



**Ethnic and Religious Identities Shaping Contestation for Land Based Resources:
The Tiv-Farmers and Pastoralists Conflicts in Central Nigeria until 2014**

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Abstract

The Tiv of central Nigeria are predominantly peasant farmers with a dispersed settlement intended to guarantee access to farm lands. The Fulani of arid northern Nigeria are nomadic pastoralists that move with the annual wet and dry seasons in search of pastures for the herds. Central Nigeria attracts the nomads due to available water and foliage on the banks of Rivers Benue and Niger; and the absence of tsetse fly within the central region. Over the years these groups have lived peacefully until in early 2000s when violent armed conflict erupted between them over access to farm land and grazing areas. The analysis of documentary evidence, interviews and focus group discussions and participant observation reveals that the conflict is due largely to population explosion, the shrinking economy, climate change, non-modernization of agricultural practice and the rise of Islamization tendency. The modernization of agriculture and the restructuring of governance hold the promise to improve inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations.

Keywords: modernization, pastoralist, ethnic, religious

Introduction

Modernization's ubiquitous postulations in the 1950s that nations would naturally secularize as they become modernized has come under severe re-examination in light of the experiences of many developing countries with material progress especially since the later part of the 20th century. Modernizers had premised their assumptions on the fact of the spread of education and industrialization which would spur urbanization with associated improvements in material conditions of the mass of the citizens (Eisendaht, 1966; Haynes, 1995). With massive transformation of material livelihood of many citizens, the value for religious beliefs and ethnic separatist consciousness as platforms of mobilization in contestation for access to resources modernizers had hoped would peter out. Suffice to note that ethnicity and religious affiliations have rather emerged and remained as strong identity platforms for competing with other groups to access societal resources especially those controlled by the state (Nnoli, 1978). Since most of the developing countries have a complex social plurality and their ethnic and religious identities were amplified by colonialism, contestation in the political sphere has continued to be fiercely fueled by these forces to satisfy the accompanying social and economic needs of various groups. Most of these, especially in Africa, were at the very basic level of modernization in the 1950s through the 1960s. However, after several decades of modernizing, ethnic and religious consciousness has rather been reinforced and the 21st century has seen them on the rise.

The centrality of ethnic and religious identities in politics and national discourse in Nigeria has remained conspicuous at every stage in the country's history. The near success of the democratization process in the early 1990s following the 1993 presidential election represents the highest point of low-level reference to religion and ethnic identity in national political discourse. The moment of unification of Nigeria's plurality evaporated with the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election in which Chief M. K. O. Abiola, a Yoruba from the south western Nigeria won. The annulment threw the country into a state of anarchy that soon took the religious-ethnic trajectories (Osaghae, 1998).

Though religious and ethnic identities have received a predominant share of responsibility for politically instigated conflicts, inter-group relations have indeed generally been guided by these two factors. Since the return of democracy in 1999, inter-group relations in Nigeria have been largely influenced by ethnic and religious identity consideration. In this context, therefore, is situated the contestation for land-based resources between the Tiv farmers and the Fulani pastoralists. Historically, the two groups had relatively enjoyed peaceful relations, although they also experienced some clashes here and there. With the aid of traditional methods of conflict resolution, peace was often achieved. The emergence of wide spread hostilities between the two groups began in the 1990s in Taraba state over grazing areas where farming activities by the Tiv farmers began to limit grazing spaces. The north-central part of Nigeria would become a theatre of armed conflict since the mid-2000s when attacks by the Fulani herdsmen on Tiv farmers and their homes and crops became a constant feature of inter-group relations within the zone. These armed clashes escalated from 2011 to 2014.

This article seeks to shed light on the relationship between the Tiv farmers and Fulani pastoralists shaped by ethnic and religious identity coloration. With an in-depth understanding of this issue, the article proposes ways to mitigate the dynamics of the conflict over competition for access to grazing areas and water resources.

Methodology

The article adopted a survey research approach and a qualitative methodology. Using primary and secondary sources, data was generated for descriptive analysis. Primary data was generated from selected informants with practical and in-depth knowledge of the armed conflict between the two groups. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with victims of the conflict in the focus study area. Analytical presentation followed a thematic model of themes and sub-themes selected to highlight the underlying causes and the identifiable trends in engagement with the nomadic Fulani and sedentary farmers in Benue State.

Benue State as a Locus of the Study

Benue state is one of the six states in north central Nigeria coterminous with the middle Belt. These states include Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Taraba, and Benue. The other states that constitute the middle Belt region are Adamawa, Kaduna (southern) and Kwara. In contemporary Nigeria, this region coincides with the Middle Belt but not exactly identical with it (Ayih, 2003; Atelhe & Chukwuma, 2014).

Benue state has 23 local government areas that count as counties in other countries. Created in 1976, the state is associated with agricultural activities as the greater proportion of her over four million people draw their livelihood from peasant cultivation. Mechanized agriculture is at a very low level. The state has a very unique geographical feature, including the River Benue, the second largest river in Nigeria. With many relatively big tributaries to River Benue, the state has access to water all year round. The availability of water from natural courses, an expansive plain dotted with few high lands and a clement weather coupled with two major weather seasons of wet and dry periods, the state is suitable for agricultural practice including livestock production. When the tsetse fly-free element is factored into the transhumance process, then Benue state more than any other within the central region provides suitable environment for sedentary and pastoralist production systems. Crops that are widely cultivated in the state include yam, maize, guinea corn, rice, beans, soya beans, groundnuts, and a variety of tree crops and vegetables.

Benue state registers a strong presence of ethnic plurality and cultural diversity as well as religious heterogeneity. The dominant ethnic groups in the state include the Tiv who are the obvious majority spread across 14 local government areas. The other groups are the Idoma and the Igede. The Idoma occupy 7 and the Igede 2 local government areas respectively. Six of the Tiv dominant local government areas have large river bank areas. These include Logo, Buruku, Katsina-Ala, Makurdi, Guma and Gwer-West. In the Idoma speaking areas, Agatu local government area shares an expansive area along the bank of River Benue.

Defining the Contours of the Conflict: Identity Characterization

Central Nigeria consists of six states namely: Kogi, Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Niger and Kwara. This region is variously termed Middle Belt (Anyadike, 1987) or the constitutionally recognized 'north-central geo-political zone'. The area consists of a complex heterogeneity of people and cultures. Central

Nigeria is particularly home to a complex plurality of ethnic minorities considered indigenous while other groups such as the Fulani, Hausa and Kanuri are considered migrant settlers in the area. Prominent minority groups include Tiv, Idoma, Eggon, Nupe, Birom, Jukun, Chamba, Pyem, Goemai, Kofyar, Igala, Gwari, Bassa, and so on. The area is unique for its plethora of minority ethnic groups having the largest concentration compared to other zones in the country.

Central Nigeria is also characterized by religious diversity: Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion. The numerical proportion may be indeterminate, but Christianity appears to be predominant followed by the considerable presence of Muslims among the Fulani and Hausa migrants. The indeterminacy of the Christian-Muslim population is due to the sensitive nature of religion in Nigeria which restrains census count from asking citizens for such identities. Central Nigeria displays this diversity that is a mirror of Nigeria's complex plurality. The region also covers part of Kaduna and Bauchi states (James, 2000).

Central Nigeria represents a transition from the savanna of northern to the southern part of Nigeria's forest region. It therefore contains geographical elements of both climatic zones. The area is heavily suited for sedentary life and hence agriculture is the dominant occupation. Root crops like potato, yam and cassava are widely cultivated across the region. Cereals like rice, guinea corn, millet, maize, *benniseed* and soybeans are also widely cultivated and constitute the primary commodities for cash incomes. The cultivation of these crops requires wide plains to guarantee sustained cultivation and high possible yield. Sedentary agricultural practice is supported by 7 months of rainfall (April - October) and 5 months of dry season (November - March) suitable for harvest of a wide variety of cereals and tuber crops. The region is supplied natural water through smaller river courses that cut across the region emptying into River Benue and Niger, the two largest rivers in Nigeria. Major tributaries in the region include rivers Galma, Kaduna, Gurara and Katsina-Ala, (James, 2000).

The Tiv and the Pastoralist Fulani in Central Nigeria

It is important to establish the context of intergroup contact and interaction between the Tiv, a sedentary group and the Fulani, a nomadic pastoralist group in central Nigeria (Wegh & Moti, 2001). The Tiv, the largest ethnic group in the central part of Nigeria, has a population size of about four million with concentration in Benue state. However, they also live in considerable numbers in Nasarawa, Taraba, and Plateau states (NPC, 2006). They are believed to have migrated from the Congo, Central Africa, and have been settled in the central part of Nigeria way back in history (Rubingh, 1969; Bohannans 1953; East, 1965; Moti and Wegh, 2001). The current Tiv population is significantly high, and the number increased from 800,000 in 1953. The impact of this on agricultural practice is varied but critical to intergroup relations.

The Tiv are predominantly peasant farmers who live on the land and find sustenance from it through its cultivation for food and income. Peasant agricultural practice is a common occupation of the typical Tiv people until the failure of crop yields caused by inadequate rains, declining soil fertility and population expansion forced Tiv farmers to embrace non-farm activities such as petty trading. When the population of the Tiv was relatively small compared to the available land for cultivation in the 1950s and 1960s, expansion of cultivation activities was rampant leaving earlier portions of the land to fallow. Shifting cultivation and crop rotation were common agricultural practices, because cultivable land was

available. With the steady expansion of Tiv population coupled with their customary scattered-sparse settlement meant to access more land and control its use, cultivable spaces shrunk rapidly. However, since many Tiv people have remained peasant farmers, they have maintained the cultivation of stretches of land available for food and income covering a wide variety of crops.

The Fulani population in Nigeria is estimated at seven million (Ebiseni, 2010) who are predominantly Muslims, are also a nomadic pastoralist group who are by occupation traditional cattle herders. Their search for favorable conditions for raising their herds keeps them on the move from one place to another. In doing this, pasture and water availability must co-exist with tsetse fly non-infested areas (Iro, 1991). The Fulani are known by several names including Fulbe, peut, Fula and Felaata (Iro, 1991, de st. Croix, 1945). The Fulani are said to have originated from the Arabian Peninsula and migrated into West Africa. According to Iro (1991), the Fulani use mobility as a production strategy to access water and pasture and possibly markets. This movement takes the pastoralists to as much as 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, making the Fulani the most diffuse ethno-cultural group. The group is believed to have been touched but only slightly by modernity in their preponderant dominance of the pastoralist's economic activity. The pastoralist Fulani with their cattle move southwards from northern Nigeria into the Benue valley for pasture and water beginning from the onset of the dry season (November to April). The Benue valley has two major attractive factors; water from River Benue and their tributaries such as River Katsina-Ala along the river lines. With the tsetse fly - free environment, the Benue valley is hugely attractive to the pastoralists. The return movement begins with the onset of rains in April and continues through June. Once the valley is saturated with heavy rain and movement is hampered by muddy areas threatening the very survival of the herds, coupled with shrinking space for passage due to farming activities, movement out of the valley becomes inevitable.

Contemporary Contestation for Land Based Resources

The contest for access to and utilization of land-based resources which are principally water and pasture between the Tiv farmers and pastoralists Fulani is situated within the peasant and nomadic contexts of economic production systems adopted by both groups. The Tiv are a sedentary people whose livelihood is rooted in agricultural practices that prime land. Population expansion puts pressure on available land accessibility even among the farmers. Declining soil fertility, erosion, climate change and modernity verses tradition all conspire to moderate agricultural practices that challenge the very livelihood of farmers (Tyubee, 2006).

The Fulani pastoralists are a nomadic stock whose system of production revolves around cattle rearing. They use mobility as a strategy of production as well as consumption (Iro, 1991). To sustain this, a number of factors have conspired to challenge the Fulani's economic livelihood. These factors include the clash of modernism with traditionalism. The Fulani have resisted modernity and hence their system of production and consumption remained largely unaltered in the face of ineluctable influences such as population expansion as well as modernization itself. Environmental factors constitute a major set of issues affecting the Fulani economy. These include the pattern of rainfall, its distribution and seasonality and the extent to which these affect the utilization of land. Closely related to this is the pattern of vegetation which is compartmentalized into semi-arid and forest areas. This vegetation pattern determines pasture availability, inaccessibility and insects' predation (Iro, 1991; Water-Bayer

and Taylor-Powell, 1985). Vegetation pattern therefore explains pastoral migration. The disappearance of grazing routes and reserves due to farming activities thus set the tone for contemporary conflicts between nomadic pastoralist Fulani's and their host Tiv farmers. But until 2001, when full scale Tiv farmers and Fulani pastoralists conflict erupted on 8th September, and lasted for several days in Taraba, both ethnic groups have lived peacefully. Earlier in 2000, herdsmen had clashed with Yoruba farmers in Kwara on 17th October. In Nasarawa state, Fulani Pastoralists also clashed with farmers of different ethnic groups on 25 June 2001 (Olabode and Ajibade, 2014). It should be noted that these months of June, September and October are within the rainy season period in which crops are planted and nurtured to be harvested beginning from late October. Grazing on cultivated farmlands would incur the wrath of farmers whose livelihood would be threatened by the act of destruction by the herds. Any response from farmers in protection of their crops would result into conflicts leading to widespread destruction of farmers homesteads. Prior to these more coordinated and sustained armed attacks that began in the early 2000s, conflicts between these groups over farmlands were usually muted. Pastoralist Fulani would arrive and formally request for permission to camp and graze which was usually granted. Any infringement on farmers' crops would be amicably settled using traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. These mechanisms appear to have collapsed due to the structure of new arrival of pastoralist Fulani. Suffice to also state that across the central part of Nigeria were pockets of large Fulani settlements permitted to settle in their host communities.

With the onset of the new conditions since 2000, the Fulani pastoralist began to arrive without their families and only male adults with their herds strapped with sophisticated weapons under their belly including AK 47 rifles. Armed conflict between these groups then began to assume a dramatic dimension since 2011 with preponderance instances in Taraba, Plateau, Nasarawa, and Benue states. On June 30, 2011 the House of Representatives opened a debate on the sustained armed conflict between the Tiv farmers and their Fulani counterpart in the central region of Nigeria. The House noted that over 40,000 people including women and children were displaced and cramped in five designated temporary camps at Daudu, Ortese and Igyungu-Adze, in Guma local government area of Benue state. Some of the camps included primary schools closed down during the conflict that were turned into camps (HR, 2010, p. 33). The House had also established that over 50 Tiv men, women and children had been killed including two soldiers at a Catholic Secondary School, Udei also in Benue state. In May 2011, another attack by the Fulani on Tiv farmers occurred that claimed more than 30 lives and displaced over 5000 persons (Alimba, 2014, p. 192). Earlier, between 8 and 10 February 2011, when the massive degree of attacks by Fulani herdsmen actually begun, Tiv farmers along the coast of River Benue in Gwer west local government area of Benue state came under attacks by hordes of herdsmen killing 19 farmers while 33 villages were burnt down. The armed attackers returned again on 4 March 2011 to kill 46 people including women and children and ransacked an entire district (Azahan, et al., 2014, p. 16). The ferocity of the attacks reflected in the rising tide of casualties and level of destruction, a consequence of the high quality of arms involved. Between December 2010 and June 2011, more than 15 attacks were recorded resulting in the loss of over 100 lives and over 300 homesteads destroyed all in Gwer west local government area. The government response was the deployment of soldiers and mobile police to the affected areas and continued exploration of peace initiatives such as the setting up of the committee on the crisis co-chaired by the Sultan of Sokoto and the paramount ruler of the Tiv, the *TorTiv IV*.

Hostilities between the groups entered a lull in 2012 due to sustained peace initiatives and military

surveillance but returned with renewed intensity and expansion in area coverage in 2013 affecting Gwer-West, Guma, Agatu, Makurdi, and Logo local government areas of Benue state. On separate occasions, Rukubi and Medagba villages in Doma were attacked by the Fulani armed with Ak 47 rifles, leaving in their trail death of over 60 persons and 80 houses burnt in the neighboring Nasarawa state (Adeyeye, 2013). Again, on 5 July 2013, armed pastoralist Fulani attacked Tiv farmers at Nzorov in Guma, killing over 20 residents and burnt down the entire settlement. These settlements are those in the local council areas that are found along the river banks of the Rivers Benue and Katsina-Ala. The contestation for pasture and water became intense and could shed off into armed confrontation easily.

Table 1: *Selected Incidences of Armed Attacks between Farmers and Herdsmen in 2013 and 2014 in the Central Region of Nigeria*

Date (DD/MM/YY)	Place of Incident	Estimated Death
1/1/13	Jukun/Fulani clash in Taraba state	5
15/1/13	Farmers/Fulani clash in Nasarawa state	10
20/1/13	Farmer/Fulani clash in Nasarawa state	25
24/1/13	Fulani/Farmers clash in Plateau state	9
1/2/13	Fulani Eggon clash in Nasarawa State	30
20/3/13	Fulani/Farmers clash at Tarok, Jos	18
28/3/13	Fulani/Farmers clash at Riyom, Plateau state	28
29/3/13	Fulani/Farmers clash at Bokkos, Plateau state	18
30/3/13	Fulani/Farmers clash/police clash	6
3/4/13	Fulani/Farmers clash in Guma, Benue state	3
10/4/13	Fulani/Farmers clash in Gwer-west, Benue state	28
23/4/13	Fulani/Egbe Farmers clash in Kogi state	5
4/5/13	Fulani/Farmers clash in Plateau state	13
4/5/13	Jukun/Fulani clash in wukari, Taraba state	39
13/5/13	Fulani/Farmers clash in Agatu, Benue state	50
20/5/13	Fulani/Farmers clash in Nasarawa-Benue border	23
5/7/13	Fulani attacks on Tiv villages in Nzorov, Guma	20
9/11/13	Fulani Invasion of Agatu, Benue State	36
7/11/13	Fulani/Farmers clash at Ikpele, okpopolo	7
20/2/14	Fulani/Farmers clash, Plateau state	13
20/2/14	Fulani/Farmers clash, Plateau state	13
21/2/14	Fulani/Farmers clash in Wase, Plateau state	20
25/2/14	Fulani/Farmers clash in Riyom, Plateau state	30
July 2014	Fulani attacked residents in Barkin Ladi	40

March 2014	Fulani attack on Gbajimba, Benue state	36
13/3/14	Fulani attack on Farmers in Guma	22
13/3/14	Fulani attack on Farmers in Makurdi	32
11/3/14	Fulani attack on Farmers in Logo	25

Source: (Chukuma & Atuche, 2014; Sun newspaper, 2014)

These attacks intensified from the middle of 2013 when the major road from Makurdi to Naka, the headquarters of Gwer west local government, was blocked by Fulani armed men after ransacking more than 6 districts along the high way. For more than a year the road remained closed as armed Fulani herdsman held sway. From 5-9 November 2013, heavily armed Fulani herdsman attacked Ikpele, Okpopolo and other settlements in Agatu, another local government area, killing over 40 residents and ransacking entire villages. The attackers destroyed homesteads and farm lands displacing over 6,000 inhabitants (Duru, 2013). What was obvious was the absence of state protection for the farmers while the attacks lasted. The state security personnel arrived long after the attacks had stopped - when the aggressors had disappeared.

From January to May 2014, scores of settlements in Guma, Gwer West, Makurdi, Gwer East, Agatu and Logo local government areas of Benue were overwhelmed by horrendous attacks by Fulani armed herdsman. The killing spree hit Ekwo-Okpanchenyi in Agatu on 13 May 2014 when about 230 armed Fulani herdsman in a pre-dawn attack killed 47 people and razed down nearly 200 houses (Uja, 2014). Imande Jem village in Guma was visited on 11 April killing 4 peasant farmers while Owukpa, in Ogbadibo local government area as well as Ikpayongo, Agena, Mbatsada villages in Mbalom council ward in Gwer East local government area in Benue state were attacked on different dates in May 2014, killing over 20 residents (Isine and Ugonna, 2014; Adayi and Ameh, 2014). The climax of the Fulani invasion and attacks on Benue farmers was witnessed at Uikpam, Tse-Akenyi Torkula village, the Tiv paramount ruler's ancestral home in Guma and the ransacking of Ayilamo semi urban settlement in Logo local government area. The attacks on Uikpam village left more than 30 people dead while the entire village was burnt down. The Fulani invaders had retreated and camped after the attacks near Gbajimba, along the coast of River Katsina-Ala ready to resume attacks on the remaining residents. On 18 March 2014, the reality of the conflict finally hit the government at state and federal levels when the Governor of Benue state ran into the herders' ambush in an unforgettable manner. This attack confirmed the extent to which the nomadic pastoralists Fulani were well armed and prepared to engage the Tiv farmers in the contestation for land-based resources.

The competition for access to pasture and water resources is problematic because herds strove for foliage destroying crops in the process and their use of water also contaminates it beyond use by the local communities. Changing resource access rights and the inadequacy of grazing resources as a result of increasing crop cultivation therefore set the stage for conflict (Iro, 1994; Adisa, 2012; Ingawa, Ega and Erhabor, 1999). Since the early 2000, pastoralists' contact with farmers has become increasingly violent, and the year 2000 was deadly and extensively destructive for the civilian population in the central region of Nigeria.

Sharp contrasts exist between these phases. For instance, movement by nomadic Fulani in the earlier phase involved whole households. Their arrival was calculated to effect formal engagement with

the host communities with permission sought before settlement. While in host communities, relationship was regulated by traditional mechanisms and where disagreements arose, they were amicably resolved. Grazing and use of water sources were allowed with respect to local values and custom. Grazing was done on marked routes and permitted fields. This perceived order appears to have been upset by three factors: changing population dynamics, inadequate governmental attention to pastoralist-farmers issues, environment exigencies, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

Inadequate Government Attention to Pastoralist Issues

Iro (1994) argues that various governments in Nigeria have neglected and marginalized the Fulani ethnic group and treated pastoral issues with official pretense. And this is in spite of their immense contributions to the country's economy (Abbas, 2011). For instance, eighty percent of Nigerians depend on pastoral Fulani for meat, milk, cheese, hair, honey, butter, manure, incense, animal blood, poultry products, and hides and skin (Iro, 1994, p. 27). While Fulani cattle provide carting, plowing and hauling, thousands of Nigerians earn their living from "selling, milking and butchering or transporting herds" (Iro, 1994, p. 27). Government also earns revenue from cattle trade. However, government welfare policies in terms of provision of water, hospitals, schools and pasturage have marginalized the pastoral Fulani.

The efforts of the government in providing sinking boreholes, control of pest and diseases, creation of more grazing areas and reactivation of grazing routes (Iro, 1994; Ingawa, et al., 1999) should be acknowledged, although they are too little and untimely. The first tangible national efforts towards addressing pastoralist challenges emerged in 1965 with the passage of the Grazing Reserve Law. This was to protect herders against intimidation and deprivation of access to pasture by farmers, cattle ranchers and intruders (Uzundu, 2013). However, this piece of legislation was not enforced hence stock routes were subsequently blocked and disappeared under the hoe. The government again surveyed land in the country earlier marked for grazing in 1976. Years later in 1980, 2.3 million hectares were officially established as grazing areas representing a mere 2 percent of earmarked area. The intention of the government was to further create 28 million hectares as grazing reserve out of 300 areas surveyed. Out of these only 600,000 hectares were gazetted covering only 45 areas. Over all 225,000 hectares covering eight reserves were fully established by the government as reserved areas for grazing (Uzundu, 2013; Iro, 1994). Many of these reserved areas have been encroached by farmers due largely to governmental inability to further enhance their development for pastoralist use. Therefore, the government's lack of a systematic development of a grazing reserve system accounts for the fertile ground for festering conflict between the Fulani herders and the farmers.

Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWS)

By 2011, it was estimated that there were 640 million small arms circulating around the world of which 100 million were in Africa, 30 million in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 8 million were in West Africa. Most intriguing is that 59% of these were in the hands of civilians (Oji and Okeke 2014; Nte, 2011). The Arab Spring, especially with regard to the Libyan uprising in 2012, seems to have exacerbated the proliferation quagmire. This period has also coincided with the globalization of Islamic fundamentalism,

an example of which is Nigeria's Boko Haram insurgency in the north eastern Nigeria and Mali's Tuareg rebels' desire to establish an Islamic state in Mali. SALWs are easy to conceal, maintain, cheaper to procure and use (UNDP, 2008) but very lethal. An important dimension to contemporary conflicts between pastoralists Fulani and farmers in Nigeria, particularly in central Nigeria, is the fact that the Fulani herders are fully armed on arrival either in anticipation of crisis or with the intention to ignite one or to defend themselves in the event of an attack. Since 2000, nomadic herdsmen are conspicuously accompanied by AK 47 guns and other light weapons dangling under their arms. In this condition, their herds are often deliberately driven into farms and attempts by farmers to push them out would be met with fierce resistance including attacks on their farms and home stead. These reprisal attacks could occur several hours or days after initial encounters and at odd hours of the day or night. Attacks had often been orchestrated when farmers were on their farms or when residents were observing a funeral or burial right that record heavy attendance at night during *wake keeps* and when residents were asleep (Odufowokan, 2014). In addition to being heavily armed, there were indications that deadly chemical (weapons) were used in the attacks against the farmers and residents in Anyiin and Ayilamo in Logo local government in March 2014. Indicators were that dead bodies had no single injury or gunshot wounds (Vande-Acka, 2014).

The attacks also bore resemblance to the activation of religious bias. The Fulani are predominantly Muslims. Their attacks on predominantly Christian communities in southern Kaduna, Plateau state, Nasarawa, Taraba and Benue have raised very fundamental concerns. The attacks on the residence of Riyom in Plateau state and Agatu in Benue state were areas that were overwhelmingly inhabited by Christians and hence attacks on them by predominantly Fulani Muslims raised questions about the religious neutrality of the attackers. Besides, armed herdsmen occupy attacked areas after farmers had flown and continue to harass the residents in their attempts to return to their ancestral home that have already been destroyed. These developments are evidenced in Guma and Gwer-West, in Benue state and some areas in Plateau and southern Kaduna (John, 2014). The preponderance of small arms and light weapons could be explained by weak governance, insecurity and poverty (RP, 2008). Other factors relate to organized crime, terrorism, insurrection, electoral politics, religious crisis, communal conflicts, and militancy (Sunday, 2011; RP, 2008; Vines, 2005). Given the way in which the nomadic Fulanis have become well-armed during their transhumance process, the viciousness with which they attack farmers, their homesteads, crops and settlements of internally displaced victims and survivors suggest a new dimension of intergroup relations between the two groups contesting for land-based resources. This requires new thinking and public policy direction.

Environmental Limitations

Pastoral production is heavily animated by the environment in which production occurs. The inevitable natural dynamics of the environment determines the content of pastoral transhumance production process. For example, nomadic pastoralists Fulani work live and reproduce in an environment challenged by deforestation, desert encroachment, the decline in water supply and the nearly unpredictable vagaries of weather and climate (Iro, 1994: John, 2014). This challenge fits the eco-violence approach theses on conflicts which thrust is the conspiracy of decline in quantity and quality of renewable resources such as water. Other environmental conditions include population growth, lack of access to land or its decrease.

Water shortage and disappearance of forests which singularly or in combination induce movement of groups and migrant groups in particular often trigger ethnic conflicts when they advance to new areas - a movement that likely upsets an existing order with induced deprivation (Homer-Dixon, 1999).

The scarcity of pasture and water resources in northern Nigeria during the dry season and the attendant southwards movement to the central region of Nigeria have always reinforced ecological scarcity and involved competition between groups; hence the contemporary armed conflict between the farmers and the Fulani herders (Blench, 2004; Atelhe and Chukwuma, 2014). The reduction in land due to the construction of roads, irrigation dams and other private and public works, the search for herbage and available water for cattle use accelerate the chances for competition and conflict.

Empirical Explanation of the Immediate Causes of the Conflict

One of the primary causes of the conflict is the trespass on farmlands by herds. This involves two things: the cramping of the soil which makes cultivation using traditional means of tilling (hoe) extremely difficult. Then the destruction of the crops and farm produce. The intensification of the conflict during the planting season was to prevent the farmers from cultivation and where it was already done to clear the area and allow for unrestricted grazing. Crops such as yams, cassava and maize are widely consumed as herbage/pasture by herds. Once the Fulani herders have forced their way to settle and occupy a farmland, they can successfully secure grazing especially with the use of arms and then reduce farming activities. Those interviewed were unanimous on the trespass on farmlands as an immediate cause of the sustained conflict between the groups. Nyiga Gogo in Merkyen village (Gwer west LGA), Terseer Tyondon (Uvir village, Guma LGA) and Emmanuel Nyambo (Mbadwen village, Guma LGA) lamented the loss of their farms to incessant herds trampling and grazing. Attempts by farmers to resist this was repelled forcing them to flee and subsequently move to temporary camps at Daudu, St. Mary's church, north bank and Community Secondary Schools in Makurdi.

Another immediate cause of the conflict is the question of water use. Benue farmers live in rural settlements with little or no access to pipe borne water and or even a borehole. Rural inhabitants get water from the streams, rivers or ponds for drinking and other domestic use. The Fulani cattle contaminate these sources of water by the way they use them. By drinking directly from the sources of water, walking through and excreting in the water, the Fulani herds contaminate the water, and this poses health related risks for the residents in the area.

In addition, sexual harassment of Tiv women by Fulani herdsmen exacerbate the conflict situation. Rape cases seem to abound when herdsmen find lone women on their farms or at the river, streams or ponds fetching water away from their homes and forcefully have sex with them. Mrs. Mkurem Igbawua died after being raped by an unidentified Fulani man. The information was disclosed by her mother, Tabitha Suemo, during an interview at Baa village on August 15, 2014. There are cases of rape reported by women in the camps and returnees to destroyed homes in Gwer West and Guma, and unwanted pregnancies are there as evidence.

Another dimension to the persistence of crisis between these groups is the criminality of the activities of local vigilante groups in their attempts to arrest the Fulani herders who deliberately allowed their herds to destroy crops. The Fulani herders are persistently harassed by vigilante groups upon receipt of reports, and in the process, they are extorted by unscrupulous vigilante personnel. Weary of monetary

extortion, the Fulani would resort to attacking their tormentors who would hide under the guise of being farmers in order to rally community support.

Closely related to this extortion dimension by the vigilante is the extortion by local chiefs who collect money from the Fulani as payment for permission to settle and graze within the chief's domain. To the herdsmen, the monetary exchange with traditional rulers is interpreted as payment for the right to pasture and graze which makes no distinction between crops and grass. Once this monetary exchange is effected, the herdsmen assume the right to graze and to defend same right when accused of destroying crops. A kindred head, Ulekaa Bee in an interview described this as the fundamental cause of contemporary conflicts with the Fulanis. The counter attack by the Fulani on residents of Agasha settlement was in response to the killings of five Fulani herdsmen from whom traditional rulers had received money to grant grazing right. To the Fulani, the right to graze is tantamount to the right to land ownership (interview with leadership of herders).

The socio-economic effect of the conflicts on the Benue economy is enormous. These include food shortage given that farmers from four local government areas (Logo, Guma, Makurdi, and Gwer West) were forced to abandon their homes and farms during the peak of the planting season. Other socio-economic effects include the destruction of schools, churches, homes, governmental institutions like police stations and loss of lives. Many residents lost other material valuables, including motor cycles.

Two symbols of authority destroyed by the rampaging Fulani herdsmen include the police station and the Guma local government secretariat. The challenge was in a way directed at the state which could not provide basic security and protection to the farmers. And standing in the way of the Fulani was the police which was once eliminated through attacks on their stations. Also, the intention for attacking the farmers was to kill them and force survivors to flee their ancestral homes and farms for the Fulani occupation. And this was what the armed Fulanis did. In all these, the Fulani have nothing to lose or that can be attacked except their herds which are often moved to safety before launching attacks on farmers.

Resolving the crisis, the farmer-victims and the leadership of herders had suggested the creation of cattle ranches, establishment of grazing reserves and determination of grazing routes. Pilakyaa Moses in Guma, Solomon Tyohemba in Makurdi, Jonathan Chaver of Tyoughatee in Gwer West local government area and Miyelti Allah Cattle Breeders Association's leadership, have all argued that these options would meet the yearnings of both groups and promote modernized systems of pastoral and sedentary production.

Conclusion

The conflict between the sedentary Tiv farmers and nomadic pastoralist Fulani is rooted in the contestation for land-based resources of pasture and water. The politics of this contestation is captured by the arguments and activities of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association representing nomadic Fulanis and livestock breeders as well as the interpretation of the armed confrontation with the sedentary farmers that bears resemblance to ethnic and religious agenda. Natural factors of environmental limitations such as desert encroachment, population explosion, climatic conspiracy and climate change have combined to give effect to the conflicts.

Amplifying the contest are factors that provide immediate impetus to the contemporary conflagration such as land ownership and use, and the provocation that is generated by grazing and water contamination. The Fulani resistance to the influence of modernization is another element that needs

consideration. In light of the preceding factors, the Fulanis must be persuaded and supported to embrace modernized forms of livestock production.

Criminal acts of cattle rustling and monetary extortion by local authorities compromise the neutrality they needed to mediate inter-group conflict of this kind.

Modernization of the productive system of both groups promises to eliminate the seemingly inherent factors underpinning contemporary contestation for land-based resources. Demographic dynamics and environmental exigencies have mapped modernization as a more promising compromise in the interest of peaceful coexistence in the context of constitutional and collective citizenship.

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