



Social-Ethical Implications of Fulani Herdsmen Insurgency on the Contemporary Nigeria Society

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary Nigeria society has been a theatre of unending insurgency from the Fulani herdsmen. The spate of violent attacks from these insurgents against farmers in various parts of the country has become a thing of great worry to all. This is more so as the federal government appears unwilling to bring to book those behind the increasing deadly menace. This paper will therefore seek to examine the socio-ethical religious implications of the above insurgency with a view to charting the way forward. Relevant published texts across the country and the structural conflict theory provided the leverage for this study.

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1. Introduction

The nation of Nigeria according to Alade (2018:17) has remained under the siege of murderous marauding Fulani Herdsmen, a development which he notes demands prompt, firm and decisive action to stamp out the deadly menace. Besides such intervention becomes more urgent when he states that the above group has been identified by 2015 Global terrorism Index as the world fourth deadliest militant group in the world. Unfortunately he feels disappointed that in such a time like these the government has maintained a seeming indifference and loud conspiratorial silence.

The above trend no doubt poses a moral and social threat to the nation as the Nigerian president by his action appears to be shielding a group of people from facing the full weight of the law at the expense of the majority of the innocent citizens he had sworn an oath to defend their constitutional right to life and equality before the law. What this means is that the reluctant of the president to speak out against the insurgency as well as the evasive approach of the nation's security to crush the Fulani herdsmen all point to leadership failure as well as ethical sabotage.

Njoku (2018) puts the above view pointedly when he states that the spate of killings of innocent citizens by the Fulani herdsmen in recent times appears to have assumed some political underpinnings as the federal government who have all the political and military machinery in their command to crush this criminal and wicked behaviour appears to be shielding them from facing the full wrath of the law. Furthermore he submits that it amounts to irresponsibility on the side of the government that instead of apprehending the culprits behind the herdsmen dastardly act, the president is busy calling for establishment of cattle colonies in Nigeria.

The attacks of nomadic herdsmen according to Imo (2017:49) are in the increase in Nigeria with a record killing of about 1229 people in 2014. Furthermore he notes that the apart from increasing deaths arising from the herdsmen insurgency property worth millions of naira were lost while thousands of people were displaced from their homes and places of livelihood.

Yomi (2017) corroborates the above view on the rising spate of Fulani Herdsmen violent conflict when he states that pastoral conflict now accounts for more deaths in Nigeria than the much dreaded Boko Haram. However he wonders why "even though pastoral conflicts are now more deadly and demands a more decisive action, the response of the Nigerian government has been anything but urgent". Besides Salaudeen and Agbedo (2018 :7) submits that with over 1,000 Nigerians killed this year across the country, especially in the middle belt axis by suspected herdsmen there are heightened fears of more reprisal blood shedding in the country that could plunge the country into total anarchy.

From the foregoing the rising spate of pastoral conflicts has become a siege that is threatening the future of the Nigerian project and our collective survival as a people with a common destiny. It is against this backdrop that this work seeks to examine the socio-ethical implications of the Fulani herdsmen insurgency on the contemporary Nigerian society with a view to identifying the way forward.

2. Theoretical framework

Theoretically, the structural conflict theory is applied in this study. According to Karl Max, Engels, Lenin in Galtung (1990), Ross (1993) and Scarborough (1998) structural theory states that the problem of conflict in society is predicated on the ways societies are structured and organized. This was the view of Marx and Engels in Faleti (2011) when they posit that "all the societal problems like cultural, political, economic, injustice, poverty, disease, exploitation, inequality etc derive from structural and organizational disparities among nations".

In recent times the spate of attacks from the nomadic herdsmen on farmers in the country across the various geopolitical zones has become a major concern both locally and internationally. Imo (2017) submits that this ugly development if not nipped in the bud, may disrupt the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals which is targeted at ending hunger, achieving food security and promoting sustainable agriculture by 2030.

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Unfortunately instead of abating these attacks from the pastoral insurgents, they have continued to increase exponentially to the dismay of helpless Nigerians. However adequate social research has not been given to the socio-ethical implications of the Fulani Herdsmen siege on the Nigerian society. Consequently this paper is an attempt to aimed at bridging the above gap.

3. Methodology

The paper adopted a survey approach which relied mainly on secondary sources of data drawn from published works such as journals, books, internet and reports. The data collected were analyzed using content analysis technique.

4. Factors promoting Fulani Herdsmen insurgency clashes

In this section we shall focus attention on the causative factors that are promoting Fulani herdsmen insurgency in Nigeria. Although violent conflicts worldwide have multi-dimensional causes, this study shall attempt to identify those peculiar ones that have placed pastoral conflict on the front burner in Nigeria society today.

4.1 Lack of ethical leadership

This was the view of Yetunde (2018) when he notes that lack of ethical leadership by those in political authority to create an atmosphere of social justice has remained a fundamental force fostering all kinds of violent conflicts in Nigeria. What this means is that this evil is perpetrated because those in leadership operate through moral bankruptcy or incompetence in administering quality governance that is rooted in equity, justice and fairness.

4.2 Lack of political accountability

Nigeria political class has for decades run the nation with an attitude devoid of accountability culture. This is why even when thousands of lives are being lost through insurgency and hundreds of thousands of lives displaced from their ancestral homes with billions of naira worth of property destroyed our leaders only interest is how to perpetuate themselves in governance. Thus Yetunde (2018) captures the above view pointedly when he states that even though the political class represents their community politically, economically, educationally as well as in other interests their inability to discharge their work with accountability leaves much to be desired. It is therefore this culture of unaccountability that has made President Buhari to refuse to call the Fulani Herdsmen to order against the wishes of the majority of Nigerians who voted him to office. A development that has continued to give audacity to these sons of Lucifer to continue to terrify and destroy innocent Nigerian farmers.

4.3 Resource Control

The major source of tension between farmers and Fulani Herdsmen has been on resource control. The resources in this case being the grazing land. Abass (2012) as noted by Imo (2017:48) captures the above truth when he states that the major source of tension between Fulani herdsmen and farmers is economic with land related issues accounting for the majority of the conflicts. What this means is that the quest to control the land resource has greatly contributed in aggravating the violent attacks being unleashed by Fulani Herdsmen. The above submission is corroborated by Olabode, & Ajibade (2010) and Solagberu (2012) who posit that the above conflict derives from the context of political economy of land struggle.

According to them the growing demand of herdsmen for pasture amidst fixed space has continued to brew fierce competition that often results to use of deadly weapons. The above view is equally corroborated by a statement credited to Tiv Chief ,Edward Ujeje as cited in Adeyemi, et al (2018:6)

when he stated that the Miyetti Allah have made it “abundantly clear that the crisis in Benue state is a struggle for resources in the Benue valley and that they will unite Fulani from across the world to annihilate the inhabitants and take over”.

4.4 Religious Domination

Akagyiram (2017) posits that apart from cultural, ancestral, and political differences, religious factor has equally been implicated as a driving force of Fulani herdsmen insurgency. This was the argument raised when he observes that in Nigeria the Fulani herdsmen are mostly Muslim while the settled farmers are often Christian. No doubt the concentration of herdsmen attacks on the Christian farmers in the Middle Belt especially the Benue State dominated by Christians underscores an indirect religious war to Islamize the Benue people by coercion. It is against this backdrop of religious domination that many see the president’s conspiratorial silence on the on-going crises as a direct support of the secret agenda of his Muslim brethren to depopulate the Christian community through ethnic cleansing in order to enforce Islamic dominion over the conquered territories. This is put pointedly by the Chairman Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Kwara State branch, Prof. Timothy Opoola, as cited in Mgboh, Gyang, Ojo, Olanrewaju and Adams (2018: 5) when he posits that when Fulani herdsmen enter into churches killing priests and worshippers, they cannot be assumed to be looking for grasses for their cattle. According to him the clear indication is that the Fulani herdsmen are launching Jihad against the Christians. Furthermore they stated while quoting Rev Fr James Nyajo that the continued dysfunctional posture of Nigeria security forces has exposed the inability of the security agencies to bring under control those threatening the existence of Christians and other innocent citizens. From the foregoing he opined that the impression being created is that the islamists of northern Nigeria have legalized Jihad in modern day Nigeria. The concentration of the killing of largely Christians in Adamawa, Benue, Taraba ,Kogi, Plateau, and Southern Kaduna has been observed by CAN Chairman, Niger State and Vice Chairman CAN, North Central states and Abuja, Rev. Mathias Echioda that the message being created from the deadly scenario is that of ethnic cleansing being targeted to a people. As long as this negative trend continues unabated the nation would ultimately drift into full blown religious war that would bring the nation to a standstill. This is why the government, the religious leaders ,civil societies, and in fact all well meaning Nigerians must rise and speak against this modern day herdsmen insurgency with a view to bringing it to a halt.

5. Ethical issues and Fulani Herdsmen Militarism

Even though development is highly desirable in all societies because it provides the foundation for the good life or enhanced standard of living, there are ethical platform that must be put in place in the society before development can take root and thrive. Unfortunately the increasing spate of Fulani’s herdsmen militarism on Nigerian’s farmers is provoking great ethical challenges that are grossly undermining the foundation for sustainable peace and development in Nigeria. This section will therefore seek to consider the ethical challenges inherent in the above Fulani herdsmen insurgency on the contemporary Nigeria society.

The word ethical comes from ethics which is defined by Lawton (1999:295ff) as a set of principles, a code, or system that acts as a guide to conduct. Furthermore he notes that unethical behaviour relates to not just immoral behaviour but also has to do with the refusal or failure to follow existing

procedures and rules of achieving organizational goals. The above view is corroborated by Alli (2007:245-256) when he states that the above word relates to a system of moral principles that govern or influences behaviour of persons.

Kukah (2012) in his own contribution states that ethics relate to the human response to divine command. According to him it is tied to the relationship between human person and God. Thus he submits that it relates to the moral philosophy which is concerned with the vertical relationship with God which in turn defines the horizontal relationship between people. From the foregoing the word refers to divine instrument which regulates man's relationship with the divine personality called God and that with his fellow humanity. It is the behavioural tool that makes man accountable to his creator and as well as with his fellow man. In his own contribution Jennings (2006:3) as cited by Gberevbie (2013:24) states that ethics relates to standards and norms of behaviour that are beyond laws and legal rights.

From the foregoing ethics refers to the instrument that moderate individual and group behaviour with respect to right and wrong conduct. What this means is that they could be internally driven through development of healthy conscience or inherent disposition or externally driven through externally enforced standards by legally established regulatory agencies. While certain societies may legitimize some unethical conducts as legal, the fact remains that every society tries to create a basis for defining what is regarded as good or bad behaviour, right or wrong conduct as a way of building stable and progressive society. We shall therefore attempt to identify the various ethical threats being posed by the contemporary Fulani herdsmen insurgency in Nigeria.

5.1 Threat to brotherhood/bond of love

According to Madu (2004:110) the founding fathers of Nigeria envisaged a united nation driven by brotherhood and bond of love. This solidarity he notes is reflected in the first stanza of Nigeria's first National Anthem which states inter alia:

Nigeria we hail thee, our own dear native land,
though tribes and tongue may differ. In brotherhood
we stand Nigeria's all, are proud to serve, our
sovereign motherland.

Further he submits that the reference to brotherhood and motherhood all points to the vision of a united people driven by bond of love, unifying principle and solidarity of kinship based on consanguinity. Unfortunately the continued threat of Fulani herdsmen attack in recent times have become a very potent force tearing Nigeria into pieces resulting in all forms of religious, tribal, regional, cultural and political dichotomy. The result is that hatred, suspicion and bitterness have taken over the land while the cord of peaceful co-existence, national integration and interdependence is being grossly endangered.

5.2 Threat to social justice

According to Ogugua (2012:428) leadership is service as well as a trust and which by implication is a duty that demands accountability to their people of how they used and still use their resources. Accountable leadership he continues relates to the upholding of justice in the land which he submits is the sole regulation principle of social life, the ligament of the society and the very bedrock or backbone of any government. Justice he posits is "the chief virtue of the state and where it is denied leadership turns to band of robbers sharing exploit (made after politicking).

Nigerian today has continued to be on the boil arising from the increasing deadly havoc being unleashed on innocent Nigerians by the Fulani insurgents. Unfortunately those who are voted to power to promote justice and the rule

of law in the nation have maintained an attitude of conspiratorial silence. It is against this backdrop of ethical abuse of social justice by the federal government that Odiviwi (2017) in his work wondered why these barefaced criminals are being pampered by the authority. According to him why are the Police, Department of State Service (DSS), Soldiers, NDC etc not clamping down on these killer herdsmen? Besides he queries why is the State allowing them to commit murder and even pogrom without the arm of the law bringing them to order. The only plausible reason is that these dare devil agents are treated as sacred cow who have been made to be above the law by the powers that be. When national leadership turns a blind eye to the cry for justice by a section of her citizenry on account of ethnic, religious, or political reasons they breed the seed of bitterness and rancor that does no one any good.

The primacy of building a justice driven society as the basis of national integration and development is underscored by Aristotle as cited in Ogugua (2012:427) when he states that there is nothing which should be more jealously maintained in nation building than the spirit of obedience to law and upholding of social justice. Justice mediated through constitutional provision should serve as the bench mark for building national cohesion, peace and sustainable development.

5.3 Threat of ungodliness

The word ungodliness comes from the Greek word *asebeia* meaning impiety, wickedness, anomia (lawlessness), disregard for or defiance of God's laws. It represents a disposition for evil things. When a nation is run by her leaders without concern for God's law it degenerates to leadership of wickedness and lawlessness. This is the case with Nigeria society where evil and deadly nomadic herdsmen are shielded from the wrath of the law while poor and innocent Christian farmers are paying with their blood simply because they are not Fulanis or have no one in political leadership to defend their fundamental human rights of right to life as well as right to engage in legal means of livelihood. According to Udabah (2017:147) morality is a divine command driven by belief in all societies of the existence of a Supreme Being who is not only the creator of all but also the universal law giver. God demands the obedience of man to his laws as encapsulated in the Decalogue and enunciated by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount and summarized by the Golden rule. Obedience to divine morality connects man and nations to covenantal relationship that ensures cosmic harmony.

When national leadership embrace ungodliness in their attitude to governance they create band wagon effect that permeate the whole national fabric or life. The result is that it breeds lawlessness, evil, wickedness, revolt to rule of law and unethical approach in the conduct of individual and institutional affairs by all and sundry. This is the bane of today's Nigeria where everyone does what is right in his own eyes because those who should entrench order and self-restraint are the ones fanning the ember of chaos and anarchy.

5.4 Threat to Honesty and Transparency in governance

Furthermore, Fulani herdsmen siege in addition appears to be fuelling the culture of dishonesty and lack of transparency in governance. At one point the government denies that the Fulani herdsmen are no menace to the Nigerian Society. In another instance they are described as Non-Nigerians who are faceless criminals that have infiltrated our borders and are causing havoc on the polity. When pressed further on why our security forces could not protect Nigerians from such foreigners the government would then

excuse the menace as mere ethnic clashes which is common in all modern societies or that they are the off-shoots of Gaddhaffi trained terrorists who have now gained entry into Nigeria. (Guardian May 1, 2018)

However whichever angle one looks at the excuses being given by government one tends to see elements of insincerity, dishonesty and lack of transparency on the side of the political leadership. This no doubt is the conclusion that could be drawn in the face of contradicting approach being demonstrated by our government officials. For instance Odivwri (2017) reports that in the face of great destruction of lives and property by armed Fulani herdsmen in Benue the governor of Benue State gave an order that all armed herdsmen should leave the state, but unfortunately the above order was countered by the Benue State Commissioner of Police who claimed that nobody has the right to order anybody out of the state so long as Benue State is for every Nigerian. This was equally a replica of the scenario that occurred some years back in Enugu State when the governor of the state demanded for prompt intervention of the federal security agencies to forestall rumoured herdsmen invasion of Nimbo but unfortunately the help came several hours late due to the contradicting orders of the federal government to that of the state government. The result was that Fulani Herdsmen invasion of Nimbo had a field day with more than 50 lives wasted and several houses and property worth millions of naira burnt in the fire. From the foregoing Nigeria seems to be a nation run by dishonest and non-transparent rulers who say one thing and mean another with respect to the oath of office they swore to on assumption of office to discharge their duty without prejudice or partiality.

The question that is still appears unanswered is why should Mr. President wait for a month before condemning the herdsmen killing of about Benue 500 people. It is turning the truth upside down that Nigerians are being murdered in the hundreds and thousands of lives are being rendered homeless in their own nation, by Fulani herdsmen and the government is busy demanding for the approval of grazing land from all the states for these band of lawless and dare devil criminals. It is this insincerity and dishonesty that prompted Odivwri (2012) to pose the question on account of the Benue Police Commissioner, whether the statement that Benue is for all Nigerians also mean that Benue is a free land for blood thirsty killer herdsmen? Or is he pretending not to know that these herdsmen carry deadly and more sophisticated weapons than even the military who are charged with securing Nigeria? Until Nigerian secures the leadership that believes in honesty and transparency in governance our nation will continue to be a breeding ground for all kinds of wickedness and vices. When a society murders trust through her leadership mere anarchy will be unleashed upon her world as stated by the wise man Okonkwo in "Things Fall Apart".

5.5 Threat to human dignity

The level of blood spilling in the country today according to the Catholic Bishop of Enugu, Most Rev Dr Callistus Chukwuma Onaga as cited in Ede (2018:29) is most frightening. According to him Nigeria did not experience the level of conflict as well as the desecration of human dignity and life during the Nigeria Civil war as is being witnessed presently from the human carnage being perpetrated by the Fulani herdsmen. Furthermore he notes that it is not just that lives are being wasted physically, economically, psychologically and demographically through this insurgency but one gets shocked and highly disappointed by the reaction of those who are supposed to be constitutionally responsible for being care givers and custodians of victims of insurgency

displaying an attitude of total abandonment and indifference towards the victims. When citizens of a society begin to demand their leaders to visit them in times of great emergency and need it implicates their lack care and regard for their human dignity.

6. Conclusion

This paper has studied and analysed the ethical threats of contemporary Fulani Herdsmen militarism on the Nigeria society. It has equally identified some of the causes as well as the continued reluctance or incapacity of the government to address the menace. It equally highlighted the ugly economic, demographic and sociological evil it is exerting on the populace such as food security threat, internally displaced population, pervasive fear and reprisal culture. It notes that no nation moves forward when it encourages a section of her citizenry to undermine the bond of peaceful existence, brotherhood and interdependence.

7. Recommendation

To overcome the current challenges of ethical threats of Fulani herdsmen militarism in Nigeria the following recommendations were made:

1. The Nigeria government should ban the outdated method of nomadic cattle rearing which is no longer the vogue in many advanced nations. They should demand cattle farmers to adopt ranching as a practiced in many civilized societies.
2. The government should restructure the nation to ensure that each of the six geopolitical zones as well as the states have autonomy to control their own resources and state police. This would ensure that criminals are promptly put in check by local security apparatus instead of waiting endlessly for federal security which may never come or even when they do show up, much damage may have been done in the local communities.
3. The government should provide basic military training to all Nigerians that equips each person with basic skill in self-defence and counter-terrorism from primary school to the university level.
4. The nation should subscribe to be run by Proper Ethical Standard (PES) that demand that leaders be held accountable for abuse of fundamental human rights of her citizenry through stiffer penalty such as death or life imprisonment.
5. Prayer must be involved for Gods' judgement and intervention when national leadership assume themselves to be gods and entrench irreverence to divine rule of justice and right to life of the citizenry. This was the view of Gowon when he calls Nigeria to employ prayer as it a mightier tool than the sword to restrain the wickedness of man.

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