

# **Nomadic Migrancy and Arms Proliferation: A Theoretical Perspective of Herders/farmers Rural Violence in Northern Nigeria.**

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## **Abstract**

The upsurge of attacks between the herdsmen and farmers in the North, is posing a potent threat in the issue of National security. The level of depredations and sheer brutality leveled on each other by both parties involved, is without doubt comparable to the Insurgency in the North-east. Up till date, there's unrestrained killings by herdsmen in Kaduna, Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa, and Taraba, which has resulted in massive destruction of people's lives and properties. These have added to the Nations challenges in terms of growth, development and even at worst threatens the unity of the Nation. The Country is at the moment faced with a

myriad of challenges that have huge implications to its conjoint existence, among which is the security threats constituted by the insurgency in the North-east, Armed banditry in the North-west and the herdsmen militia in the North central. This study looks at the uncontrolled Nomadic Migration and pastoral movement in search of grazing lands and how it has festered the escalation of rural conflict, banditry and proliferation of small arms. The theoretical framework adopted is the Ungoverned space thesis, the analytical framework looks at the conditions of Nigeria's weak security and uncontrolled migrants going in and out of our geographical space thereby making the Nigerian borders porous. The study strongly relies on secondary sources of data drawn from existing literatures.

**Key Words:** Rural Violence, Nomadic Migrancy, Arms Proliferation, Insurgency, Terrorism, Security, Ungoverned Space and Nomadism.

## **Introduction**

The Fulani herdsmen and farmers clash have killed thousands of people in Nigeria over the past two decades. Global Terrorism Index (2014) recorded that more than 1,200 people lost their lives, this made the Fulani militia the world's fourth deadliest militant group. The 2016 February's massacre of some 300 people in central Benue state and April's raid in southern Enugu state where more than 40 were killed caused outrage across Nigeria (Mikailu 2016). Properties were destroyed and thousands of people forced to flee their homes (Aremu & Aluko 2015), this has led to the growing anti-Fulani sentiment in some parts of the country. The disagreements over the use of essential resources such as farmlands, grazing areas and water has been the major cause of disputes between the herders and farmers. Fulani herders travel hundreds of miles in large numbers with their cattle in search of pasture.

They are often armed with weapons in order to protect their livestock (Aluko 2014). In another responds the herders

claim they are being attacked by gangs from farming communities who try to steal their cattle and the weapons are just for self-defense. Initially, these clashes were confined to Nigeria's central region where mainly the Berom Christian farming community in Plateau state engage in reprisal killings with Muslim nomadic herders. But the continued effect of climate change on grazing lands has pushed the Fulani herdsmen further towards the south in search of grazing land and water. This has widened the scope of the conflict with deadly incidents being increasingly reported in southern parts of the country, raising fears that the violence could widen ethnic prejudice and threaten the brittle unity that exists among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups (Aluko & Sayuti 2016).

The federal lawmakers made a proposal to introduce a Grazing Commission Bill to address the burning issue. However, the Pan-Yoruba socio-political group (Afenifere) described the bill as anti-people. The bill proposes the establishment of the National Grazing Commission which will preserve and control the national grazing reserves and livestock routes and other matters related to it. The bill which will empower the commission to acquire any land anywhere in the country would violate the subsisting Land Use Act and traditional means of land holding if enacted (Guilbert 2016). The Afenifere opines that the bill was being proposed allegedly to favor the business of the Fulani herdsmen at the expense of the farmers whose farms were always destroyed by the Fulani's cows in some other parts of the country. Also, they believe the bill is an offensive bill that attempts to rob some citizens of their possessions and award same to another set of citizens which is against the principle of natural justice.

However, the Nigerian government has made several attempts to mitigate this problem from the root. The government reserved the sum of N10 billion for the operation of the Great Green Wall Programme (GGWP) in an effort to boost the fight against desert encroachment, a major factor that has driven pastoralists from the far North to the North-Central region of Nigeria in search of grazing fields. Notwithstanding, there are gross irregularities in the level of commitments set on this project

by the federal government and other concerned state and local governments, the herdsman/farmers clashes have attracted international attention. Human Rights Watch (HRW) in December 2013 said clashes in central Nigeria had killed 3,000 people since 2010, accusing Nigerian authorities of ignoring the violence. According to official figures, in Nigeria, more than 35 per cent of land area of 923,768 square kilometres is threatened by desertification affecting the livelihoods of more than 40 million people (Eromo 2016). There has been a rising trend of rural violence in Nigeria over the years. This development has been exacerbated by the incidences of arms proliferations and organized militancy in the countryside, amidst the "government's fecklessness in dealing with the threat" (Federal Research Division-Library of Congress, 2008).

### **Conceptual Analysis of Terms**

In this section, concepts essential to the discourse such as insurgency, terrorism, security and the state are briefly discussed.

**Insurgency:** Insurgency is an organized movement that has the aim of overthrowing a constituted government through subversive means and armed conflict. Insurgent groups employ unlawful means towards achieving an end, which could be political, religious, social or even ideological. The goal of insurgency is to confront and overthrow an existing government for the control of power, resources or for power sharing.

**Terrorism:** Terrorism is an act that aims at achieving social, political, religious, economic and psychological goals through the use of coercive and intimidating acts outside the context of legitimate warfare activities that conveys some forms of messages to an audience.

**Security:** Security is a state of being safe, the absence of fear, anxiety, danger, poverty and oppression. It is the preservation of core values and the absence of threats to these values.

**Nomadism:** Nomadism in this context, refers to presupposes pastoral migration. It is a practice or strategy that is based on subsistent itinerancy, whereby a pastoral group or community

moves from place to place in prospect of a "pastoral" livelihood. Pastoral nomadism is basically a pattern food producing economy as distinguished from other forms of food extracting economy such as hunting, fishing and gathering.

**Nomadic migrancy and arms proliferations:** It is typical of Fulani herdsman to bear arms, ranging from rudimentary to modern weaponry. Nowadays, it is common to see Fulani cowboys brazenly armed with sophisticated weapons, such as AK-47, in the course of their routine grazing. The weapons are ostensibly borne for self-defense, and possibly, to ward off traditional threats of cattle rustling and banditry. Unfortunately, it is the same weapons that the herdsmen use in raiding settled communities at every instance of a major confrontation.

#### **Perception on Pastoral Nomadism/Nomadic Migration**

Pastoral nomadism is a cultural cum occupational practice whereby herds are maintained all year round based on a system of free-range, extensive grazing (Goodall, 2007). It is essentially a nobile form of food-producing economy, entailing the periodic movement of a substantial percent of the population of a pastoral community in accordance with the dialectics of pastoral economy (Khazanov, 1994). According to Khazanov (1994) the most salient characteristics of pastoral nomadism are:

- (1) Pastoralism is a predominant form of economic activity.
- (2) Its extensive character connected with the maintenance of herds all year round on a system of free-range grazing without stables.
- (3) Periodic mobility in accordance with the demands of pastoral economy within the boundaries of specific grazing territories, or between these territories (as opposed to migrations).
- (4) The participation in pastoral mobility of all or the majority of the population (as opposed, for example, to the management of herds on distant pastures by specialist

herdsmen, into which only a minority is involved in pastoral migrations).

- (5) The orientation of production towards the requirement of subsistence (as opposed to the capitalist ranch or dairy farming of today).

From the foregoing, whether it is the majority or minority of the population that is involved, pastoral nomadism entails a level of communal migration. This movement involves the herders alongside their herds, often in company of members of the herding clan. Therefore, nomadic migration is motivated by economic rationalism. As Kurekova (2011) stated, it is "stimulated primarily by rational economic consideration of relative benefits and costs". Depending on the seasonal variability as well as other salient socio-structural interveners within a pastoral ecology, nomadic migration usually tends from areas of high pastoral costs towards areas of high pastoral benefits. 'Pastoral costs' refer to the prevalence of occurrences that undermine effective and rewarding pastoralism, such as drought, desertification, civil strife, disease, insurgency, and so on.

Pastoral benefits on the other hand, is the availability of pasture and fresh water, as well as assurance of peace and security (Egwu, 2016). In other words, nomadic migration guarantees a high pastoral productivity, resilience and sustainability. With that, the subsistence of the pastoral community is guaranteed on a sustainable basis. Broadly, two patterns of nomadic migration are identifiable, namely routine seasonal migration and 'emergency' migration (Janzen, 2005). The former is dictated by the exigencies of seasonal variability while the latter is often informed by the need to escape climatic, civil, or health-related adversities such as drought, pestilence, conflict and so on. Whatever be the reason, nomadic migration has its essence in a "spatiotemporal movement" in search of a favorable rangeland (Mulianga, 2009).

Nomadic migration to and fro the borderlines of Nigeria are largely unregulated. This has created an illicit economy around the nomadic business giving rise to organized crimes such



as smuggling, trafficking in humans and drugs, and cattle rustling (IOM, 2011). It has also provided avenues for terrorism and/or insurgency financing (Okoli, 2016). The abusive instrumentalization of nomadic migration by organized criminals and insurgents/terrorists has raised a pertinent national security concern in Nigeria. The preceding section will engage this important concern and critically reviews the theories that best explain nomadic migrancy and arms proliferation.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **The Ungoverned Spaces Theory**

In interrogating nomadic migrancy and rural violence in northern Nigeria, the ungoverned spaces thesis has been adopted. The choice of ungoverned spaces theory is motivated by the fact that previous studies on the complex nature, dynamics and consequences of nomadic migrancy were predicated on eco-violence (Homer-Dixton, 1994, 1999; Okoli & Atelhe, 2014; Odoh & Chigozie, 2012; Awogbade, Olaniyan, & Faleye, 2016), competitive control of resources (Fisher & Mercado, 2014), competing governance (Forest, 2010), intractable conflicts (Northrup, 1989; Coleman, 2000; Putnam & Wondolleck, 2003; Gray, Coleman, & Putnam, 2007; Smith, 2014), modernization triggered by cultural change and democracy (Newman, 1991; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005) and the Marxist political economy (Marx and Engel, 1968; Ensminger & Rutten, 1991) approaches.

As plausible as these analytical frameworks are in explaining phenomenon of the type investigated, they tend to have given less consideration to the role of the state and the place of governance in the crisis associated with the nomadic migrancy responsible for rural violence. From this context, the ungoverned spaces theory is found to have the capacity of explaining the salient dialectics of criminal and subversive activities within Nigeria's ungoverned spaces, which have posed serious threats to the existence of the nation. The ungoverned spaces theory fertilized in the post-9/11 era featured remarkably in a report

developed by the American think-tanks with the RAND Corporation (Rabasa, Boraz, Chalk, Cragin, Karasik, Moroney, O'Brien, & Peters, 2007).

The concept of ungoverned spaces was popularized by Hillary Clinton, the former Secretary of State in the United States of America, when she addressed the Afghanistan-Pakistan border as ungoverned spaces (Marsden, 2017). Since then, publicists, scholars, researchers and policy-makers have used ungoverned spaces theory to investigate and engage discourses involving different strands of domestic and global security concerns. Contemporary security concerns, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, tends to lend credence to the ungoverned spaces theory, to the effect that sovereign void exemplified in governance deficit exist in Africa. As Keister (2014) puts it, ungoverned spaces reflect a general condition of weak or non-existence of state authority in a defined geographic area. In other words, ungoverned spaces relate to areas where there are governance deficits or absence of control over areas of specific or general concerns. Without effective state's control, or under the atmosphere of ungoverned spaces, also referred as "anarchic zones", state's security becomes precarious (Fall, 2015; Taylor, 2016; Coleman, 2000).

The ungoverned spaces theory presents definitively exploitable and contested spaces that often come under the illegitimate control of gangs, local armed groups, militants and/or warlords as a result of under-governance, mis-governance or the total absence of governance within a definable space (Raleigh & Dowd, 2013; Whelan, 2005, 2006; Lamb, 2008; Clunan & Trinkunas, 2010). In this context, a shadow state or authority emerges to contest the authority of the state (Taylor, 2016; Mallet, 2010; Whelan, 2006), through local networks within and across the state. The problems of ungoverned spaces are contingent on certain conditions, including the size of the state, population growth, density and spatial distribution, as well as the pattern of wealth distribution. Other conditions may include



urbanization, globalization and increase wealth of non-state actors and lack of capacity to exercise effective control of territorial boundaries, as well as the government complacency toward the security threats (Menkhaus, 2007; Keister, 2014; Julum & Evans, 2015).

The ungoverned spaces theory has been criticized for excessively being Western in analyzing security issues, in that the theory is framed against non-Western states viewed as constituting security threats to the Western countries as a result of their weaknesses (Menkhaus, 2010; Feldman, 2009; Andrew, 1975). Some of the reasons explicated for such analysis stem from the fragility of states in developing countries, particularly in the Middle-East and Africa. Poor governance, porous state's boundaries and weak security institutions are some of the conditions attributed for the prevalence of ungoverned spaces in these continents (Raleigh, 2013; Martin, 2003). Western scholars and publicist believe that chaos in these parts of the world have deleterious effects on the Western world (Diggins, 2011; Andrew, 1975; Feldman, 2009). The scenario implies that ungoverned spaces are generally manifest in dysfunctional states.

Nonetheless, even the strong states also suffer the consequences of ungoverned spaces that are internal to them (Lenshie, 2018; Marsden, 2017). Despite the criticism of the ungoverned spaces theory, it has been found to be plausible in analyzing the intersection between nomadic migrancy and rural violence in Nigeria. The theory implicates the government of Nigeria for permitting the emergence of contested, ungoverned, misgoverned and exploitable spaces controlled by networks of criminalities under different identities. One of such spaces is the unregulated practice of nomadic migrancy, which has yielded violence in many parts of rural northern Nigeria. In the recent time, Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented nomadic migration from other countries. These nomads are undocumented and unregulated. The porous nature of the Nigeria's boundaries makes it possible for the influx of nomadic migrants in the country.

The consequences of uncoordinated governance are incidences of rural banditry, herdsmen militancy and arms proliferations, which instantiate rural violence in most parts of the northern Nigeria. The failure of the government of Nigeria to exercise effective sovereignty or control of the ungoverned spaces within its territorial confines and frontiers, explains the criminal dynamics in the ungoverned spheres (Olaniyan & Akinyele, 2017; Ali, 2017).

### **Nomadic Migrancy: Implications for National Security**

Nomadic migrancy constitutes a threat to national security in Nigeria. It has provided an avenue for irregular and undocumented influx of migrant herdsmen into the country. Locally, it has resulted in unrestrained and often provocative movement of herdsmen from one part of the country to another. The unregulated nature of these movements means that it could be capitalized upon by criminal or terrorist elements towards undermining the security of the nation. This has, indeed, been the situation. As we have established in the course of our analysis in this study, the ungoverned terrain of nomadic migrancy in Nigeria has provided ample opportunities for the perpetration of organized crime by local and transnational syndicates operating as or in the guise of herdsmen. The proven complicity of migrant herdsmen involving in arms trafficking, cattle rustling and kidnapping in northern Nigeria, point to the ominous fact that an underworld economy of violence cum criminality is festering alongside unregulated nomadic migration.

More ominous is the fact that migrant herdsmen have been implicated in the on-going insurgency and militancy in the North-Eastern and North-Central Regions respectively (McGregor, 2014; Olayoku, 2014). Apart from rustling cows and trafficking arms for Boko Haram insurgents, migrant herdsmen have orchestrated lethal violence in parts of North Central Nigeria. The orgy of violence in North Central Nigeria has been very pervasive and prevalent over the recent years. Equally disturbing is the

involvement of migrant herdsmen in communal conflicts in northern Nigeria. This trend is evident in the ethno-communal/religious conflagrations in States such as Kaduna, Taraba, Zamfara, and the bulk of the north-central States. In these contexts, mercenary fighters recruited from the rank and file of Sahelian herdsmen militia have often been involved in localized communal conflict, fighting for their pay-masters. Sometimes, the militant herdsmen would simply volunteer to come to the aid of a preferred conflicting party on the basis of ethno-religious affinity. A semblance of this played out in the Eggon (Ombatse)-Fulani crisis in Nasarawa State (2014-2015). The ease and impunity with which the marauding herdsmen infiltrate and terrorize Nigerian communities in the hinterlands adumbrate an acute failure of national security in a fast failing state of Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, nomadic migrancy constitutes a threat to national security in Nigeria. It has provided an avenue for irregular and undocumented influx of migrant herdsmen into the country. Locally, it has resulted in unrestrained and often provocative movement of herdsmen from one part of the country to another. The unregulated nature of these movements have been capitalized upon by criminal or terrorist elements towards undermining the security of the nation. This has, indeed, been the situation. The involvement of migrant herdsmen in criminality and violence in northern Nigeria has complicated the security situation in the area, resulting in volatile inter-group relations, arms proliferations, human casualties and injury, force displacement of population, livelihood crises, and allied humanitarian disasters. It has accentuated the material suffering of the vulnerable rural population which has been sentenced to the margins of human security as a consequence. The most strategic import of the foregoing is that Nigeria's national security is under a dire threat. The ease and impunity with which the marauding herdsmen infiltrate and terrorize Nigerian communities in the hinterlands

adumbrate an acute failure of national security in a fast failing state of Nigeria.

### **Recommendation**

The following recommendations were put forth by this study.

There is need for government to put in check and balance on the Nigerian borders, this is due to the ungoverned space nature of the country border, there is need for the enhancement of the border security to ascertain who is license to enter the country and reasons for coming in. Also there is need for the creation of Ranches round the country, just as it is obtained in other parts of the world, this will help in reducing the herders' migration which often result in destruction of lives and properties. In the same vein there is need for a biometric data capturing of herders by both Federal and State Government, this is to ascertain the herders living in a particular location, whereby if any mishaps pointing at herders happens in that location they will be held accountable. Finally, there is need for government to organize town hall meetings for both leaders to create awareness on the needs to live in peace with one another, by so doing it will help in minimizing the conflicts to the barest minimum.

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