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Keywords: "herdsmen/farmers" crisis; space and identity; elite conspiracy; climate change.

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ABSTRACT

Protracted herdsmen/farmers' crisis has compounded endemic internal conflicts in Nigeria. Despite the volume of existing scholarship on the phenomenon, the complexity it has continued to assume has created the lacuna for scholarly reimagining. Using primary and secondary sources of data, this study seeks to establish the nexus between elitist politicisation of space and identity and the intricacies of herdsmen/farmers' conflict from historical, political, sociological, economic, cultural and structural variables. Findings revealed that although the harmful effect of climate change have triggered aggressive herdsmen/farmers' interactions, the politics of space and identity arising from politicization of Land Use Act; elite conspiracy; indigene/settlers dichotomy; subversion of mutual interests among stakeholders in crop/cattle agro-economy; and partisan disposition of governments' intervention strategies constitute the central problematic. Continued politicisation of herdsmen/farmers' crisis is a potential trigger of civil unrest and a threat to intergroup harmony and national integration. Therefore, stakeholders should facilitate problem-solving policy responses to the inherent challenges confronting crop/cattle agro-economy and influence inclusive governance, thereby promoting equal sense of belonging and intergroup harmony in the citizenry.

Keywords: herdsmen/farmers' crisis; space and identity; elite conspiracy; climate change.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's return to civil rule sequel to the evolution of the fourth republic in 1999 rekindled hope of stable democratic political order that would set the pace for national integration and accelerated development. Unfortunately, such expectation has remained wishful thinking as the country has continued to grapple with diverse protracted national challenges in socioeconomic, political and structural terms. This obnoxious development has provoked internal crises manifesting in terrorism and insurgency, communal conflicts, among other inter-group conflicts in unusual magnitude and intensity in the historical anal of the country. The prevailing violent confrontations between herdsmen and farmers, which began to attract unprecedented attention in 2015 has compounded the challenge of endemic internal conflicts in Nigeria. The crisis has become notorious so much that the statistics of the development deficit, humanitarian disaster and socio-security damages it has caused in terms of loss of lives and property, psychological trauma incited, unannounced dehumanizing instances are difficult to ascertain (Ojo & Oyebode, 2018).

Although no part of the country is exclusively exempt from protraction of herdsmen/farmers' crisis, the North Central region, comprising Plateau, Nasarawa, Kogi, Benue, Niger and Kwara States is the hub of the crisis. The intensity of the crisis has continued to cripple socioeconomic activities, undermine legitimate social order, and aggravate humanitarian crises in several communities. Uneven competition between herdsmen and farmers for land resources have instigated social frictions that have provoked violent conflicts in the garb of ethnic and sectarian discrimination. The complexity of the crises is so overwhelming that it has attracted the attention of the international community.

No doubt, the devastating effect of climate change manifesting in desertification, deforestation, population explosion and related environmental and demographic constraints has complicated uneven struggle for socioeconomic space for the use of herdsmen and farmers (Godwin, 2018). However, the challenge of climate change would have ordinarily been susceptible to management if the political elite have not manipulated the situation to their own selfish and parochial advantage. Increasing incidences of herdsmen/farmers crisis in the country confirms elite conspiracy for ethno-communal cleavages, sheer criminality, grassroots terrorism, sectarian acrimony, group hatred and ethnic cleansing. Continued politicisation of herdsmen/farmers' crisis is a potential trigger of civil unrest and a threat to democratic experimentation and national integration.

What is more, given the depletion of arable land for agricultural activities along the Lake Chad basin also as a result of climate change and government expansionist policies and developmental activities such as urbanisation and industrialization, as well as politicization of Land Use Act, the struggles between herdsmen and farmers have become more aggressive. This has escalated into violent confrontations that have resulted in wanton destruction of lives and property, forced displacement of humans and related humanitarian challenges.

Despite the volume of scholarly attention that the phenomenon has attracted over the years, the complexity it develops daily with some parts of the north and the middle belt taking the lead create the lacuna for reimagining the subject matter. Much that is relatively revealing is scanty about the dissection of elitist politicization of primordial disposition in the dynamics, magnitude, intensity and manifestation of herdsmen/farmers crisis in the country. Employing source materials from primary and secondary data, therefore, the preoccupation of this treatise is to interrogate the nexus between elitist manipulation of space and identity and the prevailing dynamics of herdsmen/farmers' conflict in Nigeria.

The thesis advanced in this study is that the intricacies of herdsmen/farmers crisis from historical, political, sociological, economic, cultural and structural variables provide the modus vivendi for understanding the changing nature of the crisis with a view to engaging in mutually transforming management approaches. How has politics of space and identity complicated herdsmen/farmers' crisis in Nigeria? What are the implications of protracted herdsmen/farmers' crisis for national integration? These posers would stimulate critical analysis on the dynamics of herdsmen/farmers' crisis within the context of Nigeria's heterogeneous composition.

II. CONCEPTUAL DISCOURSE

Identity is often described according to cultural, linguistic, religious, social, gender, racial, and/or territorial groups to which a people or groups of people belong (Fisher *et al*, 2000). Thus, identity has remained one of the most sensitive elements of value commonly shared by a group of people, which defines their sense of collective existence. Hence, in-group members are concerned about a group's outcomes and identify their common fate with one another (Pruitt & Kim, 2004).

Cultural neighborhood describes two groups that are ethnically and culturally different but interact with each other through activities such as trade and social interactions (Bukari, Sow, & Scheffran, 2018). Identity is significantly influenced by relationships between and/or among a particular group of people and the other, and within which context attempts to express cultural dominance are demonstrated (Fisher *et al*, 2000). This explains why identity related conflicts usually manifest in diverse dimensions because a people's sense of identity can change rapidly in response to threats to human needs to belong and secure (Fisher *et al*, 2000).

The Fulanis, totaling over 30 million people living in the northern states of Nigeria are an ethnic group who are mostly shepherds and cattle herdsmen. Historically, they migrate from one area to another in search of greener pasture for their livestock. They are mostly Muslims who

speak the Hausa language, and they share the similar interest of protecting their cultural identity (Gordon, 2000). On the other side of the divide, majority of the farmers are Christians. They protect Christian rights and consider other groups as outsiders who do not share the same value and norms with them. This persistent conflicts of interests have been manipulated by the political elite over the years, which have invariably provoked the prevailing dimension of Fulani-farmer conflict (Clark, 2018).

The relationships between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria could be explained within the context of this analysis of identity. Humans are characteristically social beings, who feel secure in an environment where their sense of belonging and identity are not compromised. Both herdsmen and farmers co-habiting the same cultural and geographical environments have been leaving in mutual suspicion that has provoked long-term conflict arising from protracted real or perceived injustice of socioeconomic, political, structural, and cultural dimensions.

In this analysis, by herdsmen/farmers conflict is meant the crises ensued between herdsmen and farmers arising from clash of economic interests between the two groups. Originally, relations between herdsmen and farmers have been relatively harmonious. It was largely a symbiotic relationship in which both parties derived some comparative advantages from each other, which has invariably enhanced social cohesion and economic gains between them. For instance, the herdsmen enjoyed relative measure of grazing rights along specific grazing areas, and farmers relied on the excretion of the cattle as manure on their farmlands.

However, conflicts between herdsmen and farmers began to manifest in violent proportion, and on a relatively unprecedented scale at the wake of the fourth Republic in 1999. The crisis is prevalent in some parts of northern Nigeria including Kaduna, Nasarawa, Taraba, Zamfara, Gombe, Kogi, Benue, and Plateau States, albeit with pockets of sporadic attacks and counter-attacks in southern part of the country. It

has been claimed that herdsmen and farmers' conflicts have occurred with the devastating implications for grassroots development and national security.

For reasons beyond the effect of climate change, the crisis has continued to assume varying dimensions on account of the politics behind the management of space and identity on the part of stakeholders. The dynamics of this politics and the devastating implications this has had for humanitarian protection and national integration constitute the preoccupation of this analysis.

This study argues that poor political and policy responses to these frictions on the part of successive governments particularly at federal and state levels has informed politicization of the crisis along identity direction. Both groups have different languages and traditions. Failure of the stakeholders to downplay the politics behind the crisis and proactively respond to deteriorating environmental conditions have led to the evolution of self-defense forces and militias, who participated in further violence, especially between Muslim Fulani herdsmen and Christian farmers (Bukari, Sow, & Scheffran, 2018).

III. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This analysis is anchored on Social Identity Theory, propounded by Henri Tajfel in 1971. The theory postulates that social beliefs and social structures are essential tools in developing a cultural perspective on intergroup relations. The thrust of the theory is that people are bonded with similar values and worldview such as hobbies, values, and interests within which context they have a sense of belonging within their respective groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It attributes the cause of in-group favoritism to a need for positive distinctiveness and perceived group status, legitimacy, stability, and permeability (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It analyzes how differences and similarities between groups can ignite in-group favoritism and bias. The theory indicates that in-group members have the tendencies to feel self-esteem and be display pride in their cultural heritage. In other words, people can feel good about themselves by enhancing group values and

ideology. However, the in-group might discriminate and exclude the out-group and hold prejudice or racism against them. The theory further contends that social comparison means after individuals categorize themselves within a group and identify themselves as being members of that group, they tend to compare themselves with another group on the one hand, and against another group on the other. This simply suggests discriminatory tendencies are inherent in the interaction between and among people of in-group versus out-group dichotomy. Hence, any manipulation of opposing interests can instigate open confrontation at any slightest provocation.

With reference to relation between herdsmen and the farmers, differing economic interests have constituted a critical aspect of their contact. Fulani herdsmen have their tradition and culture which might be different from other cultures. Farmers might also consider themselves vulnerable and believe in their rights of protecting their property and safely living in their communities without out-group disturbances. They would have the urge to protect their social identity and might act aggressively to prevent other groups from trespassing on their lands (Gordon, 2000). Their differing interests seems not susceptible to negotiation because certain forces have always manipulated their inherent differing interests to perpetuate the ensuing crises. Indeed, the appellation credited to the practitioners of animal husbandry as 'Fulani herdsmen' is a product of the frictions between the two groups and their respective supporters. This is said to be prejudicial since there are non-Fulanis who are also herdsmen, and whereas the farmers are not acclaimed to a particular ethnic extraction.

IV. BEYOND CLIMATE CHANGE: ANATOMY OF CAUSATION OF HERDSMEN/FARMERS' CRISIS

Originally, both the herdsmen and their farmers counterparts dichotomized along their respective dominant occupations have live in peace and harmony. For instance, the Fulani herdsmen had always established friendly relationships with community members, and upheld the ideals of

mutual interactions by sharing resources such as land and water.

However, the deliberate manipulation of the causation, consequences and control of the crisis are the determinant factors responsible for the dynamics of its manifestation and escalation into various violent proportions (Ojo & Oyeboode, 2018). For instance, in 2016 alone, it was observed that the crisis had resulted in the killings of over 2,000 people and tens of thousands displaced (International Crisis Group, 2017). Also in 2017, it was acclaimed that 12 out of the 23 Local Government Areas of the state had been taken over by Fulani herdsmen (Olorok, 2017). In Agatu Local Government Area of the state, former Nigeria's Senate President David Mark claimed that more than 500 lives were lost during the herdsmen attack in the community in February 2016 while about 10 communities were razed (Aborisade, 2016). The frequent attacks on the Nigeria farmers has invariably weakened grassroots development. In June 2018, 'Fulani' herdsmen reportedly attacked 11 villages in Plateau State, killed 86 people and torched 50 houses (Punch, 2018). On April 25, 2016, about 500 armed herdsmen attacked Ukpabi-Nimbo, a community in Enugu State, Eastern Nigeria, killing 46 people and burning down a Catholic church there (Igata, 2016).

This section seeks to dissect the anatomy of the complex factors responsible for the protracted and intractable nature of the crisis, which has continued to spread across the country like wildfire. The argument is that despite the reality of a combination of factors determined by climate change, elitist manipulation of a plethora of other indices have sustained the trending of the crisis thus far.

4.1 Climate Change

Without missing words, climate change is a critical factor in the activities of herdsmen and farmers. The changing condition arising from global warming and depletion has grossly had negative effect on the availability of land resources required for the economic activities of both herdsmen and farmers. The desert

encroachment from the Sahara towards the Sahel region and other associated climatic conditions including deforestation, afforestation, desertification and poor weather have continued to limit access to land, water, grasses and related essentials for agro-cattle economy. These problems are compounded by the exposure of Lake Chad to unprecedented degree of dryness. Within a period of 30 years, the lake has reduced by almost 45,000km² to 3000km², provoking the displacement of about 10.5 million people (Udeh, 2018). Thus, scarcity of land resources for agro-cattle businesses has instigated herdsmen and farmers to be sensitive of any issues relating to their survival.

It could be historically misleading to contend that stakeholders have not attempted to respond to early warning signs of the consequences of climate change on agro/cattle economy in Nigeria. One major responsive initiative to the challenge of climate change by constituted authority is policy on land use Act. For instance, during the first republic, government of northern region designed the grazing reserves policy in 1965. The aim of that initiative was to make adequate provision for cattle rearing within the context of international best practices. Under the grazing reserves system, government provided space, water and vaccinations for the livestock while the herdsmen paid taxes to the government in return. Unfortunately, successful governments failed to consolidate on the initial efforts regarding grazing reserves over the years. Hence, the initiative became one of the neglected aspects of the agricultural sector in the northern region.

That notwithstanding, the basic factor responsible for the fluidity and dynamic manifestation of herdsmen/farmers' crisis in Nigeria is manipulation of politics and religion by the political elite. The Northern political elite have been accused of manipulating religion to score political goals at the expense of national peace and security. This obnoxious practice of politicization of religion has always instigated religious extremism, which upholds hate-inclined ideology that seeks to eliminate real or imagined opposition.

4.2 Changes in Pastoralism and Farming Practices

A plethora of factors including development activities, socioeconomic variables and demographic variation have accounted for changes in the practice of both cattle rearing and crop farming across the country. Cattle herdsmen lost access to green grass for their flock while farmers lost access to arable lands for planting. This has caused unprecedented degree of competitive pressures on available environmental resources by stakeholders across group divides, capable of igniting violent confrontation. Successive governments have taken cognizance of this, which informed the establishment of a number of agencies, commissions, and programmes. Nevertheless, the political class are wont to add primordial and group colouration to almost all public projects and programmes. This invariably undermines the prospects of any government intervention.

V. RURAL BANDITRY AND CATTLE RUSTLING

It has been argued that the intensity of herdsmen and farmers' crisis over the years has induced other dimensions of criminality with attendant humanitarian disaster including grassroots terrorism, ethnic militancy, group hatred, banditry and sporadic reprisal attacks in other parts of the country. With particular reference to rural banditry and cattle rustling, many grassroots dwellers in various parts of northern Nigeria have suffered incalculable damages in terms of humanitarian crisis and loss of lives. For instance, in Katsina State, cattle rustling and banditry remain major problems in southern part of the state especially communities surrounding the Rugu forest. The forest spans over 220 kilometres, and is believed to be a key centre for the illicit trading activities. In 2016, cattle rustlers launched an attack on the rural communities in Faskari and Sabuwa Local Government Areas in which over 100 lives were lost (Shehu, Victor & Binta, 2017).

In Zamfara State, it was estimated that bandits and cattle rustlers killed 1,135 people between

2011 and 2012 (International Crisis Group, 2017). Cattle rustling and rural banditry create a sense of siege, which force some pastoralists to migrate in search of security for themselves and their herds and which in turn heighten the competition for scarce environmental resources with their host communities. The problems of attacks and counter attacks become compounded as some unscrupulous elements within the political circle manipulate the scenario to acquire cheap, parochial grassroots political gains.

VI. POPULATION EXPLOSION AND LOSS OF GRAZING RESERVES

Much of the environmental degradation has been a consequence of efforts by a growing number of people to secure improved standards of living and spaces for social activities such as recreational centres (Eze, 2014). While Nigeria's population at independence in 1960 was only 45.2 million, a report by the National Bureau of Statistics for July 2018, estimated the country's population to be 194 million in 2016. This accounted for an average growth rate of 3.28 per cent between 2012 and 2016 (Ogundipe & Obinna, 2018). With this population explosion, most of the grazing reserves established by the northern regional government in the 1960s were lost to development and expansionist policies (Crisis group, 2017). Additionally, the former Northern regional government that created these reserves has now been subdivided into 19 states, with some of the reserves straddling into two or more states, creating problems of jurisdictions and effective management. This has significantly reduced the availability of designated grazing reserves, forcing herdsmen to seek pastures elsewhere.

VII. RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

No doubt, the protracted Sahelian drought has compelled the herdsmen southwards from Chad, Niger Republic and far Northern Nigeria to contend for grazing land and water with the agrarian communities in the middle-Belt, thereby provoking violent conflicts. According to the International Crisis Group, this crisis has compelled the herdsmen from Chad, Niger Republic and Northern Nigeria to contend for

grazing land and water with agrarian communities in the Middle-Belt, which invariably instigate violent conflicts (The Punch, July 2, 2014). That notwithstanding, the crucial driving force of the crisis is the manipulation of religion and politics by the political elite in an attempt to accomplish selfish goals at the expense of the common good of the citizenry. The political elite of the northern extraction have been accused of using religion to gain political ascendancy, and in the process, have incited religious extremist groups that fabricate hate-filled ideology that detests and attempts to exterminate adherents of opposing faiths (The Punch Editorial, 2/7/2014. P. 24). Northern Nigeria has been a notorious theatre of conflicts that are often linked to sectarian differences and religious extremism. Since its ugly evolution in 2009, Boko Haram insurgency has provoked untold humanitarian disasters, loss of lives and incalculable destruction of public and private property. It has also crippled many legitimate activities including the closing of schools and breakdown of public health system (Campbell and Harwood, 2018). This development has forced herdsmen to many to move southwards in search of security for themselves and alternative land for pasturing their herds. This has invariably induced with wilful encroachment and distorted claims and counter-claims of land ownership and related resources by herdsmen and farmers, which usually triggers mutual distrust and group hatred, thereby compounding the politics of contestation for space along identity divides.

VIII. MANAGEMENT OF HERDSMEN/FARMERS' CRISIS: AN INTERROGATIVE ANALYSIS

The unprecedented protraction and changing nature of herdsmen/farmers' crisis in Nigeria complicated peace and security challenges in the country. Considering the magnitude of internal crisis in the country, concerns have been raised to the effect that they are capable of not only pushing a particular region to the brink of total collapse, but could also drift the entire country to the brink of a failing state (Ojo & Oyebode, 2018). Although, much of the violence triggered by

Herdsmen/farmers' confrontations are perpetrated in north-central and middle-belt of Nigeria, the domino effect of the crisis on peace and security has continued to spread across the country like contagious pandemic (Aluko & Alagbe 2018). Hence, governments at all levels and other stakeholders have attempted to address the crisis, albeit with relative measures of problems and prospects.

Urbanisation and modernisation are an integral parts of development activities and expansionist policies undertaken by governments at all levels at one time or the other. Such activities have invariably compelled herdsmen/farmers' migration from their various original domains to some other parts of the country. Since development projects are an inevitable components of change and continuity, it behooves on governments to acquire space for such. What is problematic is that governments especially at federal and state levels have failed to carry various interest groups along in concrete terms in their respective policy initiatives. Hence, the problem has become multi-faceted with the devastating consequences on development, peace and security. By way of self-help, herdsmen and farmers became unduly hostile to one another in the struggle for land acquisition for their respective socioeconomic advantage. This obnoxious development that is dichotomized as herdsmen/farmers crisis has heightened security challenges across the country, particularly in the Northcentral region.

The interventions of governments at various levels have always spanned the three tiers of government: federal, states and the local governments, each employing various executive, legislative and judicial instruments at its disposal. However, governments at all levels have not squarely addressed the problem because of overriding parochial interests at the expense of national interests. For instance, whenever there are clashes between herdsmen and farmers in any given locality, federal government is fond of applying force to quell the violence by deploying the police and the army to the crisis area. Such approach have turned counterproductive on many occasions as it incites counter-attacks because the

security personnel are interrupted by the political elite in the process of performing their duties.

Even in a situation where they are willing to perform in the interest of equity, common justice and fairness, the security outfit is handicapped by certain administrative, legislative and political bottlenecks deliberately perpetrated by government's actions and/or inactions, which uncontrollably undermine their capability. These include manipulation of intelligence reports; lack of cooperation among various components of security outfit, gross shortage of mobilization resources, inadequate and substandard equipment and weapons as well as short supply of manpower within security workforce. For instance, while the security personnel are not adequately equipped, substantial funds as well as sophisticated weapons including General-purpose machine gun (GPMGs), AK47 rifles, rockets and rocket propellers are found in the possession of hoodlums.

Hence, application of force, which is the exclusive instrument of the federal government has not yielded the expected results of stemming the tide of open confrontations between the conflicting parties. Mutual suspicion that characterize the actions of the security operatives have encouraged unstructured processing and possession of both sophisticated weapons, and proliferation of small arms and light weapons at the grassroots by the locals also at the instance of the political elite. Given unrestricted access to weapons and resources to mobilise for social unrest, intergroup complications easily get triggered into open confrontations at the slightest provocation, resulting in wanton destruction of lives and property and other humanitarian crisis. Public opinions have confirmed the complacent inclination of political figures in addressing herdsmen/farmers crisis in the country. For instance, Professor Wole Soyinka, African foremost Nobel Laureate has submitted that the certain interests groups in the public have accused the incumbent president, Mohammed Buhari of being unjust and unfair in his handling of herdsmen/farmers' crisis in the country because of their observation of his erstwhile language of complacency and accommodative tendency in the

face of unmerited brutalization perpetrated by certain herdsmen suspected to be of Fulani extraction against their victims. Soyinka urged president Buhari to take decisive political action against the accused killer herdsmen with a view to convincing the public that his administration is not tolerant of forceful and unlawful land seizure anywhere in the country (see Adeniji and Olorok, 2018). Moreover, administrative procedures, including presidential visit, legislative intervention, Commissions of Inquiry and judicial measures have also been found wanting because of manipulating tendencies on the part of various concerned interest groups.

Traditional institutions, which are the custodians of indigenous methods of conflict management particularly at the grassroots have been compromised and rendered almost impotent in managing the affairs of their respective domains. This is yet another dimension of politicisation of herdsmen/farmers' crisis by the political elite, which has constituted a major impediments to effective management of the crisis. The problem becomes more complicated as grassroots elite manipulate the scenario to protect parochial interests. Findings revealed that elite of local extraction- chiefs, community leaders, village heads, among others also constitute sensitive part of the forces that provoke the manifestation of herdsmen/farmers crises in their respective domains because of their interests in cattle business. They put cattle in the custody of herdsmen, thereby unduly placing them in possession and control of available landed space at the expense of others who practice farming and related land-based production activities (Interviews conducted on December 10, 2019- Abuja).

The deduction from the foregoing is that stakeholders at all levels have always employed reactionary at the expense of needs-based conflict transformation agenda towards addressing the problem. One common denominator of these fire brigade approaches was that the needs, interests and aspirations of herdsmen and farmers are not properly identified and accorded the deserved policy responses. This has caused most of those interventions to become an exercise in futility as

they turn counterproductive, and aggravated identity discrimination, mutual suspicions and distrust along communal, ethnic and regional formations (Ojo & Oyeboode, 2018).

IX. THE RUGA PHENOMENON: ELITIST POLITICIZATION OF SPACE AND IDENTITY

The escalating conflicts between herdsmen and Farmers has continued to undermine the nation's security architecture. Since the violence escalated in 2015, an estimated 300,000 people have fled their ancestral domains. This has hindered crop farming and animal husbandry. Similarly, a report by Global Index (2019) revealed that the escalation of Herdsmen/farmers' crisis has intensified hate-induced killings in recent years in the garb of contestation for space. For example, on January 1, 2018, in Logo and Guma Local Government Areas of Benue State, 73 persons were killed during an attack that was credited to certain herdsmen. Unfortunately, the then Inspector-General of Police, Ibrahim Idris was accused of trivializing incident by reducing it to a communal clash. Again, in April, 2018, it was reported that herdsmen slaughtered 19 worshipers among whom were two Catholic priests and farmers in Gumi Local Government Area of Benue State.

Also, on Tuesday, April 15, 2028, herdsmen were alleged of invading St. Ignatius Quasi Parish of Catholic Church in Ukpor Mbalon, Gwer Local Government Area of Benue State. The invasion resulted to the killing of 16 worshippers who went for morning Mass, two of whom were Priests, namely Rev. Fr. Joseph Gor and Rev. Fr. Felix Tyolaha (The Punch, 27/4/2018. P. 18). On the same day, the invaders disrupted the funeral ceremony in the same Gwer Local Government Area, killed three persons, and set 35 buildings ablaze.

Poor responses particular on the part of the Federal Government to these unlawful acts have provoked some sections of the public to accuse the government treating the problem with sentiments rather than evolving problem-solving policy

initiatives that could facilitate win-win outcomes. For instance, a claim credited to the Minister of Defence, Mansur Dan-Ali to the effect that Fulani herdsmen were killing because farmers blocked their pre-independence grazing routes (The Punch, 27/4/2018) was considered as reflecting partisan disposition on the part of the government.

In reaction to the seemingly unwholesome treatment on the part of the government, certain stakeholders have encouraged the option of self-help. For instance, General Theophilus Danjuma, a former Chief of Army Staff accused the military of partisanship and implored the masses to consider the option of defending themselves (The Punch, 27/4/2018). This is a reflection of incompetence and incapacitation of the country's security architecture.

Considering the protraction and fluidity of herdsmen/farmers' crisis, coupled with the failure of subsisting measures to squarely address the crisis, several solutions have been proposed for the resolution of the conflicts. One of such proposed initiatives was Rural Grazing Area settlement programme (RUGA), which the Federal Government of Nigeria under General Muhammad Buhari administration introduced in 2018. The proposed policy aimed to plant cattle settlement across the 36 States of the federation. The federal government presented it as a panacea to the incessant Crop-Farmers-Herdsmen conflicts in the country. However, a popular opinion among stakeholders across the country other than the Fulani community who deal in cattle economy is that RUGA policy is a premeditated attempt to grab land from the original owners and tactically transfer ownership to Fulani herdsmen even in communities outside of their historical heritage. Hence, from all indications, the implementation of the RUGA Policy has the tendency to polarize the country and further devastate the fragile corporate existence of Nigeria instead of addressing the problem for which it was initiated to solve. It is argued by many apart from the Fulanis that the programme was devised for the exclusive benefit of a specific ethnic group, which is a crude assault

on the collective sensibility of the majority in a multi-ethnic country like Nigeria.

RUGA is considered as the height of the impunity that has been carried on for many years now by certain political elite in the country. Protagonists of the initiative posit that it is a clear demonstration of the absence of sensitivity on the part of the federal government to the plight of the generality of the citizenry. No matter how RUGA is dressed, it connotes no other thing than a measure in ethnic domination and conquest as it seeks to establish territories for Fulani herdsmen all over the country. Hence, it is considered as an attempt to plant yet another dimension of seed of identity discord in the country, which has the tendency to implode at some point if it is allowed to develop into maturation.

The foregoing suggests that RUGA is not sensitive to the diversity and heterogeneity of the Nigerian state. Hence, it is considered as a premeditated calculation of forceful land grabbing from the original owners in their respective domains. This presumably constitutes a potential danger for Nigeria's already fragile multi-ethnic composition. Rather than complicating the problem of mutual suspicion in the name of policy response to herdsmen/farmers' crisis, government needs to take cognizance of the inextricable complexity of the historical, political, economic, ecological and cultural dynamics of the crisis with a view to evolving all-inclusive problem-solving strategy in the interest of national integration.

X. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examine the nexus between elitist manipulation of space and identity and the intensity of herdsmen/farmers' crisis in Nigeria. Findings revealed that although the harmful effect of climate change including deforestation, desertification, drought and flooding have triggered aggressive herdsmen/farmers' interactions, the politics of space and identity arising from politicization of Land Use Act, indigene/settlers dichotomy; subversion of mutual interests among stakeholders in crop/cattle agro-economy; and partisan

disposition of governments' intervention strategies constitute the central problematic. The underlying causation of herdsmen/farmers' crisis is informed by longstanding economic, social and humanitarian issues. It is lucid that an ill-thought RUGA Cattle Settlement Policy that has generated so much controversy along ethnic divides is not the answer to the protracted herdsmen/farmers conflicts. The suspension of the RUGA Policy by the FGN is a clear demonstration of government's failure to conduct appropriate consultations with relevant stakeholders before policy formulation.

A tree does not grow from top down to bottom up. In the same vain, government should face the reality that creating a peaceful atmosphere in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria must involve policy frameworks and socioeconomic initiatives that address the aspirations of the people within the context of its heterogeneous composition. Government has to appreciate the salient fact that good governance is the cornerstone of sustainable peace and security in any given society. And this must begin from within because no level of global governance will compensate for the absence of productive governance and agenda for development encapsulated in healthy social fabric and decent living conditions. On that note, the following recommendations are made:

1. The political elite and other stakeholders should underplay politicising herdsmen/farmers' conflicts by ensuring problem-solving policy responses to the inherent challenges confronting crop/cattle agro-economy. Restructuring the political space along ideals of federalism and inclusive governance will promote equal sense of belonging in the citizenry and facilitate intergroup harmony in the country.
2. Government in partnership with the private sector can promote mutually inclusive agro-cattle economy. Farmers can be encouraged to develop large scale cattle fodder industry, while farmers can depend on wastes from cattle as manure for enriching their land. This is a challenge that comes with the regulated ranching system which has the prospect of influencing a win-win outcome for all stakeholders on both sides of the divide.

3. Federal government of Nigeria should deploy a Joint Task Force comprising military, police, paramilitary and civil institutions to all the affected states as an immediate response to the conflict. This will help restore law and order and build confidence of the general populace in the ability of the government to respond to threats in the interest of enduring peace and integrated development.
4. There is need to encourage community policing leveraging on the already existing vigilante system in most states. Community policing will help in intelligence gathering about the conflict while civil police would respond to such threats. This will help address the challenges of waiting for the federal government to give directives before security operatives are deployed to crises areas.
5. The Federal government should vigorously pursue a holistic campaign that will seek the support of all actors, including herdsmen, farmers, state and local governments, to accept the idea of modern ranching as an alternative to traditional migration of herdsmen which causes friction and other associated threats.

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