

Critical Thinking, Pastoralists-Farmers Conflict and Nigeria's Security

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Introduction

Out of insurrection against God, the constituted authority, Adam and Eve were relegated from nurturing the soil to mere field hands. Their sons; Cain, the farmer, and Abel, the herdsman, brought offerings to Yahweh/Allah who accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's. The farmer brother killed the herdsman (Genesis 2, 3, and 4; Qur'an 2 and 5).

This scriptural disaster continues to repeat itself; the herdsman menaces the farmer but this time around the farmer fights back. Violence still ensues and it is still a disaster. As Armstrong (2014) points out, the herdsman remains the traditional enemy of the agrarian state.

Nigeria is a state always on a precipice. Its ethnic and religious mix has been a real mix-up from inception. The divide and rule policy of the British colonialists had sown a culture of mutual suspicion and socio-centric emotionalism on any national issue. Farmers and herdsman have been on one another's throats in the last few decades in Nigeria as in many parts of Africa. A chain-of-events triggered by a natural phenomenon, it is a chain-of-reactions exacerbated by the peculiar nature of the Nigerian state.

As the issues involved in the ancient scriptural narrative are unclear, so are the paradoxical relations between the herdsman and farmers in Nigeria. Cain and Abel were siblings, as adults they had defined interests not necessarily contradictory but practically exclusive. One might not escape taking side if one ventures into explaining why God accepted the offering of one and rejected the other. What is certain if one takes the scriptural account as a metaphor, the rejected is aggrieved because of apparent disadvantage and in frustration, the former killed the latter. In any case, going by the Qur'anic account, the fratricide definitely proved the angels right that creating man would lead to mutual blood-spilling among mankind (Qur'an 2, v. 30).

The pastoralists-farmers' conflict poses a threat to Nigeria's security and survival. The issues involved can be easily resolved. But the complexity of the Nigerian society and the nature of its domestic politics make 'ordinary' issues extra-ordinary in Nigeria. It takes critical and creative thinking to handle the conflict properly to forestall cataclysm.

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Conceptualisation and Review of Literature

Security is the condition of absence of danger and risk of threat. The dictionary definition of security emphasizes what is done (activities), who does what (department), what is applied (gadgets), among so many connotations of the term (Hornby; 2015, p. 1335). But beyond all this, security is the end, the result of all conceivable means to create a condition of total well-being, sans danger, and sans threat.

There can never be a state of absolute security. Even though the state holds monopoly of violence on its territory, it behoves states, as Oluwatoki (2018, p. 215) put it, to ensure their own security. This is because the state is ordinarily vulnerable from within or without; hence, national security is precarious. Evidences abound of security problems within the reality of the modern state system. It is in this respect that national security is conceived as the defence of the country.

National security is often confused with regime security, in which case survival of leaders in power overshadows the survival of the state and welfare of the people. Central to security planning is threat, not only in the military sphere but also in its economic, political, cultural and psychological contexts. As Fayemi (2000, p. 29) points out, national security is predicated on the ability to protect state sovereignty, preserve territorial integrity and maintain regime security, but which de-legitimised sub-national interests in their cultural, ethnic, environmental and economic dimensions will always generate challenges to the primacy of the state. In other words, the state is secure to the extent that it guarantees legitimate existence of its component parts.

There is no gainsaying it that internal and external forces often complement one another to threaten the security of the state. Crises within the state have been known to provide the environment for external invasion just as internal insurgency within the state had been triggered by frequent attacks from neighbouring states. It is in this respect that threat is paramount in any security planning. Yet, emphasis must not be on military threat to the exclusion of other spheres of threat.

Hutchful (2000, p. 211) has presented the paradox in the development of African security debate since the 1990s. According to critics, there was need to extend the meaning of security beyond the political and the military to “the satisfaction of basic needs, the right to a sustainable environment, protection of cultural and religious identity etc.” Discussing the paradox of security in Africa, Hutchful points out the intimate relationship between governance and security; governance creates and assures conditions of security while it is underpinned by the management of violence. While the paradox might portend threat to the ruler, as Hutchful is concerned, it also has implications for national security.

By pastoralist is meant that which relates to or a person who is into pastoralism; a way of keeping animals—cattle, sheep etc. involving moving them from place to place to find food (pasture) and water. Pasture refers to land covered with grass suitable as animal feed. Animals feed on grass in pasturage.

Archaeological evidences have shown that following the wet period, pluvial (began about 8000 B.P.) in the following millennium—7000 B.P., there were early agriculturalists—pastoralists raising sheep, goats and cattle and planting barley, emmer, lentil, and chickpea for food and flax for linen (Feder; 2016, pp. 289–290). Domestication of these animals in Africa was however preceded in Middle East and Europe. The origins of agriculture—artificial selection of food plants followed the Natufian period (13,000 years ago). The early farmers encouraged desirable plants from the wild and in the process domesticated wheat, maize and beans among others.

Agriculture has been labelled the “worst mistake in the history of the human race” (Diamond; 1987b

cited in Feder; 2000. p. 343). The Neolithic Revolution of “turning over soil, planting seeds, weeding, thinning out... tending them, herding and selectively culling herds of animals”, might have produced more food, it bred ancient disease—paleopathology—, malnutrition, shorter life span, and the institutionalization of warfare and violence (Feder: 2000, pp. 343, 344, 345, 348). Our hunter-gatherer **Pleistocene** ancestors lived healthier lives, ate more nutritious food, lived longer and were more at peace with themselves.

While inter-personal and inter-group violence of the Neolithic society might have largely been caused by food shortage and while the availability of pasture would not have allowed for conflict, there could have been disagreements for as long as the domesticated animals fed on or trampled on the domestic plants.

Conflict refers to an open clash between two opposing groups or individuals, a violent situation or period of fighting between two countries or a group of people (Hornby; 2015, p. 304). Interest is tied to the survival of any species as well as any human ensemble. Conflicts arise when there is clash of interests. The herdsman's interest of abundant grass and water for his animals might clash with the farmer's interest of having his crops stand until harvest. In a state full of suspicion and acrimony, this conflict gets into violent attacks on both sides.

In the Nigeria's case, there are historical antecedents which perhaps pitch the farmers against the pastoralists. In the absence of any intervention to forestall escalation, the conflicts are fuelled by the fear of “economic downturn” as a result of the “enemy's attack” on the source of income.

The pastoralist-farmer distinction equates parallel Muslim-Christian, Northerner-Southerner differentiation. The Fulani herdsmen have other reasons why the farmer communities in Nigeria do not trust them. The 1804 jihad of Othman Dan Fodio was primarily a Fulani political resurgence that overwhelmed vast areas of the central and southern Nigeria (Smith; 1987, Ajayi and Smith; 1971, Webster and Boahen; 1967). The Fulani's aggressive search for forage crops and grass in the last few decades is seen by the farming ethnic communities in central and southern Nigeria as new resurgence to retake their lands.

Land and Routes, Crop and Stock: The Environmental Factor

There have been scholarly as well as sentimental accounts of the pastoralists—farmers' conflict in Nigeria. It is however not a Nigeria-only phenomenon. A sentimental albeit informed feature article by Abati (Daily Post; 21st May, 2016) alludes to “Fulani impunity coming from unbridled arrogance coming from their ‘na-my-brother-dey-power’ mentality”. This is a mere emotional façade for a fight back. Herdsmen—farmers' conflict has been on for some years; it was a big problem during the tenure of the non-Fulani boss of Abati.

Abuga and Onuba (2015) are concerned about human resource implications of the conflict in the Middle Belt and South East Nigeria. According to their study, pastoralists migrate due to unfavourable weather conditions occasioned by climate change. Through frustration, the herdsmen became aggressive, destroyed farmers' farms and made them victims. The paper gave ample newspaper reports of “...suspected Fulani herdsmen who killed people and sacked villages”. The conclusion is simplistic but the authors see the death of the farmers and herdsmen as depletion of human resources “reducing productive and consumerist strength of the country”.

Ofouku and Isife (2009) studied the causes, effects and resolution of farmers—nomadic cattle herders' conflict in Delta state, Nigeria. The authors identify as causes of the conflict the following: destruction of crops, contamination of streams by cattle, overgrazing of land, disregard for local traditional authorities, female harassment, harassment of nomads by youth of host communities, indiscriminate bush burning, defecation of cattle on roads, cattle theft/rustling and straying cattle. The authors point out that the Fulani nomadic cattle herders, a minority in the host communities are distinct in culture and have strong sense of solidarity. They are isolated from the farming communities.

The conflicts have resulted in reduction in output and income of farmers, displacement of farmers, erosion and land degradation and loss of lives and properties. Aside from reduction in agricultural labour force, the conflicts have complicated the problem of proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The authors suggested solutions that allow for Extension Intervention on a large scale.

Abd al-Basit's (2009) study was to assess factors contributing to conflict among pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and sedentary farmers in rural Sudan. It was to address resource-based conflicts among pastoralists and farmers. The study showed that many inter-personal and inter-community conflicts are driven by competition over access to resources... driven by differing perceptions of 'rights'.

The pastoralists perceive customary rights of access to pasture and water both along the stock routes and in the places they inhabit at both ends of the trekking routes. Small holder cultivators draw on customary rights to use the land for cultivation and protect the land and their crops from destruction especially from migratory livestock herds. The findings can be summarized thus:

- i) Environmental: Climate change, compounded by land degradation is reducing the amount and longevity of available grazing and water, limiting the northern grazing period and pushing pastoralists south earlier in the season;
- ii) Expanding population;
- iii) Water is a critical issue for both pastoralists and farmers. Thus, restrictions on water access are increasing causes of conflict.

Olaniyan and Okeke (2015) studied farmer—herder conflict in south-western Nigeria using Saki, border town between the North and the Southwest. The paper argues that climate change alone seldom results in conflict until combined with other variables. Very significant in Saki community is the population-mix: the local people (Yoruba) are farmers, the *Ibile*—transhumance Fulani migrants of the late 1960s and early 1970s—who have settled with the local people and are pastoral farmers, and the Fulani *Bororo* who are the latest migrants and insensitive towards their hosts.

Climatic factor triggered migration with economic dimension bringing in ethnic perspectives. Local people and the *Ibile* live together in harmony and both consider the *Bororo* as threat. The authors identify four factors that exacerbate conflict in Saki:

- i) Sudden increase in the flow and size of *Bororo* migrants;
- ii) Insensitivity of the herders towards their hosts;
- iii) Better financial circumstances of the herders compared to their hosts;
- iv) Ineffective policing by state authorities.

The study shows that mere sentimentality on the pastoralists—farmers' conflict reflects shallow thought. Not all Fulani herders are violent and Saki community is not unreceptive to strangers. As the authors conclude, climate change results in conflict only when enmeshed with factors such as intolerance, economic competition, insensitivity, ethnicity and poor state response.

Another interesting study, "An Empirical Phenomenological Psychological Study of Farmers-Herdsmen Conflicts in North Central Nigeria" by Adekunle and Adisa (2010) has led credence to the fact that neither the farmers nor the herdsmen actually want conflict and violence, in the strict sense of it. The study examined the conflict management opinions of parties to conflict in Kwara State, which has high incidence of farmers-herdsmen conflicts.

Using phenomenological methodological survey, the study set out to measure the following:

- i) What are the causes of farmers—herdsmen conflicts?
- ii) What are your personal conflict experiences?
- iii) How do you normally respond to conflicts?
- iv) What are the ways by which the conflicts can be managed?

Analysis of the data yields twenty-two point list of reasons and possible solutions of the conflicts some of which are; frustration, accusation and counter-accusation, farmer poverty, stressful conditions, information gap, depleting soil fertility, water, transportation, new stock routes among others. These many factors are categorised into the four research questions. It yields the fact that the participants, farmers and herdsmen really want peace and co-existence, frustration is on both sides and the stock routes are problematic.

The authors recommend multistage conflict resolution management framework consisting of committees at community, local, state and federal levels and to include occupational unions. The committees should have representatives of traditional and local leaders. They emphasize policy programmes to address farmers' poverty.

The foregoing review has shown that both the farmers and the pastoralists are fellow sufferers. The conflicts between them are born out of frustration and desperation. It is a matter of transfer of aggression.

Warped Views and Perverted Thoughts: Media Poisoning and Socio-centricism

Orthodox mass media and the new mass media have helped to exacerbate an already volatile situation with the exploitation of the delicate religious and ethnic divide. Acts of criminality that ordinarily should be so reported are given religious/ethnic emphasis, spreading fear and suspicion in the populace. Some lousy governors worsen the situation by their provocative political-laden declarations.

The following represents messages that go viral in the social media:

... I am... to call on Christians in Nigeria... to focus more on what concern the churches in Nigeria... Christianity in Nigeria is under siege both spiritually and physically... local military group has been formed and trained for forceful spread of... in Nigeria...

Consider that herdsmen have been killing for several years now and no one can point to any legal

process to punish the guilty... the plan to hide under cattle rearing as a means of furthering an evil, destructive religious plan is rife in Nigeria...

There are many questions to be asked concerning this tirade. There is another that alerts readers (of non-Fulani extraction) about legislators' attempt to pass a law that gives government power to forcefully take people's lands to make ranches for herdsmen's animals.

Prof. Alozie (Interview, 04-06-16) sees the hands of imperialists and capitalists in this use of religious institutions in the manipulation of the citizens of the world. The real problem here is that warped views are spread to create confusion and to incite the people. If government solution is ill-conceived, it becomes double jeopardy for the country; a field day for the agents provocateur.

As Browne and Keeley (2007, p. 3) point out, critical thinking consists of an awareness of a set of interrelated critical questions plus ability and willingness to ask and answer them. This is the critical time to ask ourselves critical questions about our country, to endeavour to look for solutions without prejudice. The Arabs say that it is incumbent on the intelligent person to rein in him/herself. The same is true of a people, a nation.

According to Paul and Elder (2008, p. 6), the mind must learn to take charge of itself. Nigeria, as a state and a people, needs, more than ever before the type of critical and creative thinking that, as Paul and Elder (p. 7) put it, "enables us to settle important issues we face as humans..."

The first step to address the issue of pastoralists—farmers' conflict is to eschew prejudice and pettiness; to see the parties to the conflicts not as partisans of our collective national weakness of North-South dichotomy, Muslim-Christian divide and ethnocentric biases. The second is to recognize criminal acts for what they are and not insinuate ethnic, religious or regional motives for them as if these are platforms to unleash terror on other sections of the society.

The third is to realise that both farmers and pastoralists are important in the "conveyor belt" of food production for the country. While they are individuals in their jobs, they collectively contribute to our national well-being. Solving their problems is solving our problems. The government needs the input of all stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of appropriate policies. After all, more than half a century ago, in Southern Nigeria, cows are herded around the farms and the cows moved in their routes, as if trained, without straying into the farms. There was no conflict whatsoever between the herdsmen and the farmers. Rather, there were mutual respect and acceptance of the herdsmen in the host communities.

National Security: To the Sacrifice

It is appropriate in the circumstance to synthesize all suggested solutions to the pastoralists—farmers' conflict and consider them against the backdrop of national security. By so doing we sacrifice all parochial views that are tearing the country apart. Informal discourse with some Nigerian intellectuals (25-05-16) and students (20-05-16) on this issue yielded these views:

- (i) Not only the Fulani but Obas (Yoruba monarchs), politicians and businessmen from diverse ethnic backgrounds have cattle with the Fulani herdsmen to rear;
- (ii) These investors back the herdsmen even with ammunition to protect their investments;

- (iii) Farmers are left to their own devices to survive and particularly in the South where they rely so much, too much on the weather in their farming techniques;
- (iv) Ranches should be created but without impinging on individuals' land rights. The ranches should allow herdsmen to graze their animals with fees or private ranches be allowed as investors and entrepreneurs;
- (v) Grass, grown as lawns, used as pasture, cut and dried as hay, as used in Europe and America, should be encouraged to reduce migratory grazing that cause conflict. Sorghum, widely available in Africa and Nigeria is good fodder. It can be harnessed on a large scale for pasture.

No intervention is too much to forestall the breach of national security, but such intervention should be well thought out, not to allow the exacerbation of already volatile situation.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the pastoralists—farmers' conflicts and their implications for Nigeria's security. It presents some seminal studies on the problem and their findings and recommendations on tackling the national problem. The paper reiterates the fact that frustration and desperation drive the conflict and calls attention to the various attempts by unscrupulous elements to use the conflicts to create chaos in the country. It adds its own suggestions to the many recommendations on how to tackle the national challenge.

All problems can be solved if we apply the intellect; it is all about cerebral function. As Paul and Elder (2008, p. 45) admonish, "... if we become a judicious critic of the nature and quality of our thought, we have done all we can do to become critically creative and creatively critical persons and thinkers".

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge my research assistants: Amanda Ofoegbu, Ifunanya Ndu, Jemima Faransa, Aminat Salahuddeen and Adebimpe Adeyonu of the Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria (2016) for their contributions to the research.

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