

THE HERDERS' AUDACITY AND THE ESCALATION OF CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

Livinus Nwaugh

Department of Political Science & International Relations

Caleb University, Imota, Lagos, Nigeria

Email:priscuscott@gmail.com

Abstract

Since the emergence of consciousness in human being self-preservation has been of paramount concern to man. As an omnivorous animal, human beings cultivate plants and rear animals for self-preservation and sustenance, and resist any threat to the means of its livelihood. It is based on this prism that it employs any action both lawful and unlawful aimed at preserving its livelihood. However, preserving one's life need not be at the peril of another. However, it is on this basis that cow industry in northern part of Nigeria is examined, and how it constitute one of the life wire of the economy of the region, and determine the relation with other occupational pattern in Nigeria, and also define the fault line of conflict in Northern Nigeria region and other part of the Nigerian state. However, the paper examines the role cow economy play in northern Nigeria and factor how the trade contributes to unending schisms in Northern region in particular and Nigerian state in general. Also examined is the herders' audacity in Nigeria and Northern oligarchy in perspective. The paper deployed qualitative method in data collection and literature analyzed data using thematic content analysis. The paper concludes that the overbearing influence of cow merchants is largely one of the factors responsible for the destruction of lives and property by herders in Nigeria,

Keywords: herders, audacity, conflict, escalation, Nigeria, self-preservation.

Introduction

Cow industry is one of the major occupations in Northern Nigeria and determines the form of relations with other parts of the Nigerian state. Importantly, cow industry is structured in such away that cows lives are so sacred that threats to cows are vehemently resisted by herders especially when the threat emanates from human angle also from wide animal's angle.

Accordingly, human being is sacred and deserves utmost respect, but this does not mean that human beings should have the temerity to mistreat cows with disdain as these animals are also source of economic livelihood for its owners and their lives deserve some degree of respect. However Shehu (2018), Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016) and Gulsah Gursoy(2020) have identified cattle theft and cattle rustling as some of the major factors that embolden the aggressive tendencies of the herder in Nigeria and even elsewhere in the Africa. This is so because it is only a fool would fold its hands allow its means of livelihood stole or destroyed without doing anything in the defense of it property (Nwauha, 2023). By 2013 alone Gulsah Gursoy(2020) puts the number of herders killed to 2991 and 65000 cattle killed or stolen. Therefore to protect the cow, the herders wield heavy ammunition which they deploy to protect and unleash mayhem on any usurper, invader or intruder (Magaji, 2011; Agheyisi, 2017). The herder wage this assault as they were consistently attacked, and believed that if they were caught the cow merchants (owners) would come to their rescue as most of them are highly placed or influential personalities in Nigeria (Nwaugh, 2023).

However, several factors necessitate nomadic system in Nigeria and elsewhere which include; desertification, drought and deforestation that facilitate migration, and thereby pit the herders

and their host farmer communities in Nigeria due to the absence of ranching system (Gulsah Gursay, 2020). Also occupational differentiation necessitates incidence of ethnic and occupational rivalry and defines the fault line of conflict in Northern Nigeria in particular and other parts of the Nigerian state in general (Olomjobi,2013; Gulsah Gursay, 2020). This characterization is not only Northern Nigeria emblematisation, it equally depicts the scenario where herders are mostly settlers and the straying cows feed on the farmers' crops.

It is to assuage this ugly situation between the herders and farmers that efforts are intensified to introduce permanent settlement for herders and their cows, that Rural Grazing Area(RUGAs) were identified as one of the solutions towards resolving the friction between the farmers and herders rivalries by Buhari's administration. The move to establish RUGA by the Buhari's administration, of course not the first of its kind were vehemently opposed from all quarters in Nigeria from; North Central to South West, South East and South-South regions, especially from state governors and the proposed host communities who perceive RUGAs as another process of taken over their land by the Fulani herders which they alleged Buhari's administration have come to accomplish in Nigeria as a Fulani man. However, this allegation cannot be fully substantiated as other Nigerian leaders from different ethnic extraction have embarked in different resolution mechanisms between the herders and the farmers in different times in Nigeria's history.

However, the Buhari's RUGA system was not the first of its kind. In 1965 Grazing Reserve Law (GRL) was enacted basically to take care of the herders and their cows, ostensibly as the herders were faced with hostile environment such as; outright seizure of their cows, arbitrary taxation and seizure of the lands allotted to the herders for grazing and rite-the-passage (Magaji.2011). The hostile environment the herders lived on provoked reprisal from the herders, and to forestall the consequences of attack and reprisal attacks 1965 grazing reserve laws was enacted. According to Magaji (2011) the 1965 grazing reserve law had the following objectives;

- (a) to provide Nigeria's traditional pastoralist with grazing land,
- (b) to provide the pastoralist with land for habitation,
- (c) improve animal production so that adequate supply of meat and milk could be ensured through controlled grazing and development of infrastructure such as permanent water and other facilities,
- (d) encourage pastoralist to settle in order to enable their children to be educated and regular health service to be made available (Magaji,2011:170)

Even the 1988 National Policy on Agriculture was established to boost production of raw materials and to improve the quality of lives of rural dwellers through the provision of social amenities, and to also settle herders and their cows. The view was that, the more herders are allowed to settle in area, overtime it will foster friendliness and peaceful co-existence. Though the fears of the host communities have always centered on the sophisticated weapons at the disposal of the herders. Incidence has shown in recent time where the herders who wield these weapons use them to wrack havoc in communities damaging properties worth several millions of naira and death of over hundreds of persons. In Mangu Local Government area of Plateau State, precisely in May 22nd, 2023 over 1000 building were razed down, 22 villages and 4 persons were killed, also in Vuir Council Ward of Guma Local Government Area of Benue state 18 persons were equally killed by herders including women and children (Vanguard, Tuesday 23 2023, page 6&7), and Bokkos and Berkin-Ladi local Government Areas in plateau state on the 24th December, 2023, where 115 persons were gruesomely murdered by the herders (<https://www.thecable.ng>&<https://www.vanguardngr.com>&<https://www.premi>

umtimesng.com). As Ogunnubi & Idowu (2023) put it the incessant herders' attacks on the farming community increased hunger and reduced food supply and thereby cause food shortage in the country and the sub-region in general. Regrettably, the permanent stay of the herders in the forest pose great security danger as women were raped, maimed, killed and thousands of persons displaced while dozens kidnap for ransom thereby place farmers on perpetual fear especially when they resist the destruction of their grains by the herders (Agheyisi, 2017; Okechi and Enwerem, 2009; Idowu and Agbalajobi, 2022)

In order to register their displeasure on the wanton destruction of farm crops and other atrocities perpetuated by herders some states in Nigeria began to enact laws through their States Houses of Assembly aimed at prohibiting open grazing of cows within their states, while some states establish security outfits to effect the evacuation of the herders from their forest where they settle to commit arson, banditry, armed robbery and kidnap for ransom. Similarly, during dry season in the southern part of Nigeria the herders set bush on fire with the aim of allowing the grasses to grow afresh so that their cow could feed on the grasses and by this process set virgin forest and reserved trees, residential, schools and markets ablaze (Agheyisi, 2017)

Thus the paper observes that there have been numerous studies on farmer-herder clash in Nigeria and its attendant socio-economic and political consequences, nonetheless negligible studies exist on the influence of cow merchants and the escalation of violent conflict in Northern Nigeria in particular and the Nigerian state in general which the paper seized to fill. However, the paper is systematically structured into six parts. Part one is the introduction remark and the theoretical framework follows immediately as part two; herders' audacity in Nigeria and northern oligarchy as part three. Fourth part examines community and government response to herder-farmer schism in Nigeria. Part five is the conclusion, and finally part six is the recommendations

Theoretical framework

The instinct for self-preservation that makes human beings to crave for dominance and control if over their needs are to be sustained and guaranteed in the universes of competitions, contradictions and interest. Thus in the world of limited resources in the increasing interest of needs, forming alliance and domination becomes important for the survival of a group, people or industry. It is on this prism that the paper adopts Capture Theory as its theoretical framework. Capture theory was introduced in 1971 by George Stigler to underscore effective control mechanism in industry. That an industry stands to benefit if it properly has control over its regulatory bodies, through the process the interest and objectives can be adequately achieved and its needs attended to. Hence this theory is apt for this paper; 'our cow, our lives the innocent blood: The unending schism in Nigeria'. Thus in order to subjugate and suppress the host farmers' communities, the herders formed Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) to coordinate and control the activities of herders in Nigeria. This group is made up of influential and powerful cow merchants who are at the corridors of power that be or have unfettered access to wealth, through which they acquire weapons used in the subjugation, suppression and intimidation of the host farmers' communities.

The domineering nature of herders is not unconnected to the importance of cow industry and how it constitutes the fulcrum of their existence as a people. Little wonder in no sooner than they settle in an area or locality, they would want to annihilate and conquer the area to give them unfettered access in order to rear their cows. This played out clearly especially in the North central states of Benue and Plateau where the herders had permanent settlement and its replete on daily basis with bloodletting, as the blood thirsty herders had continued to degrade and annihilate the host farmer communities and dare any restriction on their cows.

Herders Audacity in Nigeria and Northern Oligarchy

The herders faced mammoth challenges by the nature and practice of their grazing trade without adequate ranching system. Despite the man-made challenges such as; imposition of arbitrary taxation on the herders and their cows, there is also the dimension of outright seizure of the cow in the market to cattle rustling by invaders (Magaji, 2011) there is also nature-induced challenges which includes; drought, desertification and deforestation, which the herders have continued to put up with adjusted to if their cow business must thrive and their source of livelihood guaranteed (Magaji, 2011)

Consequently, cows depend largely on grasses for their survival (Agheyisi, 2017), and any emaciated cow would be priced less in the market, especially when they look sickly. This necessitates the rationale behind the straying cows to nearby farm which has continued to impact on the farmers negatively as they equally depend on their crops as source of livelihood. This often results to attack and reprisal attacks leading to the loss of lives and property worth several millions of naira on both sides; farmers and herders inclusive (Ogunnubi & Idowu (2023).

In the case where the herders were attacked and killed they often protest in two ways, either by outright boycott of the supply of cow meat to the market so as to punish the region or resort to reprisal attack on the community which has been calamitous (Ahmadu, 2011). Alarmingly the herders accomplished this dastard acts through the wielding of sophisticated weapon such as AK 47, AK 49, Rocker Launcher and assorted rifles acquired by the owner of the cows who are mainly the prominent politicians, retired generals, religious leaders and big business tycoon who are influential and powerful or have access to those at the corridor of power in Nigeria. Thus these rifles were supposed to be deployed in war time or violent prone areas, but the possession of these sophisticated rifles by herders substantiate the claim that the herders have the support of influential and powerful Nigeria's ruling elites, and depicts the audacity of the herders and why they violate laws and civil operation in those states that enact laws to checkmate their activities. It is on this prism, rural grazing areas (RUGAs) proposed by the Buhari administration was vehemently rejected. The case of Plateau and Benue states in North Central Nigeria where the Fulani herders had settlement there is the incidence of incessant killing, rape, and kidnap for ransom and arson a daily occurrence (Agheyisi, 2017). And to avert this heartrending sight communities have continued to reject rural grazing areas (RUGAs). As Olatunde Dare in the Wednesday 21st June 2023 column titled 'The imperative of restructuring' which captured in more succinct and copious manner of speaking the condition of farmers host communities in the hands of herders thus;

Thousands of farmers may have been bankrupted by herders who have turned farmlands into killing and grazing fields, entire villages have been sacked by marauding herder asserting a fundamental right to tend their herds anywhere they please...As if they had a license, to wage a campaign of terror and impunity against farming communities. (The Nation, newspaper 21st June, 2023, P3)

Community and Government Response on the Herder-Farmer in Nigeria

Herder-farmer conflict has remained systemic and endemic with attendant loss of lives and property worth several millions of Naira (Magaji, 2011). The irreconcilable differences are obvious nonetheless there have been mechanisms or responses aimed at bringing about peaceful co-existence (Magaji, 2011), yet there are lots of insincerity amongst stakeholders on the possible peace mechanism. However, several factors account for the irreconcilable differences between the Herder and Farmer, which one of the reasons is the domineering

disposition of the Herder, especially as the cow merchants are influential and powerful in Nigeria. What suffices this assertion is the fact that some cow merchants are retired Generals, top politicians, religious, traditional leaders and big business tycoon. These groups of merchants have easy access to capital against the poor farmers who are rural dwellers with no access to capital and power.

Another factor is the feeling of farmers been oppressed by the herders who most often determine what happens in their host communities. In several cases of this sort, it has been asserted that frustration leads to aggression. The frustration borne by farmers over time is ventilated in resistance which often triggers violent conflict. However, in most cases it is to checkmate the obvious intimidation and wanton attacks by the herders that led to the formation of several communities' vigilantes aimed at resisting the herders. These community vigilantes undergo several training varying from physical to spiritual cleansing aimed at fortifying themselves from any attack such as to remain invincible in the event of confrontations or wars with the herders

According to HRW (2002) vigilante group should not substitute for conventional enforcement agencies. Instead in recent time due to the increasing security challenges that has bedeviled the Nigerian communities from herder attacks, banditry, insurgency, kidnap for ransom and armed robbery in the face of federal security outfit indifference or inertia, communities and states began to step in to fill the security gap by establishing vigilante security outfit to protect their local communities, even some regions had already established regional vigilante network such as; Amotekun in the Southwestern region, Eastern Security network/Ebuebeagu in Southeastern region while some states adopt several security architecture peculiar to their individual state such as; Hisbah corps in Kano, Yan-sakai in Katsina, Nigerian hunter light association in Adamawa just to mention a few.

However, the emergence of informal security outfits (vigilante) is not new as it predates Nigeria's political independence in 1960 (ICG, 2022; CEDCOMS, 2003). Before independence vigilante groups constituted the communities' vanguard force that maintain laws and order in their various communities. Their compositions were mainly able-bodied men grouped according to age (CEDCOMS, 2003). In a nut shell every member of the community was security conscious that in the absence of peace no meaningful development could be possible. Therefore, there is a correlation between peace and development which drives the rationale for vigilantism in the local communities in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Industries in Nigeria faced multilayer challenges stemming from environmental factors such as; draught, desertification and deforestation to socio-political and cultural factors such as; indigene-settlers squabbles and the use of the herders for political ends such as; thugs and other nefarious activities, to government policies such as over taxation and outright deregistration of industries. However the cow industry is a very critical component to the Nigerian economy, and is marred with many imagined and actual confrontations from different angles; from the host communities to the vagaries of nature but the most challenged concern to the cow industry in Nigeria is the irreconcilable differences that seemingly exist between the herders and farmers communities in Nigeria resulting to the loss of lives and properties worth several millions of Naira destroyed. Again, this challenge is not limited to the cow industry in Nigeria as other occupations such as farmers face the same challenge in varying dimension.

In trying to reconcile the endless schism between the herders and the farmers several approaches have been adopted by both the present and past administrations in Nigeria aimed

at resolving the crises. The approaches include; ranching system and the creation of different cities and towns for the herders in Nigeria aimed at accommodating the herders and nonetheless the herders prefer to live in the bushes and forests which constitute a major challenge to peaceful resolution of the herder- farmer altercation in Nigeria due to the straying nature of cows to cultivated farms and other unman territories with its attendant consequences.

Again the violent dispositions of the herders have not been in doubt, from the wielding of dangerous weapons ranging from; AK47, AK49 and Rocker Launchers to other assorted rifles. Analysts have argued that the persons behind the acquisition of these dangerous weapons were the most influential persons who may be connected to the power that be, especially the politicians who may later deploy the herders and their dangerous weapons for political ends; such as; thuggery, arsonist, harassments' and intimidation of their political opponents.

Furthermore, Grazing Reserve Areas failed in Nigeria largely as a result of government lack of political will and the involvement of different franchise that use the herders as veritable tool in carrying out different destructive tendencies in Nigeria. Also due to the nomad nature of herders, different nationals have hide under the cover of the pastoralists to perpetuate hideous atrocities within the length and breathe of the Nigerian state. However, hopes are not lost if the government would exact its will to enforce the registration of herders and their cows for proper documentation and the route they operate in Nigeria. The paper concludes that the overbearing influence of cow merchants is largely one of the factors responsible for the destruction of lives and property by herders in Nigeria,

Recommendations

The paper having examined the audacity of the herders in Northern Nigeria and its escalation of crises in Nigeria the following recommendations are proffered;

- (a) Registration of herders in their host community and the particulars should include; cow owners address, village and state of origin also the local government of origin, chairman or chairperson of their council, the cell phone of the cow owner. The name of the Miyetti Allah Association chairman and cell phone.
- (b) Northern Nigeria has several ungoverned expanse of land faced with drought, desertification and deforestation which if harnessed would enhance production and the breeding of livestock, and cultivation of different grains. The way this could be possible is through irrigation and effective implantation of trees and crops grasses. Countries that faced similar desertification and drought challenges have contended with it effectively and efficiently such as; Arab Emirate Republic (Dubia). Thus through aggressive irrigation system Arab Emirate Republic is now a tourist destination of many African political elites. Even some African political elites have invested massively in building infrastructure in Dubia
- (c) By aggressive settlement and ranching system through government effective dialogue mechanism based on community- centered approach. This could be done through outright buying of large expanse of land from the host community and proper demarcation of the acquired land after full payment. But in the case of lease, the community's consent must be sought through agreement certified by both sides (herders in one hand and farmers in the other hand)
- (d) Local policing is necessary if security and lives of the local communities are to be guaranteed, since most conflicts are local. Local policing is not only to apprehend the culprits but also to prevent the occurrences of crime, this way crime prevention which is proactive is vital than crime prosecution. When laws are kept and institutions saddled with the responsibilities are on ground crime and criminality would be minimized or

reduced. The selection process should be both the settler herders and indigenous farmers as this would build a sense of belonging.

References

- Agheyisi, J.E (2017) Climate Change-Induced Migration: Cattle Herdsmen and Savannah Grasses Invasion of the Forest Zone in Edo State Nigeria. *Benin Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 23 Number 1 June 2017 PP48-70
- Ahmadu, I. (2010) Farmer-Grazier Conflict View of a Livestock Worker on Official Interpretation and Handling. In Ate,B.E & Akinterinwa ,B.A (Ed) *Cross-Border Armed Banditry in the North-East:Issues in National Security and Nigeria's Relation with its Immediate Neighbours . Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Lagos*
- CEDCOMS (2003). *The Phenomenon of Ethnic Militia in Nigeria*. In Sesay, A, Ukeje, C, Aina, O & Odebiyi, A. (Ed) *Ethnic Militia and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria*. Obafemi Awolowo University Press,Ile-Ife.
- Gulsah Gursoy(2020) *Farmer Herders Conflict in Nigeria: An Analysis of the Root Causes and the Effects of the Conflict*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347948827>. DOI:10.13140/RG.2.216410.88008
- Human Right Watch (2002) *HRW Report*
- International Committee on Global (2022) *ICG Navigation Satellite System: Annual meeting (Hybrid Format)*
- Idowu, D. L & Agbalajobi, D.T (,2022) *ECOWAS Protocol on free movement , border porosity and the emerging threats to human security in North Central Nigeria: An appraisal of the influx of migrant Fulani herders In S.O.Olorunjoba (Ed) , political economy of colonialism and nation-building in Nigeria(pp. 277-296) Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73875-4_16*
- Magaji, Y.M.M (2011) *Strategies for Effective Confidence-Building and Peace in Nigeria*. In Ate,B.E & Akinterinwa,B.A A (Ed) *Cross-Border Armed Banditry in the North-East:Issue in National Security and Nigeria's Relation with its Immediate Neighbours . Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Lagos*
- Ogunnubi, O & Idowu,D.L (2023) *Borderless Africa, Illegal Migration and Food Insecurity in West Africa,. In Okunade,S.K & Ogunnubi, O (Ed) ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement and the AFCFTA in West Africa: Costs , Benefits and Challenge.(pp 169-189) Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-5005-6*
- Olaniyan, A. and Yahaya, A. (2016) *Cows, Bandits, and Violent Conflict: Understanding Cattle Rustling in Northern Nigeria*. *Africa Spectrum*, PP 95-105
- Okechi, D.A. & Enwerem, E (2009) *Nigeria's Changing Environment and Pastoral Nomadism: Redistribution of Pain and Gain*. Retrieved from <http://edocs.fu-berlin.de/docs/service/mcRfileNodeservlet/FUDOCs.dervate000000001383/AZU>
- Olatunde, Dare (2023) 'The Imperative of Restructuring'. *The Nation Newspaper*, Wednesday, June 21st 2023 Vol. 13 NO 6169 (P .3) www.thenationline.ng.net
- Olomjobi, Y. (2013) *Islam and Conflict in Northern Nigeria*. Mathouse Press Limited, Lagos
- Shehu, H. (2018). *The Causes and Consequences of Fulani Pastoralist-Farmer Conflict in Nigeria*. *International Journal of Innovation and Research in Educational Sciences* ,5.3 357-361
- Vanguard Newspaper Tuseday May, 23rd 2023 Vol.39 NO 10,059 (PP 6-7) www.vanguardngr.com