



## THE ROLES OF THE CHURCH IN ADDRESSING THE CONFLICTS GENERATED BY MASSIVE INFLUX OF FULANI PEOPLE INTO SOUTH- WESTERN NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *Nigeria is home to over 380 ethnic groups, with over 500 languages, producing great cultural diversity and plurality. The largest ethnic groups include Hausa consisting 23%, Fulani constituting 6% of the population, Yoruba 21% and Igbo 19%. Every Nigerian is legitimated constitutionally to live and engage in lawful business and relationship anywhere in the country; however, recent expansionist tendencies of Fulani to virtually every city in Southern-Nigeria, has become inimical to territorial policies, security, religious, social and economic development. Fulani sporadic migration has generated violent clashes, causing death, property loss, disregard for civility, desecration of religious institutions and cultural values. Farmlands have been forcefully taken over; and schools turned grazing fields and residences. Ethnic and religious cleavages and inter-ethnic fears and tensions currently pervade Nigeria. Such fear of ethnic politicization bedeviled Kenya, Rwanda and Burundi to mention but a few. This paper is premised on Lewis Coser's Social Conflict theory, which is defined as a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of conflicting parties are not just to gain desired values, but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. Theological hermeneutics, historical and qualitative approaches were employed for data collection. The Church's role in promoting peaceful co-existence has become critically imperative.*

**KEYWORDS:** Nigeria, Church, Ethno-religion conflict, Yoruba-land, Fulani influx or migration



## INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented conflicts between itinerant Fulani herdsmen and the Yoruba people of southwest states have generated a lot of security, economic, religious and socio-political concern. These unfortunate incidents which includes kidnapping for ransom, incessant killing of farmers, raping of old and young women, and other nefarious activities detailed and documented in security reports, the press and debriefings from victims of kidnap cases are traceable to the activities of some bad elements masquerading as herdsmen. These felons have turned the forests reserves, uncompleted buildings in towns and villages into hideouts for keeping victims of kidnapping, negotiating for ransom and carrying out other criminal activities.

Nigeria is densely populated and home to over 380 ethnic groups, with over 500 languages. The variety of customs and traditions among them give the country great cultural diversity and plurality. The various ethnic groups give the country a rich culture, but also pose major challenges to national identity. Most of the Fulani are Muslim estimated 16,850,565 (6%)<sup>1</sup> in Nigeria. They are largely pastoralists, and the ethnic group has the largest nomadic pastoral community in the world in comparison to their Yoruba host in south western Nigeria with more Christians estimated to be over half of the population and about a quarter of which are Muslims, others are adherents of various African Indigenous beliefs. Naturally, human beings exhibit differences not only biologically or physiologically, but also socially and psychologically in tandem with the tradition and culture of the people.<sup>2</sup>

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation with cultural differences between its component ethnic groups. From the north to the coast, the range in types of social system, dress, diet and languages far exceeds that to be found elsewhere in the world. This diversity has resulted into two major problems namely: problems arising between the larger ethnic groups and the hostility that derives from competition between peoples for wealth and power. Many of the ethno-regional conflicts we have today are related to strategic nature of interaction among groups as they compete for scarce but allocable resources. As the state or government, at all levels, becomes the main allocator of resources and also sets the terms for such distribution, government becomes also an object of group competition. Controlling government also means the control of resources and the power for their distribution. Thus, as groups contest for political power, ethnic and religious sentiments and loyalty get easily regimented for the achievements of goals. Yet ethnic and religious sentiments are issues of primordial identity with large emotive contents. Thus, often the contest for the control of state policy, produce religious and ethnic interests. These resources could be land for farmers, or boundaries for claimed lands or grazing lands. The influx of the Fulani herdsmen heightens these problems, especially in the South-Western zone to where there have been recent migration and pressures on resources.

Constitutionally, every Nigerian has the right to leave and engage in lawful business and practices anywhere in the country which has been the practice for decades. However, In recent times, the expansionist tendencies of the Fulani to virtually every city, town, village and farm lands in the Southern part of the country, particularly the Yoruba land has been

<sup>1</sup> Nigeria Country Profile at CIA's The World Factbook: Fulani 6% out of a population of 230 million (2023 estimate)

<sup>2</sup> D.D. Danfulani and A.A. Atowaju, *Youth Restiveness in Nigeria: A theological Reflection*, Lagos: B Print Publishing, 2010, 3-4.



most alarming, threatening and inimical to territorial policies, religious, social and economic development. Similar types of fear of politicization of ethnicity have been noted in Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Zanzibar and Srilanka. Nigeria is marked lately by underlying ethnic and religious cleavages and inter-ethnic fears and tensions.<sup>3</sup>

This mammoth population's migration into Yoruba land almost every day in lorries, trains and ships. They engage in all manners of job, trade and street begging. Occupying all available spaces with impunity and indulging in various crimes, including kidnapping, rape, etc. For instance, most of the host communities have lost their farmlands to them. This sporadic migration has brought about several violent clashes leading to death, total disrespect for civility, destruction of community life, desecration of religious institutions and cultural values. Many farmlands have been forcefully taken, many schools have become their homes and grazing fields.

According to Chief Ojo Ilesanmi, in October, 2018, the Fulani community in Isheri Lagos State, (constituting about 50.5% and the Yoruba hosts (40.3%) Igbo (5.7%) others (3.5%), stopped the coronation of a Christian Yoruba bale (the head chief) who they considered an infidel. In another development, Pandemonium occurred in Saki town, Oke-Ogun area of Oyo State on Tuesday, 6th February, 2018, after suspected Fulani herdsmen killed the Officer-in-charge of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad in Saki Area of the Oyo State Police Command, Sheu Magu and a member of his team. The deceased were said to have died as a result of machete injuries sustained in the hands of the herdsmen during an operation in a forest around Saki-Ogboro road.

The Agbekoya Reformed Society (ARS) has warned the rampaging Fulani herdsmen to immediately stop the killings of innocent farmers and destruction of farmlands in any part of Yoruba land. While handling down the warning in a statement titled "The prevailing political and security situation in Yoruba land and Nigeria". Chief Adekunle Oshodi tasked all the members; farmers, hunters, traditionalists and Yoruba ancestral security outfits to commence the total and uncompromising protection of all parts of Yoruba land.

The need for addressing the impact of their expansionism on host communities, institutions and ordinary people in Yoruba land has become acutely significant following the upsurge in violence, arson, kidnapping, rape and destruction of lives and properties. In virtually every area of West Africa, where the nomadic Fulbe reside, there has been an increasing trend of conflicts between farmers (sedentary) and grazier (pastoral nomadic). To the extent that farming is becoming a hazardous profession at a time the nation needs to embrace agriculture not only for arable farming but also to provide job for are teaming youths. In the last two decades, there have been numerous such cases on the Jos Plateau, the Western High Plateau, the Central/Middle Belt regions of Nigeria,<sup>4</sup> Northern Burkina Faso, and Southern Chad. The rearing of cattle is a principal activity in four of Cameroon's ten administrative regions as

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<sup>3</sup> . Kenneth Roth, *With Autocrats on the Defensive, Can Democrats Rise to the Occasion?* Human Rights Watch, Accessed on 9/5/2023.

<sup>4</sup> Nwokoye Mpi, Nigeria: Southwest Governors hired a local militia to fight bandits. Has it worked? Accessed on 8/5/2023.



well as three other provinces with herding on a lesser scale, throughout the North and Central regions of Nigeria, as well as the entire Sahel and Sudan region.<sup>5</sup>

This paper considers the roles of the church in addressing the ethno-religious conflicts resulting from the massive influx and what could be done to enhance appropriate integration and peaceful co-existence. This will practically help in forestalling a repeat of the unpleasant crisis observable in some of the states in northern Nigeria, Kaduna, Plateau, Benue, Adamawa and Borno where the influx of Fulani Herdsmen has caused unprintable havoc.

## The YORUBA PEOPLE OF SOUTH WESTERN NIGERIA

The Yoruba people<sup>6</sup> are an ethnic group of southwestern and north-central Nigeria, as well as southern, Togo and central Republic of Benin. Together, these regions are known as Yoruba land. The Yoruba constitute over 40 million people in total. The majority of this population inhabits the south western part of Nigeria. The Yoruba people make up 21% of the country's population<sup>7</sup>, making them one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa. The majority of the Yoruba speak the Yoruba language, which is tonal, and is the Niger-Congo language with the largest number of native speakers.<sup>8</sup>

The religion of the Yorùbá comprises the traditional religious and spiritual concepts and practices of the Yoruba people. Its homeland is in Southwestern Nigeria and the adjoining parts of Benin and Togo, a region that has come to be known as Yorubaland. Yorùbá religion is formed of diverse traditions and has no single founder. Yoruba religious beliefs are part of *itan*, the total complex of songs, histories, stories and other cultural concepts which make up the Yorùbá society. The Yoruba are the main ethnic groups in the Nigerian federal states of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Kwara, Oyo, the western part of Kogi and the Akoko parts of Edo State known as Akoko Edo. Today, most contemporary Yoruba are Christians and Muslims. Be that as it may, many of the principles of the traditional faith of their ancestors are either knowingly or unknowingly upheld by a significant proportion of the populations of Nigeria, Benin and Togo.<sup>9</sup>

The Yoruba are among the most urbanized people in Africa. For centuries before the arrival of the British colonial administration most Yoruba already lived in well-structured urban centres organized around powerful city-states (*Ìlú*) centred around the residence of the *Oba*. In ancient times, most of these cities were fortresses, with high walls and gates. Yoruba cities have always been among the most populous in Africa. Archaeological findings indicate that Òyó-Ilé or Katunga, capital of the Yoruba empire of Oyo (fl. between the 11th and 19th centuries CE), had a population of over 100,000 people (the largest single population of any African settlement at that time in history). For a long time also, Ibadan one of the major

<sup>5</sup> Di Adam Higazi, *Herders and Farmers in Nigeria: Coexistence, Conflict, and Insurgency*, Newsletter- Italian Institute for International Political Studies, Accessed on 8/5/2023.

<sup>6</sup> Name spelled also: **Ioruba** or **Joruba**; Yoruba: *Ìran Yorùbá*, literarily known as. 'Yoruba lineage'; also known as *Àwon omo Yorùbá*, lit. 'Children of Yoruba', or simply as the Yoruba

<sup>7</sup> B. Moshood, GRIN- Identity Conflicts among Yoruba Muslim groups in selected states of Nigeria, grin.com, Accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2023

<sup>8</sup> Toyin Falola, *Encyclopedia of the Yoruba*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016, 95 -96.

<sup>9</sup> J.S. Eades, *Strangers and Traders: Yoruba Migrants, Marketers and the State in Northern Ghana*, International African Library, African World Press, 1994, 34.



Yoruba cities, was the largest city in the whole of Sub Saharan Africa. Today, Lagos, another major Yoruba city, with a population of over twenty million, remains the largest on the African continent. Ife continues to be seen as the “Spiritual Homeland” of the Yoruba. The city was surpassed by the Oyo Empire as the dominant Yoruba military and political power in the 17th century.<sup>10</sup>

## **HISTORY OF VIOLENCE BETWEEN HERDSMEN AND FARMERS IN YORUBA LAND**

There is a complex history of violent conflicts and other related activities carried out by Fulani herdsmen in Southwestern Nigeria. The conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria which initially centred in the Middle Belt region, is sporadically spreading southward, leading to terrible armed clashes between farmers and herdsmen in almost every parts of Yoruba land, particularly, Ekiti, Ondo, Oyo and Osun states. These conflicts have escalated sharply since September 2017, at least 2,500 people have been killed, over 1,300 of them from January to June 2018, roughly six times the number of civilians killed by Boko Haram over the same period.<sup>11</sup> However, over the years, the Nigerian government both military and civilian, neglected and/or failed to bring expected solution to the conflict. Various commissions of inquiry, panels of investigation as well as committees of conflict resolution have been set up over the years to make policy recommendations for ending the conflicts. All these have not yielded so much result because of the attitude of those entrusted with the work either for political or socio-economic reasons. However, the need for addressing the impact of the conflicts on the victims and ordinary people in Southern-western Nigeria has become particularly significant following the upsurge in violence in the last five years.<sup>12</sup> The narrative of the conflict has been generally couched in sectarian, political and opportunistic terms. However, efforts to provide a comprehensive analysis of the conflict that places the misery of the victims within a wider historical and political context have been limited. Importantly, the documentation of victims’ personal accounts and their perspectives on ways of ending the conflicts has been overlooked.

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<sup>10</sup> .Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Trinidad Yoruba: From Mother Tongue to Memory*, West Indies: University Press, 1997, 20-25.

<sup>11</sup> Yomi Kazeem, “Nigeria now has a bigger internal security threat than Boko Haram,” Quartz Africa, January 19, 2017

<sup>12</sup> “Herdsmen attacks sponsored by politicians, says APC chieftain,” *Vanguard*, August 30, 2016, online pauper accessed on the 22 October, 2018.





## THE FULANI HERDSMEN

The Fulani are traditionally nomadic and pastoralist trading people. They herd cattles, goats and sheep across the vast dry hinterlands of their domain, keeping somewhat separate from the local agricultural populations. They are the largest nomadic ethnic group in the world, and inhabit several territories over an area larger in size than the continental United States.

### Herding

Most Fulani can be seen frequently parading with their cattles throughout the West African hinterland, moving their herds in search of water and better pasture. They were, and still are, the only major migratory people group of West Africa, although the Tuareg people, another nomadic tribe of North African origin, live just immediately north of Fula territory, and sometimes live alongside the Fulani in countries such as Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. The Fulani, as a result of their constant wandering of the past, can be seen in every climatic zone and habitat of West Africa, from the deserts of the north, to the derived savanah and forests of the south.

From the 16th to 20th centuries many Fulani communities settled in the highlands of the Jos Plateau and Adamawa Plateau of Nigeria and the Cameroons. These are the highest elevated places in West Africa, and their altitude can reach up to 8,700 feet above sea level. The highland plateaus have a more temperate climate conducive for cattle herding activities, which allowed Fulbe populations to settle there in waves of migrations from further west. Though most Fula now live in towns or villages, a large proportion of the population is still either fully nomadic, or semi-nomadic in nature.<sup>13</sup> Wealth is counted by how large the herd of cattle is. Long ago Fulani tribes and clans used to fight over cattle and grazing rights. Being the most treasured animal that the Fulanis herd, the cows are very special. Many people say that a person cannot speak Fulfulde if he does not own a cow.

Fulani in Nigeria have often requested for the development of exclusive grazing reserves, to curb conflicts. All the leading presidential aspirants of previous elections seeking Fulbe votes have made several of such failed promises in their campaigns. Discussions among government officials, traditional rulers, and Fulani leaders on the welfare of the pastoralists have always centered on requests and pledges for protecting grazing spaces and cattle passages. The growing pressure from **Ardo'en** (the Fulani community leaders) for the salvation of what is left of the customary grazing land has caused some state governments with large populations of herders (such as Gombe, Bauchi, Adamawa, Taraba, Plateau, and Kaduna) to include in their development plans the reactivation and preservation of grazing reserves. Quick to grasp the desperation of cattle-keepers for land, the administrators have instituted a Grazing Reserve Committee to find a lasting solution to the rapid depletion of grazing land resources in Nigeria.

The Fulani believe that the expansion of the grazing reserves will boost livestock population, lessen the difficulty of herding, reduce seasonal migration, and enhance the interaction among farmers, pastoralists, and rural dwellers. Despite these expectations, grazing reserves are not within the reach of about three-quarters of the nomadic Fulani in Nigeria, who number in the millions, and about sixty percent of migrant pastoralists who use the existing

<sup>13</sup> Muhammed Sabiu, "At the mercy of cow rustlers: Sad tales of Zamfara cattle rearers," *Nigerian Tribune*, February 2, 2014.



grazing reserves keep to the same reserves every year.<sup>14</sup> The number and the distribution of the grazing reserves in Nigeria range from insufficient to severely insufficient for Fulani livestock. In countries like Nigeria, Cameroon, and Burkina Faso where meat supplies are entirely dependent on the Fulani, such conflicts lead to scarcity and hikes in animal protein prices. In recent times, the Nigerian senate and other lawmakers have been bitterly divided in attempts to pass bills on grazing lands and migration "corridors" for Fulani herdsman. This was mainly due to Southern and Central Nigerian lawmakers opposing the proposal, and Northern Lawmakers being in support. The truth of the matter is that no Nigerian ethnic group will ever voluntarily release their ancestral or traditional homes and farm lands to another ethnic community as grassing fields, unfortunately too, with the increase in population comes the demand for the housing and industrial lands in some areas initially known as herdsman's grassing areas in the southwestern part of Nigeria. This has inadvertently led to Fulani's involvement in Communal conflicts with some farmers in some states in Southwestern Nigeria.<sup>15</sup>

## **ETHNIC MIGRATION / SEDENTARY LIFE IN NIGERIA**

### **Ethnic Migration/Indigene-Settler Causes**

Indigene-ship and Settler Problems have become a precarious challenge all over the country. In spite of the rhetoric about Nigerian 'citizenship,' all Nigerians recognize that there is 'indigene-ship.' This problem cannot be solved by political hypocrisy and rhetoric. Yes, there have been patterns of migrations. But it is clear that most Nigerians understand the settlement pattern in terms of landed ownership in Nigeria is based on tribal lines. Even though the Fulani have lived in Sagamu for over a hundred years, not many of them are in the local government council or in the Ogun State House of Assembly. In Abia, Enugu and Anambra States, Hausa-Fulani people have lived there for decades; nevertheless, not many of them are recognized as indigenes of any local government council area. In Kano and Adamawa States, many Igbo and Yoruba have also lived there for generations, but many of them are not recognized as indigenes. Even the names of individuals immediately disqualify them. Similarly, in Jos and Kaduna, many Yoruba families claim to have lived there for over four generations, but still they are not accepted as indigenes. Every Nigerian can live anywhere in Nigeria, but not all Nigerians have the same indigene-ship rights everywhere, political hypocrisy will not help in resolving this problem. Nigerians in leadership should rather be frank and realistic with this reality. Though, the 1999 Constitution, Section 25 – 32, and the Part I, provides in item 9, that "citizenship, naturalization and aliens" is an exclusive matter of the government of the federation. Thus, any Nigerian can live anywhere in the federation. Note that citizenship is not a concurrent matter as in the United States and other federations of the world.

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<sup>14</sup> John Ameh, Femi Atoyebi, Sunday Aborisade, Kamarudeen Ogundele, Jude Owuamanam, Mudiaga Affe, Femi Makinde, Gibson Achonu, and Peter Dada, "N940m grazing reserves for herdsman: Lawmakers fault Buhari," *Punch*, May 21, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Seun Opejobi, "Just like farmers; Fulani herdsman have the right to live," *Daily Post* [Lagos], November 1, 2016.



Very often some citizens of ethnic and religious groups consider themselves as hailing from aristocratic traditional backgrounds, and arrogantly exhibit ethno-centrism in relations with other groups. At times, these people relate with other groups (that is when they care to) with disdain, extending their ethno-religious status recklessly to domains of other's socio-cultural preference.

Politicians do this with nauseating efficiency. It is no wonder that traditional leader 'sell' or 'award' titles more under democratic politics in Nigeria. This often offends the sensibilities of other people who find other platforms for checkmating the nuisance of these leaders. In some parts of the North, especially in Kaduna State, there has been substantial migration in the last 20 years. In the context of competition for scarce resources and the importance of the control of the state for distribution of these resources, new lines of cleavages develop among groups. As indigenes organize for the control of their polity and economy, so do the settlers press for their rights of participation in these processes. Beyond a threshold, settler communities threaten indigene position of hegemony and control. While the settler gets "defensively aggressive" in its relations with the indigenes, the indigenes get "aggressively defensive," often resulting in violence with the full mobilization of ethno-religious loyalty and commitment.

Furthermore, Albert writes that the tradition of maintaining the notion of referring to some members of the communities as settlers or aliens and others as natives, more often than not, triggers intra-ethnic conflict.<sup>16</sup> The 'so-called' settlers, notwithstanding how long they have been in a community, are continually treated as strangers. For example, they do not possess the complete ownership of land, social position nor have a say in society unlike the natives of the communities. This often leads to the feeling of domination and marginalization within the communities. This has created a situation where the Nigerian Constitution provides for an underpinning that hinders national unity, the integration of citizens, and a sense of belonging among citizens. The aliens are not only discriminated against in terms of land ownership but are also mandated to pay extra taxes and are not allowed to settle in particular areas of the community.

In his work, Omotosho opines that the major conflicts in Nigeria are based on either religious or ethnic cleavages. Usually, both lines are connected in terms of conflict manifestation hence; each ethnic region has its own designated religion. For instance, the Southern and Eastern parts of Nigeria are usually made up of Christians whereas the Northerners are mostly Muslims. This division complicates the political and social struggle in Nigeria as one particular ethnic group belongs to one religion and another to the other. This intensifies the division in the country thereby consolidating the different interests of the diverse tribes.<sup>17</sup>

Corroborating Omotosho's views, Dike opines that the Biafran war is a typical example of ethnic conflict that started with a political undertone, but quickly transformed itself into a religious conflict. This war emanated from a political *coup d'état* and counter coup which

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<sup>16</sup>L.O. Albert, *Community Conflict in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1999) 121.

<sup>17</sup>A.O. Omotosho, "Religious Violence in Nigeria – The Causes and Solutions: An Islamic Perspective," *Swedish Missiological Theme*, 2003, 15 – 31.





took place in 1966.<sup>18</sup> The Biafran war started with the secession of the Biafran state basically because of political grievance. Nevertheless, the Nigerian central government endeavoured to recuperate its control over the Biafran nation but the conflict was quickly transformed into both religious and ethnic conflicts between the Christian Southeast and the Muslim North. Notwithstanding, while the Biafran war ended a long time ago, the Igbo ethnic nationality in Eastern Nigeria is still of the perception that their ethnic group is being discriminated against.

From another perspective, Lewis opines that a set of common assumptions has governed the analysis of ethnicity in Nigerian politics and society.<sup>19</sup> First, ethnic identification is presumed to be the most salient and consistent source of social identity in Nigeria. Second, ethnicity is regarded as a central avenue for collective action. Third, ethnicity is assumed to be a generally destabilizing influence, with particularly corrosive influences on democracy. He continued that a number of implications follow from these premises. Since political competition is organized along ethnic lines, both democratic and authoritarian regimes presumably have an ethnic character. Civilian governments supposedly encourage ethnic political parties, while military regimes are said to reflect a clear sectional ruling group. Structures of political control are also constituted ethnically, through clientele's networks and patronage systems. Ethnic identity, in a context of rivalry over scarce resources, is viewed as fostering polarization and conflict.<sup>20</sup>

While it is generally believed that ethnic identification is presumed to be the most salient and consistent source of social identity in Nigeria, this common assumption is challenged by a research by the Pew Religious Forum which revealed that religion, rather than ethnicity is the most salient identity in the country. The validity of this statement will be examined in several literatures which be further reviewed and their link of ethnicity and religion will also be considered in regards to the topic under consideration. To close this section, it is imperative to comment that the subject of ethnicity is paramount in understanding Nigerian Political history. The political ups and downs witnessed for over fifty years since the independence is largely due to pluralistic ethnicity alongside with the attempt for political hegemony and relevance among various ethnic groups. It must be said that in large scheme of thing this factor played a dominant role in ethno-religious conflicts in Kaduna State. It roles regarding this was not in any where mentioned in the literatures reviewed so far. This lacuna is what this paper poised to fill.

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<sup>18</sup>V.E. Dike, *Nigeria and the Politics of Unreason: A Study of the Obasanjo Regime*, (London: Adonis and Abbey Publishers, Ltd, 2003), 54, also, V.E. Dike, *Democracy and Political Life in Nigeria*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (New York: iUniverse Inc, 2006), 45.

<sup>19</sup>P. Lewis, "Identity, Institutions and Democracy in Nigeria," *Afrobarometer Working Paper*, No. 68, March, 2007, 11.

<sup>20</sup>P. Lewis, "Identity, Institutions and Democracy in Nigeria," *Afrobarometer Working Paper*, No. 68, 10.



## **HERDERS AGAINST FARMERS: NIGERIA'S EXPANDING DEADLY INTERNAL CONFLICT**

The farmer-herder conflict has become Nigeria's gravest security challenge, now claiming far more lives than the Boko Haram insurgency. It has displaced hundreds of thousands and sharpened ethnic, regional and religious polarization. It threatens to become even deadlier and could affect forthcoming elections and undermine national stability.<sup>21</sup>

In the first half of 2018, more than 1,300 Nigerians died in violence involving herders and farmers. What were once spontaneous attacks have become premeditated scorched-earth campaigns in which marauders often take villages by surprise at night. Now claiming about six times more civilian lives than the Boko Haram insurgency, the conflict poses a grave threat to the country's stability and unity, and it could affect the 2019 general elections. The federal government has taken welcome but insufficient steps to halt the killings. Its immediate priorities should be to deploy more security units to vulnerable areas; prosecute perpetrators of violence; disarm ethnic militias and local vigilantes; and begin executing long-term plans for comprehensive livestock sector reform. The conflict is fundamentally a land-use contest between farmers and herders across the country, it has taken on dangerous religious and ethnic dimensions, because most of the herders are from the traditionally nomadic and Muslim Fulani tribe, which make up about 90 per cent of Nigeria's pastoralists, while most of the farmers in Southwestern Nigeria are Christians. Since the beginning of violence between the farmers and the herdsman escalated in January 2018, an estimated 20,000 people have either been killed or fled their farms and homes. Large-scale displacement and insecurity in parts of Oke Ogun, Okeho, Saki, Lanlate areas of Oyo State, Akoko, Owo, Okitipupa and Atijere areas of Ondo state, Ijan, Iluomoba, Ikere areas of Ekiti state, Okeodan, Sagamu, Ayetoro, Ado-Odo areas of Ogun state, Ede, Esa-Oke, Ila Orangun, Atakunmosa, Ifewara areas of Osun state have experienced hindered farming because of the fear of the herdsman, this has grossly drive up food prices and poor production of arable and cash crops. The conflict situation has also negatively affected the economic development of the states in Southwestern Nigeria.

As the killings persist, Nigerians are weaving destructive conspiracy theories to explain the conflict. Charges and counter-charges fly of ethnic cleansing and even genocide – by both farmers and herders. These conflicts have deepened anger, particularly but not only among farmers, at the Fulani who are in almost every part of the Yoruba land. Widespread disenchantment with President Muhammadu Buhari – who is viewed as a northern Fulani man and as soft in taking serious actions on the herders has further encourages anger, self-determination and self-defense rather than waiting for military assistance on most occasions.

As a long-term solution, the government has proposed establishing “cattle colonies”, which would set aside land for herders across the country, and more recently unveiled a National Livestock Transformation Plan (2018-2027). These measures signal greater commitment on the government's part, but they are yet to be implemented and the violence continues. President Buhari's administration needs to do more in addressing the conflict between the

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<sup>21</sup> Joshua Sani, “10 States allocate grazing lands to herdsman,” *Today* [Lagos], August 24, 2016.



herdsmen and farmers in Yoruba land. The federal government must urgently undertake to stop the escalation spinning out of control. In this light, the Nigerian government should:

- **Improve security for farmers and herders:**

The federal government should deploy more police and military personnel to the affected areas to ensure they are better equipped; improve local ties to gather better intelligence; and respond speedily to early warnings and distress calls. In addition, it should begin to disarm armed groups, including ethnic militias and vigilantes in the affected states, and closely watch land borders to curb the inflow of firearms.

- **Put an End to farmers / Herdsmen impunity:**

The federal government also should order the investigation of all recent major incidents of farmer-herder violence. It may need to expedite the trials of individuals or organizations found to have participated, sponsored or been complicit in violence.

- **Adequately Propagate new National Livestock Transformation Plan and commence implementation:**

The federal government should publicize details of its National Livestock Transformation Plan, encourage buy-in by herders and state governments, and move quickly to put the plan into effect in consenting states.

- **Develop Ranches:** The Federal government and the states should discourage open grazing, as Benue and Taraba states have already done. Government at all level should also help herders become ranchers by developing pilot or demonstration ranches, and conducting education programs for herders uneasy about making the transition.

- **Encourage herder-farmer dialogues and support local peace initiatives:**

Federal and state governments should foster dialogue between herders and farmers, by strengthening mechanisms already existing at state and local levels, and particularly by supporting peace initiatives at the local level.

All communal leaders – religious, regional and ethnic – should denounce violence unequivocally and step up support for local dialogue. Most killings followed the influx of herders driven to southwester Nigeria because of the Benue state anti-grazing law.



## **THE ROLES OF THE CHURCH IN ADDRESSING THE ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS**

The Christian Council of Nigeria is made up of the Roman Catholic Church, various “Protestant Churches notably, Church Missionary Society (CMS), now Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)<sup>22</sup>, Methodist Church Nigeria, Baptists, Presbyterian, Qua Iboe, and Salvation Army<sup>23</sup> provides a forum for member churches to co-operate in various projects relating to pastoral profiling of people irrespective of their background in every part of Yoruba land. The church should encourage a true social support system and unhindered social assistance between the farmers and the herdsmen.<sup>24</sup>

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

One of the major social responsibilities of Christian Association on Nigeria is to foster ecumenism among Christians in Nigeria irrespective of denomination. Furthermore it is her responsibility to work for peaceful co-existence with people of other faith. In the present situation of devastating ethnic, religious, economic and socio-political crisis due to the influx of the Fulani people into southwestern Nigeria, it has become imperative for the umbrella Christian association to put in the following measure:

#### **i. Train members to be vigilant on Migration**

It is important for selected members of the church to be trained to keep records of those migrating into new areas in Yoruba land. This should be done with due respect accorded to these new entrants since they are also Nigerian.

#### **ii. There is need to understand the ideologies and philosophy of these migrants**

This will help in encouraging appropriate integration of the Fulani people

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<sup>22</sup>J. Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History*, (Kenya: Paulines Publications, Africa, 1994), 500.

<sup>23</sup>O.U. Kalu, *The Divided People of God: Church Union Movement in Nigeria, 1857– 1966*, 3.

<sup>24</sup>H.O. Okeke, *Milestones in Ecumenism: Evolution in Canonical Legislation in Ecumenical Matters*, (Enugu: Think Ltd, 1996), 216.