

## International Nomadic Ethnic Economy and Land Resource Conflict in Nigeria

**Eddy Akpomera**

Department of Political Science, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria  
eddyakpomera@yahoo.com

### Abstract

*Nigeria, the most populous nation in Black Africa, which has been fighting terrorism from the Boko Haram sect in the north-eastern axis of the country, is currently battling a new challenge in the middle belt and southern regions: cross-border armed pastoral herdsmen forceful take-over of land resource, which has claimed thousands of lives. The political economy of international transhumance is strongly explained in the altering of the rural wealth indicators with the armed invasion of the pasture-rich communities, destruction of crops and forceful occupation of farmlands, as well as the prebendal policies of Nigeria's political leadership with the new legal framework to arm twist southern ethnic groups to give up their land rights for nomadic pastoralism. The direct implications of the smouldering crisis are the impending food shortages in Nigeria, and the potentiality for ethnic militias as self-help mechanisms. It is recommended that cross-border arms control must be revved up for herdsmen, and the ethnic Fulani political cum economic elite in government and northern socio-cultural platforms pull the brakes on the violence in the country to avoid untoward tribal conflagration nationwide.*

**Key Words:** Cross-border, Economy, Nomads, Herdsmen, Farmlands, Violence

### Introduction

Nigeria is a federation of stratified tribal societies, and her evolution to modern nationhood has been shaped by ethnic historical developments (Irobi, 2005). As a federation of about 250 ethnic units loosely knit together by a federal system of government, Nigeria has maintained the vestiges of the British colonial socio-political strategy of ethnic segregation and distinctive cultural identities in a divide-and-rule mechanism. Despite Nigeria's political independence since 1960, cultural suspicion amongst the ethnic groups rather than integrative tendencies in the regionalization of the country has remained. Thus, the regions have become major ethnic enclaves – the North for the Hausa-Fulani; the West for the Yoruba; the East for the Igbo; the Middle Belt for the Tiv, Igala, and Berom; the Mid-West for the Edo, Urhobo, Isoko, Itsekiri and Ndokwa; and the coastal areas for the Ijaw and Ibibio. The multi-ethnic structure of Nigeria, built on forceful territorial amalgamation of the ethnic groups in the hitherto northern and southern protectorates by British imperialist power in 1914, has thrived on the ethnic groups' enduring struggle for political dominance, economic resources, social mobility and cultural superiority. It was expected that as the Nigerian societies modernize and the spirit of nationhood weld the people together, especially first under the unitary-slanted military dictatorship, and later the democratic system of governance, the elevation of ethnicity in national development will take a backseat. That has not been the case. The political, military and business elite have always played up ethnicity and religious sentiments in power relations and hegemonic control of regional economy as well as cultural dominance. The consequences have been a weak federal structure and crises of underdevelopment despite Nigeria's natural endowments in mineral deposits and human capital. Internal insecurity has been a recurring feature of Nigeria's weak state structure.

Transhumance pastoralism refers to the regular movement of herds between different locations in order to exploit seasonal availability of pastures and water by allowing herds access to crop residue in farms or graze in open range, including moving southwards in dry season (Maina, 2016).

The Global Terrorism Index Report (2015) by the New York-based Institute for Economics and Peace states that Nigeria is seriously endangered by Boko Haram, a Sunni Wahhabi terrorist organization, which has become so vicious that Nigeria experienced over 300 per cent increase in terrorist activity, killing 7,512 within 12 months (between 2013 and 2014). The report notes that Boko Haram, which has pledged its allegiance to al-Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS or ISIL) as the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) in March 2015, has earned the reputation as the deadliest

terrorist group, causing more deaths (6,644) than the ISIL (6,073). Nigeria was listed along with Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria as the five countries with the most endemic terrorist attacks, responsible for 78 per cent of all deaths and 57 per cent of all attacks in the world. The challenge of internal security has loomed so large in Nigeria that the new administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, in his first national budget in 2016, allocated the highest sectoral funding to the Ministry of Interior, and the third highest national defence agencies (National Planning, 2016). Although the Nigerian armed forces have reduced the growing efficacy and regularity of Boko Haram armed raids on military barracks and major communities in the North East geo-political region of the country, the threats of suicide bombings using even minors and young females still exist. UNICEF (2015) reported that Boko Haram increased the number of children used in suicide attacks dramatically from four in 2014 to 44 in 2015, with 75 per cent of them being young girls. Besides, the frequency of the suicide attacks which hit 89 in 2015, UNICEF also reported that Nigeria has a population of over 1.3million internally displaced persons; about 1,800 primary and secondary schools forcibly closed due to extensive damage, looting, arson or being converted to temporary camps or shelter for internally displaced persons; and over 5,000 children either separated from their parents or unaccompanied.

As Nigerian security agencies battle the Boko Haram insurgents in the Northern parts of the country, there has been a new wave of terrorist – like attacks in the Middle belt and many states in the southern parts of the country by AK-47 gun-totting marauders usually wearing the same garb of black-coloured turban like the Boko Haram insurgents. The differences in this heavily armed group, who have been on killing spree, and destruction of communities, are that they constitute themselves into gangs and herd cattle, and destroy or forcefully take over the farmlands of the indigenous people. The operation mode has been surprise raids on local communities. Although the missions of the Fulani herdsmen seemingly have been land grab and forceful occupation of prepared farmlands for the grazing of their herds, as well as imposition of psychology of fear on the local communities with killings and destruction of property, the linkages between Fulani – speaking Boko Haram armed insurgents and nomadic herdsmen are striking. First, is the ease with which illicit small arms and light weapons are paraded by the Fulani herdsmen, who are moving their cattle down south from the northern parts of the country. The Nigerian security agencies are bewildered by the new spectacle of nomadic herdsmen leading cattle with an AK-47 strapped to their shoulders and cattle in the rural agrarian communities. The new crop of herdsmen are even involved in kidnapping and extort cash from many high-profile kidnapped victims in the southern parts of the country, engage in murder of indigenes, and forceful harvesting of farm produce of the local farmers. Third, the religious similarity between Boko Haram insurgents and the herdsmen makes the modus operandi identical with chant of “Allahu Akbar” (God is great) when attacking the locals in the southern parts of Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Nigeria is a good example of a culturally pluralist federation. Cultural pluralism exists in a society where there is more than one style dimension, more than one set of cultural themes, information components and behavioural styles sanctioned in the society (Sanday, 1970). Such pluralism which encompasses cultural, social and economic dimensions can only function effectively on the platform of social justice, as it will ensure the co-existence of two or more distinct cultures with evidence of different languages, belief systems, historical backgrounds, and the fair allocation of resources to eradicate perception of deliberate inequality in political and economic relations. In most African countries with traces of cultural pluralism, ethnic competition thrives in the face of political and economic inequalities. Pantoja, Perry and Blourock (2014) explained that cultural pluralism thrives in societies under conditions of competition, hostility and polarization of the different groups in a country, and that the competition for opportunities and outcomes has been defined by the struggle for general welfare and economic resources, as well as power relations in governing the society.

The competition theory of ethnic conflicts stipulates three dimensions under which conflicts could occur (Olzak, 2013). The first has to do with the perception of racial threat in view of the mobility and size of immigrant distinct ethnic population. The steady stream of the immigrant population or newcomers to

a geographical location has the potential of triggering some form of resentment from the residents (Blalock, 1967; Koopsmans and Olzak, 2004). The second dimension is about forces of economic competition amongst the ethnic groups. In this case, the distinct ethnic groups create both locational convenience and productive or commercial niche. The attempt to exert some form of exclusivity on both features may lead to economic enclaves, and when overlap happens between the newcomers and the residents, it is viewed as invasion of the latter's niche, which could lead to protest or violence (Hannan, 1979). The third dimension relates to political leveraging, and such ethnic conflicts arise when immigrant ethnic groups start gaining influence to attempt to alter the prevailing power relations in favour of the residents. Such threats may arise from the noticeable increase in the leverage on policies and decisions arising from the widening of the political space. In this situation, the dominant group will deploy mechanisms to ensure that the political status quo was maintained (Tolnay and Beck, 1995). It is imperative to note that the three dimensions of competition theory of ethnic conflict – demographic, economic and political – are not usually mutually exclusive in occurrence in most modern societies, rather they could be mutually – reinforcing or even occurring together over a period of time (Olzak, 1992; 2013).

It has been said that ethnic identity is largely a social construction (Handelman, 2011), deployed to collectively explain the common descent, cultural features, and history of a group of people. In culturally pluralist societies embedded in Nigeria, economic competition is a major factor for conflicts. Nnoli (1980) argues that the interplay of economic forces between ethnic groups in Nigeria creates tension in the polity. Light and Gold (2000) also state that ethnic economies in contemporary societies rely on the interplay of ethnic class and material resources. Class resources are the vocationally-relevant cultural and material endowment of the ethnic bourgeoisie, while material resources include the property rights, cultural elements and knowledge transmitted over time through socialization agents. The competition theory of ethnic conflict aligns with the Burton's (1990) human needs theory which explains that ethnic conflicts, between settlers and dominant residents were largely collective struggles not just for biological needs, but also to promote security, participation, recognition, economic and security needs in a competitive environment.

This paper is focused on explaining the emerging Nigerian situation whereby pastoral nomads in the economic activity of cattle rearing for profit, which is principally an ethnic economy of the Fulani ethnic group, has lately engaged several other ethnic groups with arms in fierce competition and violent interface over land resources for economic and political power across the six geo-political zones of the country, as well as point out the new danger signals to Nigeria's ethnic co-existence and stability. The methodology adopted is the analytical presentation of the strategic demographics of the Fulani ethnic stock in the West African sub-region and the internationalization of the business of nomadic pastoralism with inputs from foreign Boko Haram insurgents fleeing the war zone with the Nigerian armed forces; the espousal of the varied dimensions of land as a critical resource in Nigeria; as well as the prebendalist tendencies of the incumbent political leadership in land grab and access, which have seriously heightened ethnic tension and mobilization for inter-ethnic violence.

### **Pastoral nomadism as Fulani ethnic-controlled economy in West Africa**

The conceptual perspective of international nomadism is rooted in the cross – border movement of the practice of pastoralism. UNESCO (1989), which estimates that there are between 30 – 40 million nomadic pastoralists worldwide, describes international nomadism as a form of economic activity which is applied to the mode of operations of herdsmen who move their stock across national borders in search of efficient ways of handling their business with arable lands for grazing. Mobility which is both pre-determined and systematic becomes a logical and efficient strategy for harvesting scarce resources spread unevenly across wide territories (Khazanov, 1982). Nomadic pastoralism is an economic activity in which livestock are herded in order to find fresh pastures on which to graze, and usually involves patterns of movement (Roger, 2001). The movement of the postoralists is neither aimless nor boundless, from pasture to pasture, along well – defined routes, at fixed periods, and in greater or less comity with adjoining nomadic and settled groups (Encyclopedia Judaica, 2008).

A critical overview of nomadism indicates that it is characterized by specific manifestation of material and cultural practice, and the preservation of vestiges of tribal social structure. Nomadic pastoralism shows shades of property and social relations amongst nomadic stock owners and their attendants. Since medieval times through to modern day, private ownership of livestock was defined with prosperous herdsmen, using their economic status to dominate the usage of the greener pastures for the usage of their livestock and personal use. The character and essence of social division of labour brought about economic, political and cultural linkages between nomadic herdsmen and settled farmers, although certain peaceful relations were sometimes laced with hostile clashes (Markov, 2010). Currently, the ownership of high volume of livestock is still the preserve of the elite either of the Fulani or Hausa ethnic stock, amongst the upper class especially in the northern parts of the country. This has also defined the structure of political relations with this capital - intensive and lucrative economic activity. The key holders of the levers of political and cultural authority in Nigeria, like the incumbent President Buhari, former military heads of State, Sultan, Emirs, and political leaders own cattle in large numbers, and aware of the trans-regional mobility of the herds in Nigeria for effective harvesting of grazing grasses.

International nomadism is given strong characterization with the structure, porosity and ethnography of the Nigerian borders. Nigeria’s land borders with her Fulani-populated neighbours is quite expansive. It covers a distance of 1,690 kilometres with Cameroun, another 1,497 kilometres with Niger, and 87 kilometres with Chad, along with sharing common boundaries in the Lake Chad Basin (FGN, 2003). The Nigeria Immigration Service has officially admitted their difficulty in manning the borders effectively, thus: “The problem is basically the fact that the structure of our borders makes effective policing absolutely difficult. In some places, these border areas are mountainous; in some places, they are in the jungle; in some places, you have settlements along the border. There are countless illegal routes into the country. Nobody can tell the number of such unapproved routes. The border posts are not sufficient.” (Allwell, 2012:17). Nigeria Police Force has explained that Boko Haram fleeing insurgents, armed guerrilla fighters and other criminal elements escaping from Libya, Mali, Chad and Sudan uprising have found the borders easy passage for the smuggling of illicit small arms and ammunition into Nigeria (The Punch, 2016). Besides, Nigeria’s neighbours have Fulani population that share common borders with eight states in Nigeria, namely Sokoto, Katsina, Jigawa, Yobe, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Adamawa. The Governor of Katsina State, Aminu Masari, who has attributed the proliferation of arms with the herdsmen to the porous Nigerian borders, noted that: “there are about seven local government areas in Katsina State that border the local forest that has remained a route that has been in existence since the colonial era; it passes through Mali, Niger Republic, Burkina Faso, and also shares the forest with Niger Republic” (Masari, 2016: 2).

The Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), a trade association that represents and defends the interests of the Fulani pastoralists nationwide, and has membership drawn from the various political parties, the public service and the elite of the Fulani stock, confirmed the lack of border control along the grazing routes on the West African sub-region, making it easy for illicit arms smuggling. The Assistant National Secretary General of the Association, Dr. Ibrahim Abdullahi explained that: “there is not a single policeman or security presence along the present grazing route that stretches from the Central African Republic, through Chad and Cameroun, down to Nigeria, up to Benin Republic and Senegal. That gives the chance for all manner of dubious people to enter the country and cause havoc” (Kanu, 2016: 2). In many border communities, there is fluid ethnic and socio-cultural affinity that flows with commercial activities, religious practices and criminal activities as the inhabitants, who are predominantly Hausa and Fulani, have lived together for several decades.

**Table 1: Spread of Fulani ethnic stock in 15 West African countries**

Country	Estimated Population (millions) (2008)	Percentage of Fulani	Religious Preference
Nigeria	130	9%	Islam



Cameroun	16.2	10%	Islam
Niger	10.6	9%	Islam
Guinea	7.8	40%	Islam
Chad	9	Below 5%	Islam
Benin	6.8	Below 5%	Islam
Togo	5.2	Below 5%	Islam
Burkina Faso	12.6	8%	Islam
Cote d Ivoire	16.8	Below 5%	Islam
Gambia	1.4m	Below 5%	Islam
Ghana	20.2	Below 5%	Islam
Guinea Bissau	1.3	20%	Islam
Mali	11.3	17%	Islam
Senegal	10	23.8%	Islam
Sierra Leone	5.6	7%	Islam

Source: Compiled from Tarig Anter, Who Are The Fulani People and Their Origins? Modern Ghana Online Radio Centre (2011) ([www.modernghana.com](http://www.modernghana.com))

### Land as critical resource

Land is a critical resource in West African countries where pastoral nomadism is practiced. Nigeria is the most populous country in the sub-region with 250 ethnic groups huddled into six geo-political zones. Hazen (2013) puts the issue of land in perspective by pointing out that it was not just a primary source of livelihood to millions of citizens, but also fundamental to the political economy of the country, the social dynamics of the people, and intrinsically linked to the power relations, wealth and security of owners of land. Besides, the resurgence of violent land conflicts, either in the forms of resource armed struggles over mineral deposits and other natural endowments; communal clashes which include violence between farming and herding population, as well as cattle rustling amongst pastoral communities; and social conflicts involving protests and riots arising from contests over land and land resources, all revolve around critical issues of land use, access, ownership, beneficiaries and products. Therefore, violent land conflicts could not be viewed as simply fighting over a piece of land, but more importantly as struggles for wealth and power, and even socio - cultural dominance.

For many communities in Nigeria, land is a strategic economic resource, and very central to household and communal wealth. It is so important to the daily lives of the people, that it constitutes about 60 per cent of the asset endowment of poor households (Deininger, 2003), and like in Sierra Leone, the rural poor in Nigeria could describe land ownership and cultivation as their “bank” (Moore, 2010). Apart from being a fundamental instrument for cultivation of food and source of income (van der Zwan, 2011), sale and hiring of land for periodic farming and housing projects still serve as safety net in improving on household reproduction and sustenance (Oxfam, 2011). The centrality of land as an economic resource drives the struggle for access to land for the security of household and communities, especially the rural and urban poor who survive on subsistence agricultural produce or pastoral livelihoods, in order to reduce their vulnerability and insecurity (Hazen, 2013).

Land is also a political resource in Nigeria. This aspect of political power of land is actually tied to the economic resource, as land is seen as a source of household and communal wealth, and by implication, defines the power relations in the social matrix. For most rural households and communities, land ownership is a powerful asset that bestows traditional authority upon the owner, although privatization driven by entrepreneurs and the middle class in land purchases have steadily threatened the continued dominance of traditional authority (van der Zwan, 2011). The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) vests political authority on land administration in Nigeria on the State Governors, which is expressed in the Land Use Act of 1978.

It is imperative to note that land could be viewed as a socio – cultural resource, with the owners having strong cultural linkages either by tradition as ancestral homes for ethnic enclaves or through religious

prism. In Nigeria, certain regions of the country are identified with particular ethnic groups like the geo-political South West identified with Yoruba, and the South East with Igbo, as well as in religious practices, with the core North associated with Islam and Sharia, and the southern States identified with Christianity. This defining perception of those living on particular parcels of land or region have been deployed to identify those who qualify as indigenes and settlers, and serve as the prism for the allocation of resources, despite being of uniform nationality (Hazen, 2013).

### **Nomadic herdsmen-local farmers conflict over land resource**

In recent times, the herdsmen-community violence has been increasing in frequency of attacks, magnitude of destruction, criminal scale and psychology of fear and insecurity. Although in the past, the pastoralist were semi-nomadic, largely moving their herds more during the dry seasons southwards where there could be better collection of water and arable land for grazing, these movements had minor skirmishes, arising from the destruction of planted farms. Today, the mission of the pastoralists is violent land grab using the instrument of terrorist-like attacks on communities for political and economic reasons. Apart from seeking some form of dominance through the instrumentality of violence in the areas, preventing the local farmers from accessing and cultivating their farms would, in the long run, decapitate their economic strength in the power relations in the Middle Belt region, which is actually the North-Central geo-political zone of Nigeria. It is imperative to clarify the point that while the North-Central zone is a political creation, the term Middle Belt region of Nigeria is a socio-cultural conception that has been specifically defined by the widespread of Christian religion amongst the population, anti-feudal political tendencies driven by the Islamic hegemony of the Sokoto Caliphate, language differential from the Hausa-Fulani dialects spoken in the core North, and mobilization tool for separate identity and political power.

Abdulbarkindo and Alupse (2015) posit that the ideological conception and categorization of the Middle Belt was to activate non-Muslim and non Hausa-Fulani consciousness against the northernization perceived as a ploy to Islamize the Christians and other non-Muslim groups in the geographic North, while keeping ethnic minorities marginalized in the socio-political development of Nigeria. Located largely in the mid-lands between the southern and northern part of the country (Ishaku, 2002), the Middle Belt include inhabitants in the following states: Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Kwara, Kogi, Niger, Federal Capital Territory, Adamawa, Taraba, southern Kaduna, southern Kebbi, southern Gombe, and two minority Local Government Areas – Tafawa Balewa and Bogoro - in southern Bauchi. These states have had heaviest dosage of violence over the struggles over land as economic and political resource, political power and leadership, as well as religious domination between the various local Christian ethnic communities (who are considered the indigenes) and the Muslim Hausa-Fulani population (who are considered the settlers).

The indigene-settler political violence in the Middle Belt region, majorly began in Plateau State between the ethnic Berom and the Hausa-Fulani in the 1980s in the heat of the defunct military regime of Ibrahim Babangida, leading to the creation of Jos North and Jos South local councils to separate the combatants. It failed to assuage the political interests of the ethnic combatants. The pastoralist combatants are now better armed with small arms and light weapons, and focused on Christian civilians, including children, women and the elderly, and more directly on destruction of prepared farmlands, killing, raping victims, abducting for cash ransom and decimation of communities by arson (Burnett, 2012). The insecurity situation in the Middle Belt region, especially in the rural agrarian communities has been worsened by the proliferation and use of assault rifles by the herdsmen, who could be sourcing their weapons from Boko Haram fleeing insurgents, as well as established cross-border trade routes. The violence has continued unabated due to the absence of security agents in such rural communities, the political influence of the Fulani urban elite who own the cattle as economic venture, and the collapse of traditional or alternative dispute resolution mechanisms to create mutual confidence to investigate and resolve issues of cattle killing claims by pastoralists, and their wanton destruction of lives, farms and property of the local communities. The herdsmen attacks have created pockets of predominantly Christian internally displaced persons in the various states in the Middle Belt region, arising from fear

of repeated violence and lack of resources or government assistance to rebuild their homes destroyed by the armed herdsmen. Although there are no comprehensive data on the perennial Fulani herdsmen-driven violence and killings in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, the Tiv-speaking ethnic group in Benue State alone announced in May 2016 that it has lost 984 of its kinsmen, women and children, created 29, 974 internally displaced persons in 10 local government areas in the state, while value of properties lost has been put at N40billion (\$20million) in the past three years (Ovuakporie and Agbakwuru, 2016). Between January and mid-March 2018 that the Open Grazing Prohibition and Establishment Law came into operation in two states in the region, no fewer than 1,350 lives have been lost in Benue and Taraba states, while 175,070 persons have been internally displaced in Benue state alone, with 80,450 being children, scattered across eight local camps created by the state government (Vanguard, 2018).

The armed herdsmen are heading southwards of the country, and the ripple effects are glaring. The land resource violence and criminal activities of the pastoral nomads are not limited to the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. The southern Christian-dominated states have witnessed the repeated violence linked to the herdsmen by the security agencies. In the desperate search for cash, the herdsmen have stepped up criminal activities of kidnapping for ransom, and high-profile victims have included the former Secretary to the Federal Government and Minister of Finance, Olu Falae, in Ondo State, South-West Nigeria; a traditional ruler who was also killed in Delta State, South –South Nigeria; politicians, clergymen, academicians, spouses of the elite, and many others (Vanguard, 2015; Amaize, 2016). Southern states in the Federation in the throes of herdsmen killings and violence include Oyo, Ekiti, Ondo, Edo, Delta Enugu, Ebonyi, Abia and Bayelsa.

### **Tension over proposed federal law for cattle grazing reserves**

Majority of the ethnic groups are at loggerhead with the Federal Government and the National Assembly over the proposed 2016 Legislation on the Establishment, Preservation and Control of National Grazing Reserves and Stock Routes and the Creation of National Razing Reserve Commission, and Federal Government's appropriation to spend N940m (\$4.7m) in the 2016 fiscal year to import Brazilian grasses and cultivate 50,000 hectares for pastoralists (Ogbeh, 2016). The serious contradictions in these policy frameworks have raised ethnic tempers over land grab and land access as well as resource colonization of the country by the Fulani ethnic group, with the alleged connivance of the political leadership at the federal level. The 36 – clause proposed legislation, before the National Assembly, makes provision for the establishment of a Commission, as a body corporate, charged with the functions of establishment, management, and control of cattle routes and grazing reserves in the Federation. The contentious provisions are that the Bill grants the Commission the liberty to identify and request for any expanse of farmlands and arable locations it deem fit, and directs State Governors to transfer identified grazing land to the Commission; any encroachment on the identified expanse of land attracts five years imprisonment or fine of N50,000 (\$252); and, apart from prior one-month notice before litigation, no court of law shall carry out its judgment or attachment of court process issued against the Commission in any action or suit without obtaining the prior consent of the Attorney General of the Federation.

The serious contradiction in the proposed legislation is that it collides with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which approves the Land Use Act of 1978 as the official policy that governs land administration in the Federation. Section 1 of the Land Use Act (1978) provides that “all land comprised in the territory of each State in the Federation are hereby vested in the Governor of that State and such land shall be held in trust and administered for the use and common benefit of all Nigerians.” From the provisions of the proposed Grazing Reserves legislation, the Commission will take over the powers of the State Governors and dictate what parcels of land it controls and the governors would be subordinate to it. It will mean that State Governors will transfer their constitutional powers to the Commission, for the economic interest of a few or one particular ethnic stock with a variant of commercial business – pastoralism.

More contentious is the provision for the Commission to “identify lands” for acquisition in various communities in the 36 States of the federation, which is an open invitation to deprive many local communities of other 250 ethnic groups of their ancestral and agricultural lands to serve the economic interests of the Fulani who are the only pastoral nomads in the country. In view of the fact that land is a serious economic and political resource in Nigeria, the serious ethnic tension generated by the provisions of the proposed legislation is based on the suspicion that the proposed legislation is a clever “attempt to hand over the entire country, its economy, its land, its citizens, its security and its future into the hands of one tribal group – the Fulani” (Pam, 2016: 4)

The ethnic suspicion and tension to the Grazing Routes and Reserves proposed legislation have been rising, especially in the southern regions of the country, with majority Christian population and numerous ethnic groups therein. Governments in the South West geo-political zone largely populated by the Yoruba ethnic stock, across the political party divide the country, have kicked against any offer of land for grazing reserves. Similarly, Governments of Enugu, Ebonyi and Abia States in the South East geo-political zone, the home of the Igbo ethnic group; Edo and Delta States in the South – South geo-political zone with several ethnic groups – Edo, Esan, Afemai, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Isoko, Ibo, Ika, Ndokwa – and Bayelsa State made up of the Ijaws, and Cross River populated by the Ibibios, have rejected the proposed bill, as working against the economic, socio-cultural and political interests of their citizens.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Across the African continent, cross-border transhumance issues are delicate as they always throw up land resource conflicts. The competition theory of ethnic conflict has enunciated the three dimensions of such struggles which can be confirmed from the land resource struggle amongst the multi-ethnic units in the continent. It could be seen that the three dimensions – demographic, economic and political – have occurred simultaneously and mutually re-enforcing in the context of the land resource competition that has enveloped the consciousness of the various ethnic groups. The activities of the herdsmen, assisted by foreigners of same Fulani ethnic stock have positioned the conflicts in terms of their increasing number of armed immigrants in the local community posing as threats by forcefully taking residency; the attempt to impose their economic activities and the destruction of lives and the productive niche of the local people now affecting the material conditions of their lives; as well as deploying the political leverage of their ethnic group in the country to attempt to legitimize their access to land in all the 36 states of the federation and in any of the 250 ethnic units.

The political economy of the escalating land resource violence in Nigeria spearheaded by Fulani herdsmen is a complex phenomenon that is already threatening the peaceful co-existence of the many ethnic groups that have held together the Nigerian Federation. Rooted in the economic survival and the socio-cultural lives of the ethnic groups, as land is a strategic resource for the Nigerian citizens, the violence has woken up the consciousness of the communities to the apparent design for domination by an ethnic group expressed in armed pastoral herdsmen. Definitely, cattle ownership and rearing is a private commercial activity of the Fulani elite in the northern parts of the country, who now enjoy political leverage with the Presidency of Muhammadu Buhari, a Fulani. Thus, the serious interest of the Federal Government to utilize huge sums of public funds in the 2016 national budget to import grasses from Brazil and set up 50,000 hectares of grazing reserve, is seen as the product of influence of the Fulani business elite on government, which may have embolden the cattle minders in the rural communities in the southern parts of Nigeria to forcefully engage in land grab and access.

The proposed legislation to empower a Commission to identify and take over any agrarian land in any State of the Federation for economic activities of pastoral nomads, and legally make such occupied lands the exclusive enclave of Fulani herdsmen, is viewed as deliberate design of the Fulani political and economic elite to impose the ethnic stock as compulsive land owners in all the States of the Federation. The fundamentals of economic survival, forceful displacement of the local Christian communities from their ancestral and agricultural lands, and the invasion of many local agrarian



communities by the tribal herdsmen have given new impetus for the rise of ethnic militias who may join the race for illicit arms to defend their kiths and kin, instead of the current trend of burying their dead.

A critical dimension to the land resource violence is the source of the AK-47 weaponry and assault rifles with the cattle attendants and herdsmen. The herd of cattle is largely owned by the wealthy economic, traditional and political elite, and the nomadic herdsmen and youths are more like employees. The possession of such illicit small arms and ammunitions by the herdsmen and youths are now common sight in Nigeria. The initial understanding was that cattle rustling undertaken by herdsmen criminal gangs' were always violent raids on the other hapless herdsmen clutching sticks and long knives. The understanding was that the rifles were needed to wade off rustlers who make the cattle owners suffer losses in real commercial terms. The cattle rustlers were thought to be armed herdsmen from the northern neighbouring countries, and Boko Haram insurgents who needed livestock to cater for their adherents and captives as well as raise funds for their operations. The inflow of small arms from the nomads and insurgents-laden Mali, Libya, Chad, Somalia, and escaping Boko Haram insurgents into the country, has worsened the situation. However, the spectacle is now different as the assault rifles have been freely used to unleash violence Christian - dominated agrarian communities in the Middle Belt and southern parts of the Nigeria. The consequence of the new scenario may be illicit arms stock-piling by the aggrieved communities and ethnic militias or vigilante groups to repel such attacks from herdsmen and protect their communal farmlands. Nigerian armed force and security agencies, stretched already by the activities of Boko Haram insurgents and suicide bombing activities, may be incapable of handling ethnic-driven armed struggles over land resource in different locations of the country.

The fear of political dominance by the Fulani ethnic stock, utilizing the instrumentality of armed herdsmen and the proposed legislation, is looming large in the mentality of the elite of other major and minor ethnic groups in the country. This had been linked to the religious and socio – cultural expansionist tendencies of the Fulani who had, in the pre-colonial times, spearheaded the religious Jihad that created the powerful Sokoto Caliphate and imposition of Islamic leadership (Sultanate and Emirship) and culture in several cities in the northern and Middle Belt areas, even up to northern parts of Edo State. Added to the fact that President Muhammadu Buhari is a Fulani elite, who has openly declared his ownership and rearing of cattle as his economic activity before taking on the mantle of political leadership of Nigeria in 2015, is the suspicion of the many ethnic groups in Nigeria that the federal government was attempting to boost the economic power of the Fulani ethnic group, and by implication, improve their political power relations with other contending social forces in the country.

Nigeria faces imminent threat of food shortages, and with her large population, the implication could be serious. The traditional farmers in the major agrarian areas of the country have been abandoning their farmlands largely due to the notorious activities of Boko Haram operatives in the North East, and Fulani herdsmen in the Middle Belt and Southern parts of the country. Reports indicate that subsistence and large-scale farmers have abandoned their farmlands and agricultural production for security reasons (Musa, et al, 2016), and traders of northern ethnic stock have cut down on the supply of cattle, rice, beans, and vegetables to the markets in the southern parts of the country, buoyed by the economic downturn, leading to sharp increase in the prices of staple foods in the country. The Vice – Chairman of All – Farmers Association of Nigeria, Terfa Yalu, and the National Chairman of Vegetable Farmers Association of Nigeria, Idris Sherrif, have raised alarm over the impending food shortages and starvation if peace does not return to the agrarian communities, as cattle dealers and vegetable farmers in the north were afraid of the threat by southerners to attack their kinsmen, while in the Middle Belt region, especially in Benue and Nasarawa States, regarded as the food production haven of the country, as well as in Enugu and Delta States, farmers were afraid to access and utilize their farmlands owing to the criminal activities of marauding herdsmen (Musa, Iorhemen, Cheke, Ofoma and Onyekwere, 2016).

It is recommended that Nigeria should quickly address the international dimension of the crisis by designing stricter border checks mechanisms for stop inflow of arms. Nigeria must find a balance

between protecting the spirit of protocol on free movement of persons on the ECOWAS sub-region and stricter border controls to detect arms. Terrorists thrive on the possession of arms and explosives which are deployed to terrorize locations and persons. The penchant of allowing cross-border transhumance, and overlooking the arms-bearing tendencies of the herdsmen is weak governance and security consciousness of the country. Nigerian security agencies must wake up to the realities of illicit arms and ammunition flooding the country, especially from the northern neighbouring countries. No ethnic group or business concern is above the law against illegal arms possession and usage, neither is there a legal waiver for herdsmen bearing assault rifles in the open, and terrorizing host communities with them. The Nigerian government has stated that the nomadic marauders were Malians, Chadian, Nigeriens and other foreigners; therefore it is essential for the Nigeria's borders to be properly manned, even with air-borne electronic monitoring systems, especially along the established international grazing routes.

The political and economic elite are stoking this ethnic cross-fire brewing across the country. It is imperative that the Fulani and other tribal elite that own these cattle invest in the setting up of grazing reserves for their livestock. Instead of attempting to use the National Assembly and the Federal Government to officially establish grazing routes and confiscate other people's agrarian, economic and ancestral lands, for their private business interests, and create unending violence, the cattle owners should face the realities of modern methods of pastoral agriculture by acquiring land for their livestock. The Federal Government planned hectares of land to be grassed from Brazil should first be located in the core northern parts of the country where there are uncultivated semi-arid landmass, and adopt the zero grazing policy of Kenya, in Eastern Africa, to curtail nomadic herdsmen conflicts with the local farmers. The northern states, with high population of Fulani, such as Sokoto, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Jigawa, Zamfara, Yobe, Borno, Adamawa and Gombe could benefit from the Federal Government intention in collaboration with the business elite to establish ranches, and avoid the socio-economic tension in the other parts of the country.

The proposed federal legislation, which is an attempt to use legal means to forcefully re-define the economic and social relations amongst the ethnic groups in Nigeria, is ill-advised. It is a bad legislation to confer land property on an ethnic stock to benefit the private business interests of the tribal elite, and thus, create several internally displaced persons and refugees, severed from their ancestral lands and means of livelihood, in their own country. This will be an open invitation to armed struggles in a country where serious economic crises and social tensions have been prevalent, and Nigerians living in poverty clocking over 61 per cent with the high unemployment (BBC, 2012). From the fragile ethnic relations in Nigeria, no ethnic group or local community would willingly give up its economic resource and ancestral property to assuage the business interests of an ethnic elite and their natives, and forceful deprive majority of ethnic groups of their economic and socio – cultural survival.

In this regard, the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, the umbrella elitist group catering for the interests of pastoral nomadism in the country, would be needed to audit the national identities of the herdsmen and identify the criminal elements in their midst disguising as herdsmen. Proper registration process should be undertaken, and State and Local Councils coordinators appointed to monitor the activities of herdsmen in the country. To drive this process, rein in loyalty and obedience of the herdsmen, and generate confidence in its implementation, the Arewa Consultative Forum, the high-profile elite platform protecting northern socio-economic, Islamic and political interests in the country, must buy into the peace moves to ensure enduring co-existence of the 250 ethnic groupings in Nigeria. Indeed, the directives from the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria and the Arewa Consultative Forum would constitute the most potent combination of ethnic, religious cum business instructions that the armed and unruly herdsmen would understand and obey to stop unleashing homicidal and destructive violence on host communities. These two northern-based elite groups hold the aces to arrest the ugly situation threatening Nigeria's security and stability because their members control the wealth and cattle business in the northern parts of the country, and without a stable middle belt and southern Nigeria, the risks for corporate and stable Nigeria remain very high. The days of

Biafra bloodletting and pogrom, that shook Nigeria to its foundation, may be child's play, with the inherent political tension, economic frustration, and tribal branding in the polity.

## References

Abdulbarkindo Adamu and Alupse Ben (2015) *Migration and Violent Conflict in Divided Societies: Non-Boko Haram violence against Christians in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria*, Working Paper No. 1, Abuja: Nigeria Conflict Security Analysis Network.

Blalock H. (1967) *Toward a Theory of Minority Group Relations*, Wiley, Berkeley

Burnett John (2012) "In South Sudan, Cows are Cash and Source of Friction", *National Public Radio*, August 16 Retrieved from [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org)

Burton John (1988) "Conflict Resolution: The Human Dimension," *The International Journal of Peace Studies*, 3:1, January. Retrieved from [www.gmu.edu/programs](http://www.gmu.edu/programs)

*Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (1999) Laws of the Federation, (Abuja: Federal Government Printer

Deininger Klaus (2003) "Land Policies for Growth and Poverty Reduction," in *World Bank Policy Research Report*, Washington DC: World Bank and Oxford University Press

*Encyclopedia Judaica* The Gale Group (2016) Retrieved from [www.bjeindy.org/resources](http://www.bjeindy.org/resources)

Federal Government of Nigeria (2003) *Nigeria at a Glance*, Abuja: Ministry of Information and Orientation

Global Terrorism Index Report (2015) by *Institute for Economics and Peace*, Retrieved from ([www.visionofhumanity.org](http://www.visionofhumanity.org)) ([www.economicsandpeace.org/research](http://www.economicsandpeace.org/research))

Handelman Howard (2011) *The Challenge of Third World Development*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall

Hannan M. T. (1979), "The Dynamics of Ethnic Boundaries in Modern States" in *National Development and the World System* by Meyer J. W. and Hannan M. T (eds.), Chicago: University Press

Hazen Jennifer (2013), "Survival at Stake: Violent Land Conflict in Africa", in *Small Arms Surveys*, Geneva Retrieved from [www.smallarmssurveys.org](http://www.smallarmssurveys.org)

Irobi Emmy (2005), *Ethnic Conflict Management in Africa: A Comparative Study of Nigeria and South Africa*, *Beyond Intractability*, May

Ishaka Jonathan (2002), "The Media and Ethno-Religious Conflicts in the Middle Belt of Nigeria", in *Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Democracy in Nigeria: Challenges*, by Alemika, E. E. and Okoye, F (eds.) Kaduna: Human Rights Monitor p. 224

Khazanov A. M. (1982), *Nomads and the Outside World*, Cambridge: University Press

Koopmans R. and Olzak Susan (2004), "Discursive Opportunities and the Evolution of Right Wing Violence in Germany", *American Journal of Sociology*, 110: 198 - 230

Land Use Act (1978), *Laws of the Federation*, (Abuja: Federal Government Printer

Light Ivan and Gold Steven (2000), "Ethnic Economics", reviewed in *Journal of Political Ecology: Case Studies in History and Society*, 9, Houston: Univeristy of Houston

Markov, G. (2010), *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Retrieved from [www.encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com)

Moore Jina (2010), "Africa's Continental Divide: Land Disputes" *Christian Science Monitor*, 30 January. Retrieved from [www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com)

*National Grazing Reserve (Establishment) Bill*, (2016) Abuja: National Assembly

National Planning Ministry (2016), *Budget of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 2016*, Abuja: Office of the Hon. Minister

Nnoli Okwudiba (1980), *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Press

Olzak Susan (2013), "Competition Theory of Ethnic / Racial Conflict and Protest", *The Wiley – Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, by David Snow, Donatella della Porta, Bert Klendermans and Dong McAdam (eds.), Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Oxfam (2011), "Land and Power: The Growing Scandal Surrounding the New Wave of Investments in Land" in *Oxfam Briefing Paper 151*, Oxford: Oxfam

Pantoja Anthonia, Perry Wilhelmina and Blourock (2014), "Towards the Development of Theory: Cultural Pluralism Re-defined", *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 4:1, September, Western Michigan University

Roger Blench (2001), *Pastoralists in the New Millenium*, FAO, pp.11 – 12,

Sanday Peggy (1970), "The Application of the Concept of Cultural Pluralism to the US Domestic Social Policy", *Revised Paper at 69<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of American Anthropological Association*, San Diego, California, November

Tolnay, S. E. and Beck, E. M (1995)., *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882 – 1930*, Urbana: University of Illionois Press

UNESCO (1989), *Nomads at the Crossroads*. Retrieved from [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

UNICEF (2015), *Assessing the Impact Boko Haram has on Children in the Four Affected Countries, namely Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger*. Retrieved from [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

Van der Zwan, Joost (2011) "Conflict-Sensitive Land Policy and Land Governance in Africa," *Strengthening the Economic Dimension of Peacebuilding Practice Note 7*, (London: International Alert. Retrieved from [www.international-alert.org](http://www.international-alert.org)

Allwell Okpi (2012), "Illegal Routes into Nigeria Countless – Immigration" *The Punch*, 15 July, p.17

Amaize Emma (2016), "Herdsmen kidnap Ubulu-Uku Traditional Ruler, *Vanguard*, 07 January, p. 1

Ameh Godwin (2016), "Fulani Invasion: Ortom Weeps Openly, Says Benue State is Under Siege" *Daily Post*, May 17. Retrieved from [www.dailypost.ng](http://www.dailypost.ng)

*BBC News* (2012), Africa: Nigerians Living in Poverty Rise to Nearly 61%. Retrieved from [www.bbc.com/news](http://www.bbc.com/news)

Daily Post (2016) "Some Herdsmen are Boko Haram members – Buratai", *Daily Post*, 26 May, p.1

Duru Peter (2018) "Farmers/Herdsmen crisis: 80,450 children trapped in eight IDP camps in Benue," *Vanguard*, 24<sup>th</sup> March, p.1



Kanu Chukwuemeka (2016), “Miyetti Allah members at NASS pushing Grazing Reserve Bill – Igbo Group, *Today Newspaper*, 17 April, p. 2

Masari Aminu (2016), quoted in “Herdsmen Menace: Buhari directs CDS, IG to deal with perpetrators”, *The Punch*, Lagos, 28 April, p. 2

Moore Jina (2010), “Africa’s Continental Divide: Land Disputes” *Christian Science Monitor*, 30 January. Retrieved from [www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com)

Musa Ibraheem, Cephas Iorhemen, Emmanuel Cheke, Kenneth Ofoma, Charles Onyekwere (2016), “Herdsmen Attacks: Food Scarcity Looms, Farmers Desert Farms over Insecurity”, *Sunday Telegraph*, 08 May, p. 4- 5

Ogbeh Audu (2016), “Grazing Reserves: FG imports grass from Brazil – Ogbeh, *The Nigerian Times*, 03 March. Retrieved from [www.nigeriantimes.ng](http://www.nigeriantimes.ng)

Pam James (2016), “Understanding the Fulani National Grazing Reserve Bill”, *African News Circle: Africa and the World in Perspective*, 02 April. Retrieved from [www.africannewsircle.com](http://www.africannewsircle.com)

Ovuakporie Emman and Agbakwuru Johnbosco (2016), “Agatu Attack: IGP, Dambazau, DSS, Herdsmen’s absence stall Reps Probe” *Vanguard*, 26 May, p.35

Soyinka Wole (2016), “Soyinka: Nomads Cannot Place Themselves Above The Law”, *The Nation Newspaper*, 29 April, pp. 2 – 3

The Punch (2016), “Notorious Herdsmen are Malians, Chadians – IGP”, *The Punch*, 14 February, pp.1 – 2

Vanguard (2016), “Afenifere, Others caution NASS over Grazing Reserve Bill, *Vanguard*, 14 April, p. 2