearing and transport culture have actively joined the competition for pre-eminence in violence with Boko Haram, Niger Delta militants, sundry gunmen, transactional kidnapers, and the rest. The supposed herdsmen are killing people on an industrial scale, burning people's houses in their route communities, razing whole communities and spreading hate and instability even in places that had hosted them for decades.

Put differently, the country plays host to another terrorist group yet unrecognised – nomadic pastoralists. The Fulani herdsmen – cattle grazers – have been named one of the deadliest terror groups in the world amongst Boko Haram, Isis, Taliban and al-Shabaab. Although they are overlooked in Nigeria and in certain parts of the Central African Republic, the group has wreaked enough havoc to be acknowledged by the global community as the fourth deadliest terror group in the world. The group of “Fulani militants” as they have come to be known, is made up of individuals from the Fulani or Fula ethnic group, a tribe of over 20 million people – 70 percent of whom are nomadic grazers – who exist in at least seven West African countries (Egbedi, 2016).

Various cases of conflicts in Nigeria involving the Fulani pastoralists and farmers consist of significant variables in economic, social, political and ecological parameters. These conflicts occur mostly in areas of stiff competition for grazing land and farming but the degree of intensity differs from state to state depending on the ecological location and the communities involved (Ali, 2013). The conflicts occur when Fulani herders move into non-Fulani homelands with their cattle. This usually leads to the destruction of farmers' crops. Thus, the herders provoke their victims to acts of resistance (preventing entry into farms, killing or

stealing cattle, or poisoning fields). In response, the herders wage deadly attacks on farming communities (Okeke, 2014, p.67). Before now, clashes between mostly Fulani herdsmen and settled communities have been concentrated in North Central Nigeria, particularly the states of Benue, Plateau, Kaduna and Nassarawa.

However, in the recent time, from the plains of Plateau, Nasarawa and southern parts of Kaduna States, these armed desperados have increased in numbers, pouring southward into Oyo, Ekiti, Ondo, Osun, Ogun, Benue, Taraba, Kogi, Enugu, Abia, Anambra, Delta, Edo and parts of Rivers States. They brazenly herd their livestock into people's farmlands and threaten them with their deadly weapons at the slightest sign of protest. Some of them even go beyond that and engage in criminal ventures such as kidnapping, armed robbery, murders and rape. They sometimes block the highways and inflict life-threatening injuries on their victims (Vanguard Editorial, April 28, 2016).

Some have depicted the violence as a continuation of ethno-religious struggles that predate the colonial era. However, the relative absence of such widespread bloodshed throughout much of Nigeria's post-independence history suggests more contemporary factors are to blame. Specifically, it appears the upsurge in farmer-herder violence stems from the confluence of four developments: the ongoing expansion of land under cultivation, environmental degradation across Africa's Sahel region, the decline of traditional authority figures, and the recent rise of large-scale cattle rustling (Baca, 2015).

Although ethnic differences are often given as the reasons for similar clashes, access to land is at the root of these confrontations. Triggered by desperation to protect and advance an ever-shrinking ecological space, characterised by resource-scarcity, population explosion and climate change-induced migration of pastoralists from the far North to the North-Central region of Nigeria in search of grazing fields, the country has recorded deaths by the thousands from clashes between predominantly Fulani herdsmen and local farmers (Odemwingie, 2014). Though with occasional manageable conflicts, Fulani herdsmen have cohabited peacefully with their host communities and land-owners in all parts of the country for ages.

Thus, some pertinent questions posed by this study: Why the sudden upsurge of invasions and violent criminalities among these gangs of "herdsmen"? Are the aggressors Fulani herdsmen or terrorists masquerading as herdsmen? Or are the herdsmen adopting terrorist method to install fears in the heart of peasant farmers as a survival strategy? Is there a clandestine agenda of the herdsmen? Who are those arming the Fulani herdsmen to unleash mayhem on

innocent and defenceless Nigerians? Why are the police incapable of protecting the farmers from violent attacks by Fulani herdsmen? Why is it that the Fulani herdsmen alleged to be behind the inhuman killings and destruction of property in the affected states and indeed across the country always get away with their crimes without being brought to justice? Drawing extensively from secondary sources with the aid of descriptive and narrative tools, this study seeks to provide answers to these posers.

The cultural and historical perspectives to nomadic Fulani herdsmen

The early origin of Fulani People is most fascinating and deepened in mystery with widely divergent opinions. Many scholars believe that they are of Judaeo-Syrian origin. However, it is generally recognised that Fulani descended from nomads from both North Africa and from sub-Saharan Africa. They came from the Middle-East and North Africa and settled into Central and West Africa from the Senegal region they created the Tekruur Empire which was contemporary to the Ghana Empire. Then, they spread in all the countries in West-Africa, continuing to lead their nomadic life style. They created here and there mixed states where they sometimes were the dominant group. But more often, they were absorbed by the indigenous population whom they had dominated.¹

The Fulani were the first group of people in West Africa to convert to Islam through jihads, or holy wars, and were able to take over much of West Africa and establish themselves not only as a religious group but also as a political and economic force. They are the missionaries of Islam and continued to conquer much of West Africa. The Fulani are primarily nomadic herders and traders. Through their nomadic lifestyle they established numerous trade routes in West Africa. Many times the Fulani go to local markets and interact with the people, getting news and spreading it through much of West Africa (Anter, 2011). According to the encyclopaedia of world culture (Cited in Amzat et al, 2016), the Fulani are found in twenty nations across Africa – from Mauritania and Senegal to Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya. The only country that may not have any Fulani settlements is Liberia. The encyclopaedia estimates the population of the nomadic Fulani to be around 7 to 8 million while the settled Fulani is estimated around 16 million. In Nigeria, the tribe known to be predominantly cattle herders is the Fulani also known as the Fula or Peul. They largely reside in the northern Nigeria, but

¹ Read more at: <https://www.modernghana.com/news/349849/who-are-the-fulani-people-their-origins.html>

they follow their livestock along migratory patterns. This wandering lifestyle has brought them into conflict with settled farming communities in Nigeria, who have accused the Fulani of cattle rustling, kidnapping, and murder.

The people whom historians identified as Fulani are quick to resort to combat in the defence of their interest but also have a reputation for waiting for the opportune moment to seek revenge if the situation demands patience, according to the encyclopaedia of world culture (ibid). This fact may explain why there are clashes often between mostly Fulani herdsman and settled communities, particularly in the states of Benue, Plateau, Kaduna and Nassarawa. The socio-economic lives of both the farmers and the herdsman revolve around land and therefore, land matters become easily conflictual.

With origins in the Senegambia region, the Fulani now stretch across some 20 states in West Africa and the Sahel belt, ranging from Guinea-Conakry to Sudan. Though the Fulani herders once existed in a symbiotic relationship with sedentary agriculturalists in this region (involving the fertilisation of fields by cattle who fed on the vegetative debris left over after crops had been taken in and the exchange of meat and milk for grain and other agricultural products), this relationship has been disturbed in recent years by environmental changes that have driven the herders further south, massive growth in the size of Fulani herds, the growth of practices such as agro-pastoralism, the expansion of farmland into traditional corridors used by the herders and the general collapse of customary conflict-resolution methods (McGregor, 2014).

For the fully nomadic Fulani, the practice of transhumance, the seasonal movement in search of water, strongly influences settlement patterns. The basic settlement, consisting of a man and his dependents, is called a *wuru*. It is social but ephemeral, given that many such settlements have no women and serve simply as shelters for the nomads who tend the herds. There are, in fact, a number of settlement patterns among Fulani. In the late twentieth century there has been an increasing trend toward livestock production and sedentary settlement, but Fulani settlement types still range from traditional nomadism to variations on sedentarism. As the modern nation-state restricts the range of nomadism, the Fulani have adapted ever increasingly complex ways to move herds among their related families: the families may reside in stable communities, but the herds move according to the availability of water. Over the last few centuries, the majority of Fulani have become sedentary (<http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Fulani.aspx>).

Those Fulani who remain nomadic or semi-nomadic have two major types of settlements: dry-season and wet-season camps. The dry season lasts from about November to March, the wet season from about March to the end of October. Households are patrilocal and range in size from one nuclear family to more than one hundred people. The administrative structure, however, crosscuts patrilineal and is territorial. Families tend to remain in wet-season camp while sending younger males – or, increasingly, hiring non-Fulani herders – to accompany the cattle to dry-season camps (ibid). The economic mainstay of the pastoralists is animal-herding e.g. cattle, camels, goats and sheep. In Nigeria, the Fulani own about 80 to 95 percent of the large animals available. They also own a good number of the goats and sheep. Their method of animal exploitation and management is predominantly pastoral nomadism or subsistence pastoralism. Under this system, pastoralists engage in labour-intensive forms of animal herding and dairy production and only occasionally sell or slaughter animals. The pastoralist most times sell unfit animals and surplus animal produce i.e. milk and butter. The marketing of surplus animal products is the role of women, who use the proceeds to purchase other foodstuff, utensils and ornaments while the sale of animals in hoof is the sole responsibility of the men (Etsename, n.d).

According to literature, the Fulani grazing lands were initially classified into dry season grazing land (Hurumi), rainy season grazing land (Mashekari) and cattle route (Burtali). The global climate change phenomenon and the resultant exacerbation of desert encroachment in the North East and North West regions of the country (the traditional abode of the Fulani) over the years, has gradually diminished the Hurumi and Mashekari pushing the pastoralists further southwards as they search for fodder for their cattle (Ndibe, 2016).

The Fulani indisputably represent a significant component of the Nigerian economy. They constitute the major breeders of cattle, the main source of meat, the most available and cheap source of animal proteins consumed by Nigerians. The Fulani own over 90% of the nation's livestock population which accounts for one-third of agricultural GDP and 3.2% of the nation's GDP (Eniola, 2010, cited in Abbass, 2014, p.332). Nomadic pastoralism is at the heart of the Fulani cultural lifestyle, and that is why there has been so much labelling of the Fulani in the emerging narrative, whereas the violent herdsmen certainly do not represent Fulani interest. For centuries, the Fulani, living across West Africa, have herded cattle from one part to the other, across borders. In Nigeria, the migration is seasonal or cyclical: as the dry season begins in the North, the herdsmen travel with their livestock down south in search of pasture and water, and to avoid seasonal diseases. After about six months, with the onset of

the rainy season and farming in the South, they travel back to the North. Along the route, they sometimes settle down, develop a relationship with the farming communities and function as transhumance pastoralists (Abati, 2016).

Cattle rearing, arms proliferation and the terrorist strategic dimension

Nigerian security forces have claimed that some groups of semi-nomadic Fulani herdsmen engaged in bitter and bloody conflicts with farmers in several Nigerian states are actually composed of members of Boko Haram. A statement from Nigerian Director of Defence Information Major General Chris Olukolade claimed the potentially dangerous identification came during the interrogation of Fulani herdsmen arrested after a series of killings and arson attacks in Taraba State (*Vanguard*, April 23; *Leadership*, April 24; *Nigerian Tribune*, April 24). Reports of Boko Haram members (who are mostly members of the Kanuri ethno-cultural group) disguising themselves as Fulani herdsmen while carrying out attacks in rural Nigeria are common (McGregor, 2014).

The menace of the rampaging herdsmen are such that in Benue and Plateau states in the north-central of the country, their activities have been likened to a genocide on the native Tiv, Idoma, Berom, Angas, Kwalla and Taroh people (Odufowokan, 2014). As noted by Obi (2016), the recent activities of Fulani herdsmen in southern Nigeria is suggestive of insurgency. It is Boko Haram in a different form and shape. According to him, the target is to infiltrate the South of the country, which the conventional Boko Haram could not penetrate.

Despite being overlooked by the international media for the most part in recent years, the herdsman-farmer clashes are on track to be a significant destabilising security issue for Nigeria over the next few years. And unlike with Boko Haram which was ostensibly defined by religious boundaries, these clashes have more potential for a ripple effect within Nigeria when the sensitive issue of ethnicity is added to the mix (Amaza, 2016). The jihadi group Boko Haram are usually characterised as the biggest threat to Nigeria's state security and even as one of the world's deadliest militant groups. Between 2010 and 2013, Fulani militants killed about 80 people in total, but by 2014, they had killed 1,229 people, and in 2015 that figured had doubled (Dickson et al 2016). But in the first four months of 2016, Boko Haram have actually been responsible for less deaths-208 to be precise-than other sectarian groups in Nigeria combined, which have accounted for 438 deaths so far, according to the Council on

Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker. A huge chunk of these are down to an ongoing conflict between predominantly Fulani herdsmen and settled farming communities, which is costing the Nigerian economy billions of dollars per year as well as hundreds-if not thousands-of lives (Gaffey, 2016).

However, unlike Boko Haram which only operates in Northern Nigeria, the nomadic militants, before now, dominated the middle belt region. The Global Terrorism Index of 2015 states that over 90 percent of the attacks carried out by the group are on private citizens, accounting for 81 percent of deaths in the area. And these attacks have mainly been through armed assaults, killing an average of 11 people per attack. Before the report, the largest attack was in 2014 when the group killed over 200 people – community leaders and residents that were meeting in a remote village in Zamfara state, Nigeria (Dickson et al, 2016).

Alamu (2016, p.3) posits that contrary to the dangerous bogey being fed to the nation, the herdsmen are not a new mutation of Boko Haram. There might have been an influx of arms and munitions from the Libyan debacle and the open corridor of the Maghreb through Mali. There might have been a militarisation of herd-protection as a result of organised cattle rustling and organised resistance to free roaming as the logic of settled and sedentary culture violently collides with the logic of nomadic free passage. Alamu further contends that while Boko Haram is ideologically driven and principally targeted at the state, the herdsmen are culturally propelled; a regnant residue of ancient customs and nomadic shuttling which targets entire communities and their people.

A study of major conflicts between the Fulani herdsmen or the Nomadic and the Agriculturalists or the Pastoralists and Farmers shows that the land related issues, especially over grazing fields account for the highest percentage of the conflicts in other words, struggle over the control of economically viable land cause more tensions and violent conflicts among the Nomadic and farmers (Ali, 2013). In a study by Olayoku (2015, p.20) it situated and analysed fatal incidents resulting from cattle grazing within its historical, political, and social contexts. Using the Nigeria Watch database data from June 2006 to May 2014, it identified the major stakeholders as being basically communities of farmers and Fulani. State security agents, the political authorities, and local or foreign “mercenaries” also played a role. The causes, however, were identified to be fundamentally economic and centred around land issues, showing that the creation by the government of grazing routes did not mitigate the problem. In the final analysis, the study revealed that violence from cattle conflicts was not

restricted to specific periods of the year and occurred during all months, with the highest number of fatalities recorded in both the rainy (June) and dry (December) seasons. Some established facts, according to Obaze (2016), subsist:

First, the grazing conflict is needs-based and cross-cultural, if only in name. Second, the grazing conflict has assumed high-level of intensity and destructiveness and risks becoming intractable. This affirms the conflict as a classical distributive conflict; with grazing land as the contentious resource. Third, though Nigeria may lack monitoring capabilities and parameters for measuring the intensity of the conflict, the spiralling rise in fatalities, destruction of properties and the growing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), should suffice as early warning signs. They should also serve as informal benchmarks for measuring the scope and intensity of the grazing conflict.

The deadly terrorist group has since 2011 embarked in mindless killing of defenceless women and children in the Middle Belt. Between 2011 and 2014, they took over many of communities in the four local government areas of Guma, Gwer-East, Buruku and Gwer as well as Tom-Anyiin, Tom-Ataan, Mbaya and Tombu in Buruku Local Government Area of Benue. In 2013, the group was credited with mindless murder of about 60 women and children seeking refuge in church in Plateau state while those who went out for their funeral a few days later including serving senator, Gyang Dantong, and, Gyang Fulani, the Majority Leader of the Plateau State House of Assembly, were equally murdered (Oluwajuyitan, 2016).

In 2015, the people of Egba village in Agatu Local Government of Benue claimed about 90 of their compatriots were killed by Fulani herdsmen. The then state police commissioner, Hyacinth Dagala, insisted 'only 30 corpses were recovered' as if that was a relief to the bereaved families. But neither for the 90 nor the 30 deaths was anyone apprehended or prosecuted. In May 2015, Governor Gabriel Suswan narrowly escaped an ambush by Fulani herdsmen. All a governor who could not protect himself or his citizens could do was to lament the fate of 'displaced farmers and their family members who live in refugee camps in Otukpo, Ojantele, Ataganyi and Ugbokpo (Oluwajuyitan, 2016). The attacks in the Middle Belt has been described by Moses Ochonu (2016) as an organised, systematic and repeated invasion of communities with the obvious aim of displacing them from the land. According to him, these nomads are not the familiar seasonal nomads who migrate southward through Middle Belt communities during the dry season and northward during the rainy season.

They are invasions that result in the massacre of defenceless indigenous people in purportedly vengeful orgies of bloodletting. Clashes require two sets of combatants. In these massacres, there is only one heavily armed group of combatants, a militia armed and hired by the herdsmen, a militia that the leaders of the Fulani herdsmen boldly and proudly admit is doing their bidding. These massacres do not fit into the traditional, familiar mold of “farmer-herdsmen” clashes (ibid).

On the 24th of January 2016, Fulani militants were responsible for the death of 30 people in Adamawa State, including a Divisional Police Officer. They were also responsible for the kidnapping and killing of His Royal Majesty, Akaeze Ofulue III of the Ubulu-Uku kingdom in Aniocha, Delta state. The nomads brought about enough destruction in the south west of Nigeria to cause leaders in the region to convene an emergency meeting resulting in a call for government intervention (Dickson et al, 2016). In all the incidents reported, especially in the first few months of 2016, it has been a case of a band of cowmen barrelling through other people’s territories and acting with a certain proprietary hubris as though the legitimate owners are impostors. A few cardinal incidents could help to put the violence in perspective. One of them took place in Agatu community in the middle belt where the Fulani herdsmen razed down the community, burnt down homes, and slaughtered everyone in sight, old, young, children and women. They also raped and brought the once vibrant, cohesive soul of the place to its knees (The Nation Editorial, April 28, 2016). More than 300 people were reported to have been killed by Fulani herdsmen who invaded and occupied the area in Benue State. The police and other military forces appear helpless (Omonisa et al, 2016).

After the highly publicised attacks in Agatu, the herdsmen once again stormed Agwabi community in Buruku Local Government Council of Benue State on May 13, 2016 killing five persons. The Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, MACBAN stated that the herdsmen attacked the community because Tiv youths in the state stole 800 cows. So, instead of reporting the incident to the appropriate security authorities, the herdsmen took law into their own hands and killed Benue villagers. Also, on May 20, suspected herdsmen attacked a village in Ikole Ekiti, Ekiti State, killing two and severely injuring three others. This incident sparked an outrage across the state with the state government, banning cattle grazing and warning that the incident could lead to reprisal attacks against Fulanis in the state (Ashiru, 2016, p.18). On January 5, at Ofagbe community, Isoko North Local Government Area, Delta State, herdsmen reportedly killed a man and wounded another who identified himself as Thompson Ogege. The following day, suspected Fulani attacked Amoji in Delta State and

abducted no fewer than four persons according to a community leader, Emmanuel Odili. On the same day, a gang of youths attacked and razed down Suwa and Burukutu in Lamurde local government area of Adamawa State. The assailants were said to be well-armed Fulani herdsmen. In November 2015, an armed group alleged to be Fulani herdsmen reportedly attacked nine different communities in Dekina Local Government Area of Kogi and killed twenty-two people. A month before, women from four local government areas in Enugu State, called on the state government to save them from Fulani herdsmen who regularly molest, maim, rape and destroy their farmland and livestock (Amzat et al, 2016).

The other incident was in Edo State where the herdsmen killed a man without any evidence of provocation. The community was enraged and they lashed back and razed down the herdsmen's post and led to a sense of community alert and an air of adversarial relation between the herdsmen and the local communities. Silence has replaced raw nerves of conflict since. The third incident occurred in a forest near Aba in Abia State, where numerous bodies were buried and the Directorate of State Services stoked ethnic umbrage when it said five Fulani persons were killed. But tens of other corpses were buried but they were invisible to the eyes of the secret service. How did they identify who was Fulani or not? (ibid).

The new phenomenon of the nomadic pastoralist now behaving as a conquering group of invaders, ready to inflict terror, and not ready to ask for permission for land use, is where the big problem lies. The bigger problem perhaps is the refusal of the nomadic pastoralist to give up an old tradition that has become antiquated in modern times, or perhaps in urgent need of modernisation and reform. And to insist on that old mode on the grounds that the life of a cow is more important than that of a human being is worse than the Boko Haram phenomenon (Abati, 2016). Prior to this time, herdsmen did not carry these kinds of weapons. Before now, herdsmen were not hostile to the communities through which they pass. Above all, they did not allow their cattle to feed on and destroy farmlands. All these have changed in many radical ways. Herdsmen have transformed into brutal killers; they are violent, murderous, bloodthirsty, aggressive and provocative. They wage hateful wars against peaceful communities and villages located thousands of kilometres away from the states where the herdsmen originated (Obijiofor, 2016). Yet, in response to the public opprobrium to the attacks, the Chairman, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, Plateau State, Nuru Abdullahi, said nobody could deprive Fulani herdsmen of their constitutional right of free movement. Abdullahi said:

Why would they ask them not to go to the southern part of the country? It is their constitutional right to move freely as guaranteed by the laws of the land. What the various governments and security agencies should do is to prevent attacks and counter-attacks and such things that breed violence like cattle rustling and trespassing into farmlands. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees freedom of movement for every citizen of the country; this includes the right to live, work and carry out any legitimate activity in any part of the country. If and when you breach this freedom, then, the law should deal with you. So, asking anybody not to go to any part of the country is unconstitutional.

In a report, titled “Terror in the Food Basket” published by SMB Intelligence, a data mining and research firm that provides analysis of Nigeria’s socio-political and economic situations, described the attitude of the Federal Government toward the Fulani herdsmen and host communities in the North Central Region as “head-firmly-in-the-sand”. SMB Intelligence stated that the report was compiled through ground reporting in three states in the region – Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau States – interviewing survivors, visiting Internally Displaced People’s camps, review of media reports, visiting markets and curating available causality figures. First, the report debunked the over-simplification of the conflict as caused by the activities of cattle rustlers and said what is happening in the region is “wholesale slaughter of communities” that required urgent attention. According to the report, over 2,000 people have been killed in conflicts between the herdsmen and host communities in the region in 2015 alone. In comparison, according to the report, the Boko Haram insurgency kills 2,500 people annually (See Ibekwe, 2015). The report stated that although the conflict in the region, aptly referred to as the “food basket” of the country due to its largely agrarian communities, is under-reported by local and international media, its implications are far-reaching and as deadly as the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East:

No war has been declared. Unlike the more high profile and internationally recognised Boko Haram insurgency, the conflict in the Middle Belt is under-reported in both the domestic and international media, and the government’s response to it has been a sort of denial that this conflict exists, with senior government officials preferring to focus on either Boko Haram, or the issue of cattle rustling in the North-West. While the number of Nigerians that have been killed in this violence rivals the numbers affected by Boko Haram in 2015, the killings are just as indiscriminate – women, children, young men, the elderly – everyone is a target. In March 2014, Gabriel Suswam, then governor of Nigeria’s Benue State, came under attack (ibid).

Going by several reports of herdsmen encroaching and grazing their cattle on farmlands and the pattern of attacks on farmer's settlements and communities, the Fulani appear overwhelming as the aggressors. And there are allegations that the Fulani community is so resolutely committed to fighting their cause that they engage mercenaries, who are sometimes dressed in Nigerian army fatigues and use sophisticated weaponry on hapless local community members. However, there has, so far, not been any evidence of official sponsorship, although Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, a Fulani rights protection group, regularly rises in defence of the herdsmen. Again, the inability of the law enforcement agencies to check the proliferation of Small Arm and Light Weapons (SALW) worsens security situations in the Northern part of Nigeria, leading think tanks, research groups, and advocacy organisations have repeatedly reported (Odemwinge, 2014).

The conflict highlights the prevalence of weapons in the hands of non-state actors in Nigeria. A 2009 Small Arms Survey put the number of illegal small arms and light weapons in Nigeria at between one million and three million, a number that is bound to be an underestimate as it was before the start of the Boko Haram insurgency, which has increased the number of weapons in circulation. The flow of arms within the West African sub-region increased after the fall of Libyan dictator Muammar Gadhafi and the disintegration of the Libyan government, worsening conflicts in the region from Boko Haram in Nigeria to Tuareg rebels and Islamist groups in Mali and other parts of the Sahel. It is not inconceivable that these arms also flowed into the hands of ethnic militias like the Fulani herdsmen, in addition to arms smuggled into the country through the ports (Amaza, 2016).

Since 2000, nomadic herdsmen have arrived with AK-47 guns and other light weapons dangling under their arms. In this situation, their herds are often deliberately driven onto farms, and they will attack any farmers who attempt to push them out. These reprisals could occur several hours or days after initial encounters and at odd hours of the day or night. Attacks have often been orchestrated when farmers are on their farms, or when residents are observing a funeral or burial rights with heavy attendance, yet when other residents are asleep (Odufowokan 2014). The Fulani herders do not have an established political structure and tend to be represented by various cattle breeders associations. Alhaji Bello Abdullahi Bodejo, the leader of one of the largest of these groups, the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, claims that most of the attacks attributed to the Fulani herdsmen are actually carried out by "terrorists" who have infiltrated the Fulani to carry out violence (*Leadership*, April 25, 2014). The association has also explained that many of the clashes between herdsmen and farmers

were caused by the encroachment of the latter on traditional cattle routes (*Daily Sun*, April 18, 2014). But the Chairman, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association in Plateau State, Alhaji Mohammed Nuru Abdullahi defended the activities of the herders:

Fulani herdsmen do not have any security backup because they are in the rural areas where the security operatives may not be able to access. Now cattle rustling and killing of Fulani have become a lucrative business. Therefore, Fulani herdsmen will do everything possible to protect their lives and property since government has failed to do so. The Fulani use the AK47 for defence since the government has failed to protect them (The Punch, May 8, 2016).

Nigerian borders are porous, allowing herdsmen from across West Africa to enter Nigeria unchecked, wielding dangerous weapons, left-overs from wars in Mali and Libya. Border controls must become stricter, and Nigeria should take a more serious interest in the ECOWAS Convention on small arms and light weapons. The cost of negligence in this regard is to be measured by the frightening number of persons that have been killed by herdsmen since January 2016 alone (Abati, 2016). Recently, soldiers of the Guards Brigade of the Nigerian Army arrested a truckload of herdsmen in Abuja. The herdsmen, according to the army, said they were on a mission to recover their stolen cows. Assorted ammunition, including pump action rifles, was recovered from them. Although the army said the herdsmen were in custody, pending further investigations, it is worrisome that dangerous weapons, including high calibre firearms, are in massive circulation among non-state actors who have been terrorising citizens (ThisDay, 2016).

With climate change and desertification in the North, and the availability of cheap arms from wars in Libya, Chad, Mali and other places in the desert, sophisticated weapons are purchased and given to hired hands from all over the West African sub-region to move hungry cattle to Southern greener pastures (Nnanna, 2016). Some of the major drivers responsible for the frequent violent confrontations between farmers and herdsmen have to do with population dynamics, namely the high population growth rate in Nigeria, increased livestock that is estimated at 19 million cows; 45 million sheep; and 35 million goats. Thus, the need to cater for these animals, in a country that is confronted with an increasingly small space for grazing, leads to frequent encroachments on farmlands by herdsmen, which in turn lead to violent confrontation with farmers. Despite the fact that grazing routes were created in the past, urbanisation has led to a situation whereby these routes have been tempered with. For

instance, only 141 grazing reserves out of the 415 initially established were gazetted (Yusuf, 2014, p.11).

Security agencies and the observable sobering ineptitude/lapses

Presently, the nation is squeezed to death between the murderous hordes of primitive herdsmen on the rampage and the rallying hearse-men of social and economic cannibalism feasting on its entrails while screaming blue murder (Alamu, 2016, p.3). From minor eruptions in the past months, the crisis has grown to become major eruptions capable of threatening national security. Since there was no deliberate and imaginative effort to tackle the crisis, it has festered quietly but dangerously (Akinlotan, 2016, p.64). Thus, in response to the mounting insecurity, many populations have formed self-defence forces. Although set up to protect vulnerable communities, these groups generally present another security challenge to Nigeria. The evolution of Ombatse, an ethnic militia founded by members of Nasarawa State's Eggon people, illustrates this point. Initially formed to counter perceived herder encroachments, Ombatse transformed into a chauvinistic organisation engaged in acts of political violence and criminality. At one point, it came into direct conflict with Abuja, reportedly killing over 700 Nigerian security personnel in a May 2013 ambush (Baca, 2015).

Most victims, however, believe that rather than arrest and punish the herdsmen, the security operatives had, in some circumstances, aided them. The people of Ukpabi Nimbo, (Enugu State) for instance, believe that the attack on the village would have been prevented had the security agencies acted on information made available to them by the villagers. In the 2014 Fulani herdsmen attack in Benue, the survivors also hinted that the army collaborated with raiders to destroy property and kill the people (Amzat et al, 2016). Though both the police and the army have debunked this allegation, the explanation which was recently given by the Inspector General of Police, Solomon Arase, in his interview with Channels television confirms the weakness of the police in tackling the problem. On the crisis between herdsmen and farmers in the Agatu community, he said some policemen were deployed, but also expressed concern over the cost implication of deploying men to a troubled spot. According to the IG, the deployment of security was usually unbudgeted for: "If I deploy them and their welfare is not appropriately taken care of then I am creating another problem" (ibid).

In the Benue State killings, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) was exasperated that the media was blowing casualty figures out of proportion because the Agatu and their political representatives, such as former Senate President David Mark, had indicated that about 500 people, including women and children, were slaughtered. Some police officers even suggested without proof that the herdsmen were non-Nigerians. But when Fulani leaders addressed the press on the Agatu killings, they indicated they were retaliating the murder of a few respected Fulani leaders, even supplying graphic details of the aforesaid provocations. Yet, the police have neither invited the avengers for questioning nor even embarked on investigations into the vendetta. Self-help, the police seem to be saying, is not out of place (Akinlotan, 2016, p.64).

Following the lackadaisical attitude of the security agencies and the federal government towards reining in the sophisticated gun-wielding herdsmen, there is a growing perception that otherwise law abiding citizens may have to make their own security arrangements to secure their lives and property. This feeling that help would not come from official quarters have intensified with the extension of the aggression of the herdsmen to the southern part of the country as more farming communities fall under their unprovoked attacks. Such feeling of insecurity and the compelling urge for citizens to arrange for their own defence can only worsen the situation on the ground.

Put differently, the incessant attacks by herdsmen, kidnappers, vandals, cattle rustlers, insurgents and the inability of the security forces to proactively stop them has led to an increasing number of Nigerians vowing to protect themselves and their communities by arming themselves. This act will significantly increase the prevalence of illegal weapons across the country, thus exacerbating crime and insecurity in the country (Ashiru, 2016, p.18). Thus, private or community arrangements for security against gunmen would require private accumulation of arms. In this bid to balance terror, Nigeria runs the risk of becoming home to massive illicit arms with assured disastrous consequences (ThisDay Editorial, 2016). According to Adeniyi (2016):

Given the long tradition of the nomadic cattle herding in the country, we ought by now to have acquired enough human assets among the herdsmen as to rely on flawless human intelligence to pre-empt and prevent these attacks. Indeed, that our security agencies are failing on this crisis is evident from the fact that they have not even interrogated the challenge to understand what exactly we are dealing with.

Fulani herdsmen are seen all over the country with these weapons, creating tensions and putting farmers on edge- farmers who are not allowed to bear such arms. This impunity on the part of the Fulani herdsmen is inexplicable. It is as though there are different sets of laws for the Fulani nomads (Ochonu, 2016).

The more these attacks happen without security agencies able to stop the attackers, the risks of the people self-arming to protect themselves or even carrying out a reprisal attack on people who have similar ethnic and religious affiliations as the herdsmen becomes increasingly likely. Such a reprisal attack will likely set off another reprisal attack and it will be an endless cycle of violence (Amaza, 2016).

The Fulani herders, however, often find themselves on the receiving end of communal violence or attacks by government forces. On April 3 2014, a uniformed group alleged to be Hausa-speaking Nigerian soldiers arrived at a Fulani settlement in Nasarawa State in armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and killed over 30 Fulani, most of them elderly members of the community who were too slow to run away. The attack came only 24 hours after Fulani herders had signed a peace agreement with local Tiv agriculturalists. Military authorities would only say they were “investigating” whether the attackers were actually Nigerian troops (Premium Times, April 9; Nigerian Tribune, April 4, 2014 cited in McGregor, 2014). Within days, Fulani herders were carrying out mass attacks on Tiv agricultural communities in Benue State while nearby security forces failed to respond (*Vanguard*, April 12, 2014 cited in *ibid*). Aside leaving huge casualty figures, these incursions also created enormous refugee situations in the affected communities where the ancestral homes of the helpless victims are razed and most times occupied by the marauders.

There have been accusations and counter-accusations between the herdsmen and farmers in many of the states. In Oyo State where the leadership of the Police tried to broker peace among them, the farmers, as noted by Amzat et al (2016) accused herdsmen of grazing on their crops without restriction, rape their women, threaten them and sometimes use dangerous weapons to rob innocent commuters along several roads within the state, the herdsmen in turn accused the farmers of killing their animals by poisoning the water which their cattle drink. The Fulani Bororo cattle rearers also pointed out that those troubling the farmers and committing crime are non-resident herdsmen and strangers who are insensitive to the farmers and other locals.

The citizens exercise no restraints in individually or collectively protecting the security and safety of their resources and lives. Since safety and security have become scarce commodities, only those that can afford them protect them with all the means available, at the detriment of others irrespective of the risks involved (Abbass, 2016). Now, angry farmers, youths, and some local hunters in many communities in the country said they have decided to acquire weapons against unprovoked attacks by Fulani herdsmen. According to *The Punch* (May 8, 2016), they said they decided to resort to self-help because they had lost confidence in the security agencies' ability to protect them against attacks. They vowed to stop what they described as the mindless killings and destruction of their farmlands by rampaging Fulani herdsmen. According to them, they will no longer watch the herdsmen attack them and destroy the sources of their livelihood. The alleged failure by the government to contain the cruel activities of the herders, prompted the angry farmers and the youths to begin to amass arms and other weapons such as machetes, and axes in preparation against sudden attacks.

The ethnicity-ticking-time-bomb narratives

Though religious and ethnic identities have received a predominant share of responsibility for politically instigated conflicts, inter-group relations more generally have been guided by religious-ethnic factors. Since the return of democracy in 1999, inter-group relations in Nigeria have been largely influenced by ethnic and religious identity. In this context, therefore, can then be situated the contestation for land based resources between the Tiv farmers and the Fulani pastoralists (Genyi, 2014). The fact that the majority of farmer-herder clashes pit Muslim Fulani pastoralists against Christian peasants has exacerbated ethno-religious hostilities at both a national and local level. Prominent Christian clerics have claimed that the Fulani act as proxies for northern Nigeria's elites and/or Boko Haram, while some Muslim organisations have bitterly denounced the alleged mistreatment Fulani herders suffer at the hands of empowered Christian communities and state agents (Baca, 2015).

However, the infusion of ethno-religious and political colourations appear to have befuddled our understanding of the underlying character of the pastoralist/farmers conflict given audacious armed banditry, robbery, kidnapping, and cattle rustling allegedly perpetuated by the arms bearing herdsmen. Rather than framing the pastoralists-farmers violent conflict appropriately as contestation over valuable resource use, there have been growing tendency

towards dressing it with the toga of ethno-religious uprising. As rightly observed by Adeniyi (2016):

Converting the national security threat posed by some herdsmen to another North-South/Christian-Muslim issue with which to score cheap political points is a dangerous thing to do and I could see that very clearly. While some political leaders in the South were exploiting the tragedy to send out inciting messages that propagate hate and revenge, some highly placed Northern defenders were also mobilising behind the herdsmen who have remained marginalised and pushed to the fringes of existence by a succession of political leaders from that same region.

Of recent, several socio-cultural and militia groups in the southern part of the country have indicated their readiness to reject the invasion of their communities by Fulani herdsmen. For instance, Agbekoya gave the Federal Government a 14-day ultimatum to stop the incessant attacks by suspected Fulani herdsmen on farmers in Yorubaland even as it vowed to retaliate any attack on its members. According to its National Publicity Secretary, Olatunji Bandele, if the Federal Government fails to act decisively within the stipulated time, the Agbekoya will have to defend its people with whatever means at its disposal. He said the association held an emergency meeting last Thursday where it discussed the incessant onslaught by Fulani herdsmen against Yoruba farmers, especially in the Oke Ogun area of Oyo State. He stated that if the situation was not brought under control, the group would “close down all markets in the South West; make sure that Fulani herdsmen do not enter any village in Yoruba land with their cows. And if they dare enter, they are doing it at their own risk.

We have alerted Agbekoya South West warriors across Yorubaland to be battle ready in case the Fulani herdsmen do not heed our warning because this thing has continued for the past four to five years now. We have other security measures that we are taking but keeping to ourselves. If the Fulani herdsmen failed to heed our warning and they dare enter Yorubaland, they will be doing so at their own risk. We are waiting for the Federal Government to take decisive action (The Punch, May 1, 2016).

Another Yoruba group, Oodua People’s Congress, said although the Yoruba were perceived as accommodating, the group would not sit by and pretend as if all was well. The National Coordinator of the OPC, Mr. Gani Adams, told one of our correspondents in a telephone interview that the attacks by Fulani herdsmen in the region had gone out of hand. Adams said, “Nowadays, it is becoming too rampant in the South-West. Now, nobody is provoking the Fulani herdsmen; they are the ones taking laws into their hands, killing and maiming innocent

people in their (victims') communities. These Fulani herdsmen may even be Boko Haram in disguise. If government is looking at this as if they are an influential tribe or race in Nigeria and that they can't tackle it, it may become a very serious security treat. We the Yoruba think that we are highly accommodating and that if a stranger who is living in our community has committed an offence, the law should take its own course" (The Punch, May 1, 2016).

Following the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in the South-East, there has been an increased sense of caution between indigenes and northerners. On a few occasions, the Police had to dispel rumours of impending attacks including a false report in that a cache of ammunition was evacuated from a Mosque in Aba (Ashiru, 2016, p.18). After the attacks by Fulani herdsmen in Enugu and other parts of the federation, Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign States of Biafra, MASSOB, gave a 30-day ultimatum to President Muhammadu Buhari to end the attack on innocent Nigerians or face its wrath. MASSOB, which said it was worried by the inability of the federal government to stop the increasing destruction of farmlands, raping of women, robbery, kidnapping as well as killing of innocent Nigerians by Fulani herdsmen, accused President Buhari of protecting the attackers. In a statement made public, MASSOB notes that:

We condemn attack on Biafrans by Fulani herdsmen at Uzo-Uwani council area of Enugu State. We wish to remind Ndigbo and Biafrans that this killing and destruction of property of our people by Fulani herdsmen is getting out of hands. It is on record that the Nigerian Police received security report, last Friday, that over 500 Fulani herdsmen gathered in that community to attack them. This ethnic cleansing was planned against Ndigbo in 2003. Now that the power has gone to the Fulani man, they have begun to execute this evil agenda. MASSOB is calling on all the pro-Biafra groups, Igbo youths to wake up and let us unite and face our enemies. We are warning the Fulani herdsmen to leave Biafra land or they will face our wrath (Umoru, Henry et al, 2016).

The Ijaw Youth Council, IYC, worldwide, also described as "suspicious" and a "deliberate plot," the recent armed attacks and killings in some communities in the South East and North Central by persons alleged to be herdsmen. It said those involved in the attacks were terrorists sponsored to disguise as Fulani herdsmen to kill and promote tribal clashes across the country. Spokesman of IYC, Eric Omare, condemned the persistent attacks by terrorists disguised as Fulani herdsmen in several parts of the country. The Ijaw youth body warned indigenes of Niger Delta communities to be vigilant and set up structures to prevent and respond to any attack if launched in the region. Omare said: "We believe that the attacks by

the so called Fulani herdsmen are deliberate terrorist acts with religious agenda to wipe out some communities in the middle belt and southern part of the country. We, therefore, call on communities in the Niger Delta region, especially the Ijaw communities to be vigilant and watch out for these terrorists who are disguising as Fulani herdsmen. We also call on community and youth leaders in different Niger Delta communities to set up structures to prevent such attacks and also speedily bring such activities to the knowledge of security agencies” (Oyadongha, 2016). The notion of ascribing ethnicity to a pure criminal issue or limiting the scope of discussion to a particular occupation (Cattle rearing) has been described by Amuta (2016) as manifestations of the lazy and simplistic Nigerian approach to discourse and governance:

To simply content ourselves with referring to these mindless butchers as ‘herdsmen’ is to taint an ancient and legitimate occupation with a bad name. Furthermore, to limit their ethnic source to ‘Fulani’ is again to assign this criminal brigandage an ethnic badge and use that badge to profile one of Nigeria’s proud nationalities. Both approaches are manifestations of the lazy and simplistic Nigerian approach to discourse and governance. Simply put, these murderers are not made so because they are either Fulani or happen to be engaged in cattle herding.

Those who are familiar with the beginnings of the Darfur crisis in Sudan would understand the role played by the Janjaweed militia, a mobile killer squad in the escalation of the Sudanese crisis. These squads were armed and mobilised by powerful political interests to carry out relentless attacks on settlements of non-Arab Sudanese in the Darfur province. These raids and attacks were at first sporadic until they became systematic. The raids had common characteristics with the unfolding herdsmen scourge here: they were carried out by squads that seemed well armed and carefully trained. They killed people in large numbers, razed whole villages and never stopped to hold territory (Amuta, 2016). More disturbing, there is a gruesome intentionality about some of the recent attacks, an indication that these supposed herdsmen set out with a more pointed definition of mission objectives than the mere escort of livestock would warrant.

Stemming the ugly trend: the needed intervention

In seeking a lasting solution to this menace, a number of options have been highlighted among which is the need for grazing reserves, banning of itinerant cattle- rearing and making

it compulsory for cattle owners to establish ranches. It was reported that in the First and Second Republic, federal government established grazing routes and reserves much of which has been taken over by transgressors who have either turned them to farmlands or build on such (Ojo, 2016). Speaking in January 2016, on conflicts between farmers and herdsmen, while receiving a delegation from the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, an organisation active in the promotion of peace in Nigeria, President Buhari said that a plan to map out grazing areas would soon be presented to the Nigerian Governors' Forum (NGF) as a temporary solution to the frequent conflicts until cattle owners are persuaded to adopt other means of rearing their cattle (Omonisa et al, 2016).

The idea of herdsmen roaming freely all over the country, particularly in areas where they are not domiciled, is described as a cultural anachronism which clashes with the precepts of a modernising nation-state and can only be sustained by violence (Alamu, 2016, p.3). According to Ojo (2016), "the most effective solution is ranching. That is the best practice in civilised countries. Poultry and animal husbandry are supposed to be done in an enclosed environment. It is pathetic to see cattle grazing at our airports and major highways. Everywhere in Nigeria you see these herdsmen with their cattle on the roads and vehicles have to park for them to cross". As many others have noted, what the nation expected was a well-reasoned intellectual template for confronting the menace and a militarily coordinated programme of action for bringing the tragedy to heel and the offenders swiftly to book. Obaze (2016) proposes a four-pronged solution that can be adopted as a panacea to the incessant conflicts:

First, is stopping nomadic Fulani herdsmen from wielding automatic weapons and ensuring the security of lives and property of susceptible communities. Second, federal and state authorities should henceforth deploy armed patrol teams along designated grazing routes within the federation. Third, as an ancillary to the Land Use Act, the Federal Government should set up immediately, designated grazing areas in the six geopolitical zones, thus restricting herdsmen to those grazing reserves. This recommendation aligns with a recent proposal by Senator Shehu Sani (APC-Kaduna Central), to create designated grazing zones in Northern States. Finally, by law, movement of cattle from these reserved areas to selling points must be by trucks as is the case in other parts of the world.

Cattle rustling, (which the herdsmen use as excuse to take laws into their hands) is a crime that should be punished whenever the culprits are identified. But that should not be a license

for the herdsmen to take laws into their hands, robbing, raping, maiming and killing in the name of retaliation (Adegboyega, 2016, p.13). If herding is another method of raising domesticated animals, then it is livestock farming. It prevailed as a method under two related realities which no longer exist. First, there was large expanse of land most of which was unclaimed by any specific groups or individuals. Second, the land was unsuitable for crop farming and the shrub and plants on the land was good for the animals. Neither of these realities now exists (Gbadegesin, 2016, p.13).

As a way of preventing the recurring tragedies between herders and farmers, several interventions have also been made at different levels. One of such is the recommendation by the 2014 National Conference. The delegates at the conference resolved that nomadic cattle rearing should be stopped; instead, the delegates recommended that ranches for cattle should be established across the country (Amzat, et al 2016). Over the years, the herdsmen are demanding grazing land and stock-routes. As a response from the government, a bill empowering the federal government to establish grazing reserves in all states has passed a second reading in the Senate (Odufowokan, 2014). Minister of Agriculture, Audu Ogbeh, revealed President Muhammadu Buhari's directive for him to establish 50,000 hectares of grazing reserves within six months. According to him, this is meant to end the conflicts between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in the country. He was quoted as declaring:

We are faced with cattle grazing challenge now... A lot of people are getting killed, it is my business to solve that problem. The president has told me so. I have done my survey and I have taken my decision that we have to grass-up 50,000 hectares of land in the next six months across the northern belt before we move south. I'm bringing improved grass seeds. I will multiply it and I'm going to solve the problem of grazing (See Vanguard, April 28, 2016).

It is argued that rather than people's lands being forcefully confiscated for allocation to nomads in the name of "grazing reserves", the Federal Government should partner with interested and willing state governors to unfold a policy of ranching for all animal husbandry practitioners. Those involved in it must make the necessary investments, including the purchase or lease of land to carry on their businesses. As noted in the Vanguard Editorial (ibid), there is no credible alternative to the adoption of well-established best practices in modern animal farming which increase productivity, create wealth and offer opportunities for nomads to settle down and enjoy the benefits of modern life such as education and health facilities. According to Effanga (2016):

For many of our communities, farming and aquaculture are the main source of livelihood. These productive activities rely on access to farmland and source of water, which may be nothing more than the local stream, river or lake. The suggestion on the creation of grazing routes is therefore, one that would clash with this reality, especially if such a creation is going to be arbitrary, without the consent of the locals along the planned routes. In any event, the planned routes would certainly cut across various states and communities and if there is resistance in any location along the route, it would affect the entire plan.

It is reported that there is a Bill for an Act to establish The National Grazing Reserve Commission for the Preservation and Control of National Grazing Reserves and Stock Routes and other matters connected therewith before the National Assembly (Leadership, 2016, p.6). The mere suggestion that grazing reserves could be established in all parts of the country is causing ripples across partisan, social, ethnic and religious divides. It is instructive that the bill has met with resistance from across the country. It was first sponsored by Senator Zainab Kure in the 7th National Assembly (The Nation, May 24, 2016). Those opposed to a Grazing Reserve Law premise their suspicions on some of its provisions. It seeks to establish grazing reserves across the country for Fulani herdsmen as a way of ending conflicts between them and farmers. The reserves are to be provided with facilities such as earth dams, water points, dairy processing centres, schools, functional barns and livestock service centres (Leadership, 2016, p.6).

The express reason is that the cattle herders need pasture for their cattle. The exponents of the bill argue that, largely due to desertification and overgrazing, grazing lands in the home states of the Fulani are much less than in the past and the remaining ones are fast diminishing. Hence, the Fulani have found it necessary to move southwards to seek pasture. In the course of doing so, they have often come into conflict with farming communities, and, consequently, have often lost large numbers of their herd. To prevent such conflicts from reoccurring, the sponsors of the bill want the federal government to designate grazing routes and reserves in non-Fulani communities for the Fulani (Okeke, 2014, p.70).

Also, by its provisions, the commission will acquire lands from any state of the federation. But an intriguing twist to it is that the fundamental and ancestral rights as well as rights to pursue a means of livelihood of farmers whose lands will be taken for the purpose of the grazing reserves, are not considered in the bill. The issue of compensation or resettlement of those whose lands will be taken over was also not mentioned. A grazing law as being

proposed, will serve the interest of one ethnic group out of over 250 others, without recourse to the lifestyle, culture and businesses of people in other parts of the country. In the first republic, when grazing reserves were first created, they were restricted to the part of the country where the pastoralists naturally come from (Leadership, 2016, p.6).

The reasonable thing to do, as suggested by Sekoni (2016, p.14), is to look for why it was not necessary for Fulani herdsmen (from Nigeria or Niger/Mali) to bring their cattle from their communities to destroy the farms of other communities in the days before the first military coup d'état. According to him, there is no doubt that the Sahel has been expanding in the last few decades, thus limiting the amount of space available traditional livestock pasture. But it has been possible in the same northern states to embark on irrigation that has enabled significant vegetable farming in okra, tomato, pepper, beans, maize, millet, soybeans, etc., that Fulani herdsmen coming from the far north are not allowed to destroy, because they are also considered to be economic crops that are as profitable to their growers as cattle to their farmers.

It is contended that livestock farmers who employ the services of herders must not be allowed to put their economic interest above national interest. The nation has a primary interest in harmonious relationship among its various groups. In addition, it also has an abiding interest in the economic prosperity of all its citizens. Private ranching as a globally tested method of livestock farming is the best approach to the promotion of the interests of livestock farmers and herders that work for them as well as the interests of crop farmers (Gbadegesin, 2016, p.13). The way out of this mess is not to temporise on when to start modern animal farming. Canada is a beef exporting country. Yet it is hard for people to see cows running around cities, towns, and vegetable farms in Canada as they do in Nigeria. Also as suggested by Ojo (2016) effective border control is equally needed to ward off Fulani herdsmen who migrate from other countries to wreak havoc here in Nigeria.

As a matter of fact, the quest for solutions must be comprehensive and go beyond the mere arrest of a few criminals. On the face of it, there is criminality, which needs to be apprehended and severely punished through the appropriate machineries of law enforcement and the judicial process. There is also national security, which needs to apply greater analytical intelligence to understand the changed nature of the behaviour of our herdsmen (Amuta, 2016). An online newspaper, Premium Times, reported that Senator Shehu Sani (APC-Kaduna Central), once tasked the Federal Government as a matter of urgency to

convoke a national security conference to tackle the spiralling herdsman-farming communities violence where the participants would include the representatives of the warring parties: the Miyetti Allah Fulani Cattle Breeder Association of Nigeria, Association of Nigerian Farmers, Federal and States Ministries of Agriculture and Environment, Traditional Rulers, representatives of affected Middle Belt communities, Ethno-cultural organisations such as Arewa Consultative Forum, Afenifere, Ohaneze Ndigbo, as well as security agencies. According to him, the conference would provide short and long terms solutions to the incessant violence. Amongst others, the Senator, representing Kaduna North, recommended the establishment of seven grazing reserves and setting up of a National Joint Task Force on Cattle Traffic Movement (NATFOC) (<http://nigeriaonline.ng/2016/03/22/farmersherdsmen-clashes-way-forward>).

Conclusion

The eruption of violent conflicts between the Fulani pastoralists and farmers as manifested, in many forms and dimensions have wide range of implications on the Nigerian federation. The conflicts have brought about fundamental problems of human security in the region particularly with regard to humanitarian crises (Abbass, 2014, p.340). If herdsman-farmers clashes have suddenly assumed national security concerns, it is simply because past governments treated the crisis irresponsibly and amateurishly as a law and order problem -of nomadic cattle rearers versus angry farm owners. It is, however, far beyond that. Though the government sometimes recognised the clashes as a cultural and tangentially climatological issue, they have done precious little to anticipate the mushrooming crisis, not to talk of proffering farsighted and realistic solutions (Akinlotan, 2016, p.64). The recurring attacks and increased level of carnage committed by these nomads have led many to question whether or not there's a larger issue at play, something other than their widely acclaimed quest for land, resources and justice (Egbedi, 2016).

The danger of not getting to the root of such issues is that it could encourage farmers and communities in the savannah belt to make their own private security arrangements which would be nothing more than a resort to self-help. Right now, there is a subtle but growing online campaign to “go protect your land” which is no more than an incitement for communities to start acquiring arms. When that happens, anarchy is at the door for our country (Adeniyi, 2016). Yet, as rhetorically asked by Mathias (2016): “Do we not delude

ourselves if we believe that across the country, Fulani cattle herders take vengeful steps in those military fashions to address killing of a herdsman or the rustling of their cows? Obviously there is a security failure to develop a clear narrative that will help us address the disturbing trend”.

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