Herders-Farmers' Conflicts: A Critical Analysis of Intergroup Relations In Nigeria

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Abstract

Intergroup conflicts, arising from hostile relationships between groups with parallel goals and interests, are ubiquitous. Intergroup conflicts derive from the fact that humans live in group formations because of their nature as social animals. Due to the conflictual nature of humans, intergroup relations are sometimes tempered by tensile and antagonistic conditions characterized by conflicts in forms of competition, discrimination, alienation, subjugation, intimidation, extermination, war, etc. depending on the social formation of any society. This is the case in Nigeria, a place where herders and farmers are engaged in incessant fratricidal clashes across the country. This paper therefore seeks to explain the dynamics of intergroup conflicts in Nigeria by using the farmers-herders' conflict as an example. In providing a perspective to herders-farmers' clashes in the context of intergroup relations in Nigeria, the study utilizes the Territorial Imperative Theory by relying on secondary data for sourcing information to explain the nature of intergroup conflicts between the Fulani herders and the native farmers in Nigeria that have assumed a violent dimension.

Keywords: herders, farmers, conflict, intergroup relations, Nigeria

Introduction

Intergroup conflicts, arising from hostile relationships between groups with parallel goals and interests, are ubiquitous. Intergroup conflicts derive from the fact that humans live in group formations because of their

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nature as social animals. As contended by the famous Greek philosopher, Aristotle, "man's life outside the social group makes him either a 'god' or a 'beast'" (Shankar-Rao, 1997). The statement underscores the social necessity for human beings to live in group.

Remarkably, the study of human social groups in one form or the other has been at the epicentre of many social science disciplines. This is especially so because in modern societies, a myriad of social groups exist in sizes and varieties and individuals usually belong to many social groups and different social categories such as family, religious, educational, age-grade, community and professional groups. The existence of numerous human groups is premised on the fact that social relationships are delineated based on varying social, political, economic, physical, and work characteristics in which all individuals naturally belong to two or more of the existing social categories (Forsyth, 2014).

Basically, the nature of social living which conditions human beings to live in groups also makes intergroup conflicts inevitable (De Dreu, 2014). Intergroup conflicts are negative forms of social relationships within and among groups. This is because, it is not always possible to have smooth and perfect interactions among several groups, cohabiting or interacting with one another in human societies. Due to the conflictual nature of humans, intergroup relations are sometimes tampered with by tensile and antagonistic conditions characterized by conflicts in form of competition, discrimination, alienation, subjugation, intimidation, extermination and war in human societies. This is the case of Nigeria, a nation where herders and farmers have in recent times, been entangled in incessant fratricidal clashes in most parts of the country.

This paper therefore seeks to explain the dynamics of intergroup conflicts in Nigeria by using the farmers-herders' conflict as an example. The need to interrogate the causes of ongoing clashes between herders and farmers is significant in further helping to gain insight and understanding of the phenomenon of intergroup relations and associated conflicts in the country.

The paper is divided into seven parts. First, the introduction. The

second part examines the conceptual meaning of the main themes of the paper, which are 'conflicts' and 'intergroup conflicts'. An overview of intergroup conflicts in the structural context of Nigeria is the focus of the third part. The fourth part of the paper examines the phenomenon of herders-farmers' clashes as manifestations of intergroup conflict in Nigeria, while the fifth part attempts a theoretical explanation of the causes of intergroup conflicts between herders and farmers in the country. Following, is an empirical analysis of the causative factors of herders-farmers' conflicts in Nigeria. The seventh and final part of the paper is the conclusion.

Conceptual Clarifications

Conflict

Conflict is a social phenomenon that defies a single definition. According to Professor M. Afzalur (2011), there is no universally accepted definition of conflict due to the contention on whether the conflict is a situation or a type of behaviour. According to him, all definitions of Conflict include known opposing interests and the process of trying to stop the opposing view or views.

One of the earliest definitions of Conflict was by Karl Marx (1818 -1883), a conflict theorist who defined conflict as the existence of divergent interests within a group or the result of each group or class trying to pursue her interest which in the process, makes them come against one another with conflicts. Marx understood human society in terms of conflict between social classes, notably the conflict in capitalist societies between the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production who are the capitalists — basically the rich people) and the proletariat (the working class and the poor). Subsequent thinkers have described or defined conflicts from different perspectives with a common theme being that conflicts are pervasive and are an inevitable aspect of social relations. In the opinion of Brock Utne (cited in Hwedie and Rankopo, 2012), Conflicts must be understood in their social contexts, involving

Zannou Andre Corneille Sehou (2022) Herders-Farmers' Conflicts: A Critical Analysis of Intergroup Relations in Nigeria. *LAJOHIS* 4(1)

196

values and beliefs, fears and suspicions, interests and needs, attitudes and actions, and relationships and networks.

In this sense, conflicts can be regarded as an inevitable reality of every human group taking place in political, social, cultural, economic sectors, etc. In the view of Closer (cited in Thakore (2013, p.7), human interactions are a sociation, in that it could be associative or dissociative; therefore, conflicts are an inevitable fact of human reality. As Dagne (2013) stated in his article, conflicts are a normal part of human interaction and are rarely completely resolved or eliminated.

Afzalur (2011), proposed a definition of conflict as "an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social entities." He further claimed that conflicts may also manifest as 'intrapersonal conflict' which is limited to an individual; a person who is conflicted with himself.

As a universal phenomenon, conflicts exist in all human societies, irrespective of the period, location and actors involved. As long as people live together, work together, and interact with each other, conflicts remain inevitable between subgroups, individuals in a group, or different groups entirely. The source of the conflicts could be the incompatibility of the objective or subjective interests of the groups or individuals (Fisher and Keashly, 1991 cited in Fetherston, 2000).

Conflict, though an inevitable consequence of social relationship, is undesirable by humans due to the negative and catastrophic consequences it generates in social relationships. It is however important to state that all conflicts are not necessarily negative. As a necessary element in all human contact, it can either be a factor for creative progress or a cause of disruption. That is, it could be either be malignant or benign.

Intergroup conflict

Intergroup Conflict is a derivative of the ubiquitous phenomenon of conflict which describes a situation between different groups who are at odds with one another. Intergroup conflict as the term connotes can be regarded as conflictual disagreements between two or more groups and

their respective members. It is a conflict that arises out of disagreements, rivalries, competition, or incompatible goals between and among various groups. This form of conflict which ranges from large-scale conflicts, such as wars between countries, terrorism, racial and ethnic discrimination, and conflict among political parties, to relatively small-scale conflicts involving competition, antagonism and aggression among rival sport teams, gangs and high school clique, has occurred throughout the modern history and is undeniably pervasive across human societies (MacDonald, et. al 2012).

Fisher argues that intergroup conflicts arise from objective differences of interest coupled with antagonistic or controlling attitudes or behaviours. Incompatibilities, which can prompt conflict, include economic, power or value differences, and even differences in need satisfaction. Often times, intergroup conflicts have a mixture of these elements. Fisher offers a social-psychological approach to understanding intergroup conflicts. That is, conflicts between people that occur in terms of their group identities.

Within a society or other social systems, people can be in conflict when a group perceives the other as a barrier or threat to the achievement of its own goals or survival. Expressions of such incompatibility among various groups can be violent exhibitions, such as inter-ethnic conflicts, inter-religious conflicts and inter-party conflicts.

Theoretical Framework

The need to explain the fundamental causal factors responsible for the incessant incidence of conflicts between herders and farmers in different parts of the country requires the use of a theoretical prism that would bring to a sharp focus the intricacies of the conflicts between the two groups. The paper adopts the Territorial Imperative Theory which was developed by Robert Ardrey in 1967 in which he traced the animal origin of property, nations and territoriality. In the context of the theory, a territory is described as an exclusive geographical space carved out, preserved, and defended by an animal or group of animals for the purposes of preserving basic needs and interests. These basic needs which include, security of

Zannou Andre Corneille Sehou (2022) Herders-Farmers' Conflicts: A Critical Analysis of Intergroup Relations in Nigeria. *LAJOHIS* 4(1)

198

space and food, identity, prestige, etc. are strategic and defended at all costs with unreserved determination to prevent access to those who are likely to undermine their interests and needs.

Deriving from this theoretical position, all animals, including man, have the cognate tendency to be preserving or possessing territorial space, by employing any means available to them especially when such territories and possessions are threatened. This is the reason why Ardrey (1967) opined that "if we defend the title to our land or the sovereignty of our country, we do it for reasons no different, no less innate, no less ineradicable, than that of lower animals." In the same manner, Sherif and Sherif (1969) supports this view by arguing that territorial aggression in animals is based on the relatively simple chemical, tactile and visual discrimination involved in detecting unfamiliar 'opponents' while for humans, the concept of 'territory' depends on complex cultural symbolisations of 'property' or 'homeland' . People, they pointed out, are quite capable of territorial loyalty without actually living in the territory itself. Therefore, conflicts may ensue in an attempt by individuals, groups, or countries to defend their territories, land, traditions, cultures, and property which they value very much.

This, in part, explains the reasons why various groups fight over land and territory. Indeed, scholars have argued that territorially concentrated groups in divided societies are more likely to demand self-determination and to be engaged in violent conflict in its pursuit. It is against this viewpoint that the protracted conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria can be explained. The herders are driven by the urge to secure territories meant for purposes of grazing their animals which is necessary for preserving their nomadic economic lifestyle and identity while the latter perceives such tendency as a threat to disrupt their economic activities and dispossess them of their ancestral land. This inevitably results in a fierce contest and battle between the two groups over the possession and preservation of territories that serve as exclusive economic interests to the two parties. Thus, the protracted and perennial conflict

between the herders and farmers in Nigeria is a classic case of a struggle over territory for economic survival and identity preservation.

Herders-Farmers' Conflicts and the Context of Intergroup Conflicts in Nigeria

The plural nature of Nigeria as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural state naturally creates the conditions for competitive struggles between and among the existing interest groups, such that the country has witnessed a pattern of aggregated intergroup relations that assumed widespread conflictual dimensions for decades since the country's independence in 1960. This is evident in the alarming proportions of intergroup conflicts occurring between and among several groups that make up the entity called Nigeria (Babatunde et.al., 2014:1). The basis of intergroup conflict in the country is not only stressed along ethnic lines. Divisions also run along religious lines, political party affiliations, regional groupings, statehoods and more.

The struggle for political control, cultural and ethno-religious differences, contestations over resource distributions, land allocations, citizenship questions and indigene/settler contestations have often degenerated into violent conflicts in different parts of the country. Intergroup conflicts in Nigeria are characterized by social consciousness, indifference towards others, and protection of socio-cultural values in a competitive society, etc., which according to Ogbogbo et. al (2012:1), has since independence, made relationships between various groups to remain "within the matrix of suspicions and hostility". Such hostility manifests in various areas across the country, such as power struggle, communal clashes over land disputes, and resource conflicts.

Perhaps, the foundation of intergroup conflict in the country can be traced back to the emergence of the Nigerian political entity as a creation of the British colonial system. Prior to the establishment of the colonial system, the entity now referred to as Nigeria comprised of disparate and hitherto autonomous ethno-linguistic groups which organized themselves differently into either centralized or decentralized political structures.

Zannou Andre Corneille Sehou (2022) Herders-Farmers' Conflicts: A Critical Analysis of Intergroup Relations in Nigeria. *LAJOHIS* 4(1)

200

Even though these various groups tried to maintain their separate entities, there were instances where some of these kingdoms and cities were engaged in acrimonious battles for political domination, territorial expansion and economic appropriation that often led to gruesome antagonism and sometimes outright hostility, as evident in the various wars such as the Yoruba civil wars, etc. There were also evidences of extensive social, commercial and diplomatic contact among some of the groups which led to a great deal of linguistic borrowings and cultural diffusion as well as efforts to maintain peaceful relations among the various groups to facilitate trade and reduce the degree of tension and differences in their areas.

Prelude to the formal colonization of Nigeria, the 18th and the 19th centuries witnessed external factors that significantly influenced changes in some of the socio-political structures and practices of these tribal societies. The introduction of foreign religions, notably Christianity was profound in this regard. Christianity affected the social, religious and political life of the people especially through the introduction of Western Education, which led to the emergence of a new group of elites, who were distinct from the traditional elites. The aspiration of this group of elites to positions of leadership set them against the traditional elites who were the leaders and custodians of the socio-cultural, political and economic activities of the people. In many places, particularly in the Hausa-Fulani parts of the north where Islam had previously been embraced by some of the people, the beginning of the 19th century witnessed the radical transformation of their social and political activities following the conquest of the Hausa States by the immigrant Fulani Jihadists led by Usman Dan Fodio. The success of the Jihad led to the establishment of an Emirate-theocratic system in the affected areas like Sokoto, Zaria, Kano, etc. The absence of Christianity and Western Education in the North eventually heightened, nationally, the potential for conflict and distrust between them and the Christian dominated Westernized South.

By the time the colonization process of the country was formally instituted in 1914, with the amalgamation of the then northern and

southern protectorates that paved way for the political domination, economic exploitation, and administrative convenience of the British colonial rule, the various existing groups were arbitrarily merged into a single political entity with no due regards for the consent of the people and without giving them the choice to formulate the basis for peaceful integration among them. The basis of inter-group conflicts in Nigeria can further be explained within the context of the system of 'divide and rule' which was the hallmark of the British colonial rule itself. For the colonial system to thrive, the British colonial officials explored the strategy of 'divide and rule' through policies of segregation between the geographical north and south, Christians and Muslims, peasants and merchants, educated and traditional elites, minority and majority tribes, etc. in the administration of political, educational, religious and other affairs. The policies inadvertently created animosity and heightened hostilities among the various groups in the country throughout the colonial era.

Thus, according to Quadri and Oladejo (2020, p.132):

> The colonial political structure can best be labelled as the divide and rule type as it pitted ethnic groups against one another, and consolidated uneven development which saw the acceleration of persons from rural to urban areas. The colonial political structure mitigated inter and intra-ethnic conflicts but seeded ethnic conflict by propagating horizontal inequality which saw one ethnic group privileged and others deprivileged. The seeded ethnic conflict metamorphosed into ethnic consciousness following the fall of colonialism and led to widespread ethnic rivalry ...

Similarly, the cleavages and polarization of the country was intensified and sustained by the emergent nationalists that drove the decolonization process in the country. Tribal and religious-based followership were mobilized by nationalists during the independence struggles. Moreover, in a bid to outwit one another to wrest political power from the colonial authorities, nationalist leaders resorted to forming and exploring the instruments of tribal and regional based political parties which further

Zannou Andre Corneille Sehou (2022) Herders-Farmers' Conflicts: A Critical Analysis of Intergroup Relations in Nigeria. *LAJOHIS* 4(1)

202

sowed the seed of suspicion, hatred and hostility in order to achieve their ambitions. This is reflective in the activities of the Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe-led National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) that was predominant in the Igbo-dominated Eastern region, the Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Action Group (AG) of the Yoruba dominated Western region and Tafawa Balewa/ Ahmadu Bello's Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) in the north. Apart from Dr Azikiwe's pretense of a broad-based national focus in stemming the affairs of his political party, others like Awolowo and Bello never made a pretense of their tribal and regional orientations in their respective political parties.

The division and the seeds of intergroup conflicts that were sown during the colonial era blossomed and led to an intractable series of socio-economic and political crises after Nigeria got her independence in 1960 as the various contradictions and points of intergroup conflicts had not been resolved. According to Bujra, the postcolonial order was founded on the same socio-economic and political structures which were already in existence (cited in Quadri & Oladejo, 2020: 132). Thus, barely few years after independence, that culminated in the full-scale thirty months civil war (between 1967 and 1970) arising from the failed secession bid of the Igbo of eastern Nigeria from the country.

Nigerians are still basically divided along ethnic and religious lines with the attendant manifestation of suspicion, hatred and conflict/hostility. Although, after the civil war, the then military Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon declared "no victor, no vanquished" and embarked on programmes of reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation among others such as the introduction of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), in order to reconcile the aggrieved ethnic groups and also to reduce tension engendered by the civil war. However, little success has been recorded in this regard as Nigerians are still divided along ethnic and religious lines while mutual suspicion, hatred and outright intergroup conflicts still persist.

The issue of intergroup conflict has not only rendered efforts towards national integration futile, but also clogged the wheels of social, political

and economic progress in Nigeria. The national security of the country has also suffered immeasurably from never-ending scenarios of intergroup conflict. The situation has therefore made successive governments to be preoccupied with the promotion of national / intergroup unity with little success (Adebayo, 2002).

The Niger Delta militancy has added to the litanies of insecurity that have engulfed the country in recent times because of the demand by the people for the control of the mineral resources from their region. The strained relationship between the people of Niger Delta and the other regions of the country (ethnic groups) resulting in the incessant armed conflicts was as a result of their perceived economic exploitation and marginalization. The contemporary Nigeria, according to Quadri and Oladejo (2020, p.131):

> . . . is afflicted with terrorism which has been wreaking havoc for the past two decades. The emergence of the killer Fulani herdsmen, criminal bandits and kidnappers are equally threatening the internal sovereignty of the country. In fact, Global Terrorism Index ranked Nigeria as the third most terrorized country in the world due to the spate of extrajudicial killings across the country along ethnic and religious lines.

Most recently, the nefarious activities of the herdsmen (who are mostly of Fulani stock) have further added a strain on the already fragile intergroup relations in the country. The attempts by the herdsmen to maintain their nomadic economic lifestyle, have often led to encroachment and infringement on the resources and economic organization of their host communities, usually the farmers, thereby giving rise to confrontation, suspicion and hostility between herders and farmers. The herders-farmers' conflicts have become a worrisome dimension of intergroup conflicts in Nigeria. The herdsmen-farmers' conflicts depict the nature and dynamics of intergroup relations between the Fulani herders and the native farmers in Nigeria. Technically, this negative pattern of intergroup relations is a consequence of a high level of competition over scarce resources (mainly

Zannou Andre Corneille Sehou (2022) Herders-Farmers' Conflicts: A Critical Analysis of Intergroup Relations in Nigeria. *LAJOHIS* 4(1)

204

lands for grazing and farming). This is further enhanced by other divergent socio-political variables such as religion, group size, cultural patterns, historical patterns and so on (Ingawa, Ega & Erhabor, 1999; Nyong, 2010).

Cases of intergroup conflicts between the herders and farmers in Nigeria have occurred. for over a century. In the 1920s, for instance, there were sporadic incidents of conflicts between farmers and pastoralists around the Mambila Plateau in the present day Taraba State. Mambila Plateau was prone to conflict because the available natural resources back then that both herders and farmers depended on was limited because the natives and the herders had increased geometrically. Later on, the herders moved in large numbers to the Plateau from various locations within and outside the country. This development around the movement of the herdsmen into areas utilized for farming activities manifesting in socio-environmental disequilibrium is naturally one of the major factors causing negative inter-group relations pattern between the two groups (Babatunde et.al.2014:7).

In contemporary times, the intergroup conflicts between the Fulani herders and native farmers have assumed militancy dimension. The situation has degenerated to the extent that some extremely aggressive groups are now emerging among the herders and farmers, who use sophisticated weapons such as guns, advanced communication devices to confront their rivals. The Nimbo, Uzo-Uwani community, Oke Ogun and Agatu crisis in Enugu, Oyo and Benue states respectively readily come to mind and further attest to the strained relationship between the various ethnic groups in the country.

When the theory emerged, it represented a significant departure from the previously dominant perspective of intergroup relations tied to personal characteristics of the individual(s) to the structure of the situation. In this way, emphasis shifted from viewing intergroup relations from the individual characteristics perspective to the structure of the situation. This also implies that rather than focusing on the differences in the personal traits and attributes of the various participants in the various groups in explaining the relationship between and among plural

Zannou Andre Corneille Sehou (2022) Herders-Farmers' Conflicts: A Critical Analysis of Intergroup Relations in Nigeria. *LAJOHIS* 4(1)

groups, the focus rather should be on understanding the form and nature of the structure and the situation informing the relationship. This line of thinking was greatly espoused by scholars like Sherif (1966), Harvey and White (1961). To these scholars, human behaviour in a group context or interaction is not influenced or determined by the personal characteristics or attributes of the individual but by the structure of the situation. To understand the behaviour of an individual or group of individuals in an interaction, situation demands an appropriate understanding of the structure of the situation or condition(s) in which the individual or group of individuals relate or interact. Sherif (1966), taking an insight from social psychology, is of the opinion that "it is the structure of the situation, not the personal characteristics of the individual (or an aggregate of individuals) that determines human behaviour". In furtherance, he adds that "intergroup conflict is caused by an incompatibility of goals regarding material resources. It is the struggle over such material resources as land, oil, gold, and labour that is the source of intergroup conflict, not personal characteristics like a prejudiced personality". This view is a radical departure from the earlier view being upheld by the Social Identity Theory which tends to look at intergroup relations from the stand point of the 'we feeling' derived from the membership of a distinct social group. The Realistic Group Conflict Theory rather than view it from this angle, looks at the relationship of individuals and/or groups in a multi-cultural society from the economic base. This perspective upholds the view that the struggle for scarce material resources in the society is the fundamental root cause of conflict in the society. Understanding intergroup relations within the context of a multi-cultural society therefore demands a commensurate understanding of the economic or material base of the relationship. In other words, what is the mode and nature of material production in the society? What is the mode of material distribution and appropriation in the society? It is these modes of production, distribution and appropriation of the material resources that inform the mode and nature of the relationship of individuals and/or groups in a multi-cultural society. In this context, group identification is narrowed and subsumed

Zannou Andre Corneille Sehou (2022) Herders-Farmers' Conflicts: A Critical Analysis of Intergroup Relations in Nigeria. *LAJOHIS* 4(1)

206

in goal(s) incompatibility in resource distribution/allocation and appropriation. It is therefore in the course of production, distribution and appropriation of material resources that the nature and form assumed by an intergroup relation is established. This perspective is a veritable tool for analysis in the study and understanding of the nature/patterns of intergroup relations in a multi-cultural society like Nigeria and so is appealing to this study. The Realistic Group Conflict theory situates within the context of the prevailing material resources production, distribution and appropriation in the country. It upholds that in the course of material production, distribution and appropriation, individuals/groups enter into socio-economic relationships. This relationship can be cordial or antagonistic. However, this relationship may be antagonistic arising from the unequal and exploitative nature of the relationship. It is this conflict ridden relationship and its resultant nature and outcome that are of interest to the approach.

Dimensions of Herders–Farmers Conflicts in Nigeria

Intergroup threats have manifested in the herders-farmers' conflict in different forms and dimensions. Some of the threats between the two groups can be categorized mainly into political, economic, environmental and socio-cultural dimensions.

From the economic perspective, the herdsmen activities represent a significant component of the Nigerian economy. According to Fabiyi and Otunuga (2016), they own over 90% of the nation's livestock population and substantial proportion of the nation's GDP (The Nigerian population depends on the cattle for food, and the demands are high for livestock products). The seeming lack of requisite fiscal policies to address the need of the herdsmen for grazing facilities and provision of basic amenities and protection for the herdsmen and their families lead to aggressive behaviours between herders and rustlers whom the herders perceive to be farmers.

The high rate of poverty in Nigeria is another economic factor that has fueled herders--farmer' conflicts. With a large number of Nigerians

living below the poverty line, those mostly affected and living in most-poverty prone-areas and without modern tools and facilities to enhance their productivity are majorly farmers and herders. Their bids to migrate to other places in search of green pastures in the face of shrinking land for grazing and farming purposes are bound to collide. The conflicts that emanate from such collision have the tendency to create circles of extreme poverty and hunger, and lead to more violence, especially for those who want to protect the resources for their in-groups by excluding outsiders.

Politically, power relations between herders and farmers become more competitive when there is not enough access to grazing grounds and safe livestock routes. Any hierarchical socioeconomic structure can generate structural violence and fail to satisfy people's primary material and cultural needs (Rubenstein, 2017). The northern regional government established most of the grazing reserves in the 1960s, and only 114 were formally demarcated. The incumbent government got majority of its votes from the arears particularly in the North where the herders originally domicile as against the little support from farmers-dominated areas such as the southeast and southern regions of the country. This has led to the perception of impunity by herders in carrying out what farmers may regard as nefarious activities. This is more as the government does not seem to put in place legislation and policies that could reduce the escalation of aggression and violence which in most cases emanates from the herders. This is represented by the seeming justification of the aggressive and violent behaviours of the herders as indicated in recent speeches of the Nigerian president who is also of Fulani descent and is an acclaimed herder himself, that it was borne out of the need of the herdsmen to reclaim the economic rights such as grazing routes that they had been deprived of.

There is also an environmental dimension to the herders-farmers' conflicts due to the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. For decades, climate change has slowly changed the landscape of Nigeria. Many Northern parts of Nigeria have turned into deserts. Nigeria's rivers are at the lowest levels they have been in years

Zannou Andre Corneille Sehou (2022) Herders-Farmers' Conflicts: A Critical Analysis of Intergroup Relations in Nigeria. *LAJOHIS* 4(1)

208

and communities are dealing with droughts (Fabiyi & Otunuga, 2016). This situation triggered the conflicts between farmers and herdsmen over diminishing natural resources. Deserts and droughts have swallowed up to 70% of grassland and droughts appear more frequently particularly in the northern part of the country where diminishing grazing areas and arable land bring constant and intense conflicts between herders and local farmers, because of the interest of both parties (Muhammed, 2015).

The social and demographic dimension could be gleaned from the increasing population growth of Nigeria which intensifies the conflict between farmers and herders. With the increase in population, there is pressure on the land as the number of people that engage in many rural-based activities such as farming and pastoral activities have increased. Nigeria's cattle population was estimated at 25 million in 2016 and the number is projected to increase to 60 million by 2050 (Fabiyi & Otunuga, 2016). Large amounts of food and water are required to cater for massive numbers of animals when they are traveling over farmers' lands. Farmers who feel threatened by these actions from the herders are bound to react when unfortunately, the herders feel the same. Also, Adogi (2013:7) put it thus:

> As the population is increasing, definitely there will be an increase in demand for land as well, also, water, forest products and grazing land within the territories inhabited by Fulani and native farmers; these groups are forced to find new ways to cope with different types of conflict at once because of competition over marginal resources.

Competitions for land have led to tension over the years between both parties in the conflict. While the herders who usually travel hundreds of miles with their cattle in search of grazing land regard available lands as territories for grazing, the farmers see them as trespassers who have come to occupy the land of the indigenous people (Clark, 2018). Both herders and farmers regard themselves as victims of the conflict.

Religion is another social factor that amplifies group identities and

intergroup differences. For most of the time, farmer-herder conflicts have manifested a conflict between Muslim herders and Christian farmers at both a national and local level (Mustapha & Ehrhardt, 2014). Christian farmers perceive the herders as an Islamisation force, while some herders feel maltreated when they encounter Christian communities.

Also, in the social context, herders and farmers can be conceptualized as cultural neighbours. Cultural neighborhood describes two groups that are ethnically and culturally different but live in the same community and geographical place and interact with each other through activities such as trade (Bukari, Sow & Scheffran, 2018). For example, the herders are mainly Fulanis who have their distinct language and other cultural traits while many farmers are indigenous people who do not share the same value and norms with them. (Clark, 2018).

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is established that intergroup relations is a basic condition of social living which make relations and conflict inevitable in human societies. The herders and native farmers' conflicts in Nigeria attest to the fact that the pattern of intergroup relations between these two groups are not harmonious because of the incessant conflicts and violence that occur between them. Utilising the Territorial Imperative Theory, the nature of intergroup conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria is caused by contest over territorial spaces which are limited and of utmost importance to the survival of the two groups.

Indeed, intergroup conflict is a universal phenomenon that has fundamentally affected many societies, but its resolution has traditionally been done through appropriate policies and actions of government that promote harmony, cordiality and functional interaction, as well as commitment towards institutional and legalistic mechanisms for conflict prevention. The incessant intergroup conflict between the herder and farmer groups in Nigeria is as a result of the failure of the government to play such roles. In reducing the conflict between herders and farmers therefore, adequate attention needs to be paid by government to the

Zannou Andre Corneille Sehou (2022) Herders-Farmers' Conflicts: A Critical Analysis of Intergroup Relations in Nigeria. *LAJOHIS* 4(1)

210

burning issue of land use among the various groups in the country. Also, technology-driven economic activities should be promoted to optimize the values of limited natural resources that are sources of intergroup conflicts. In addition to this, the government should mediate between the contending parties through a form of political intervention. Finally, policies and legislations should be put in place to discourage the option of violence but promote cooperative attitude of every citizen towards peaceful coexistence.

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212