

## **FULANI HERDSMEN ATTACKS ON FARMING COMMUNITIES: PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Innocent-Franklyn, Ezeonwuka & Oluchukwu N. Orizu**

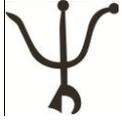
*Department of History and International Studies  
College of Management and Social Sciences  
Renaissance University, Ugbawka, Enugu State, Nigeria*

### **Abstract**

*The bloody clashes between Fulani herdsmen and crop farmers across Nigeria with its attendant socio-economic and psychological consequences have left people in anguish and perpetual trauma. The traumatic experiences that accompany Fulani herdsmen invasion in turn lead to urge for reprisals, widen inter-ethnic/group relationship, breeds suspicion and tendency to aggress. The attacks not only destroy psychological wellbeing but also dampen the economic and social fabric of the victims. Farming communities affected by the conflict often run to internally displaced persons camp (IDP) thereby abandoning their socio-economic activities. Three objectives of the study are: the frequency of Fulani herdsmen attacks; the quanta of economic loss and psychological implication of such unwarranted killings. Theoretical framework of the study is combination of helplessness theory by Abramson, Metalsky and Alloy (1989) and frustration-aggression hypotheses by Berkowitz (1989). The study recommended for quick and holistic intervention by government before the crises snowballs into full-scale war.*

### **Introduction**

The issue of Fulani herdsmen invading farmlands and destroying crops, most especially during the dry season, has remained a recurrent decimal in Nigeria, most especially within the states of the North- West and Middle belt. The spectacular difference now is the rapidity and the scale of the occurrence, including follow up reprisals. Such harrowing experiences are now slowly enveloping the Middle belt region of Nigeria, and meted out to the South Westerners and South Easterners, just as environmental drought is engaging the Southern vegetation / environment, after dealing with the North. According to Bolarinwa (2012) Nigeria recorded several violent conflicts in many rural communities, since 1999 till 2012. Conflicts that have resulted to over 10,000 deaths and the internal displacement of over 300,000 Nigerians have been recorded (Bolarinwa, 2012). In 2003, Okaka town, an



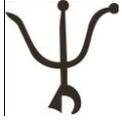
agrarian community in Itesiwaju Local Government Area of Oyo State was at the receiving end of this menace. During the locust – like invasion, cattle destroyed several farmlands in the community leading to widespread fear of hunger among the populace.

Those who narrated their ordeal in that incident include the Nigerian Cassava Growers Association, which lost 97 hectares of cassava, estimated at about 20 million naira; two individuals in the community also lost 60 hectares respectively, while another Lagos-based farmer lost over 100 hectares (Ezeonwuka & Igwe: 2016).

Another complainant, described how he lost over 300,000 naira worth of yam seedlings, which he had prepared and covered up as he is used to, only to discover to his chagrin that all was gone. Resolved to stop this widespread ravage of their community, and equally filled with retaliatory passion and frustration, the farmers sprayed Di hydro-Diphenyl-Tricoloroethene (DDT) on their farms, which led to the death of several cattle. This recourse to self help by the people, further heightened tension, between the community farmers and the herdsmen, who waited to avenge the death of their prized possession (Ezeonwuka & Igwe, 2016).

In Jigawa state alone, more than 70 cases of conflicts have been recorded since the beginning of the 2015 farming season. These cases bordered on encroachments into farms by cattle, and farmers misuse of cattle routes. The situation is not different in Nasarawa and Benue states as Fulani herdsmen persistently engage farmers in feuds that often resulted in serious casualties on both sides (Bakare, 2015). However, most worrisome in the present development is the pillaging, raping, killing and now kidnapping by the so called herdsmen. Stories are dotted the national dailies on daily basis of how these shepherds strategically attack several communities at their houses, with sophisticated assault guns-AK-47.

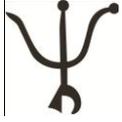
For their rustic constitution, one may not be wrong to ask where such weapons came from, if not from national armories or from the wealthy owners of the cattle, who not only have the where withal and the connections to obtain and ferry such across to robust Fulani herdsmen hit-squad. Equally begging for answers are the issues of the rape of women and that of kidnapping with ultimate intent for ransom. This issue came to a crescendo with the kidnapping of Chief Olu Falae, the former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, by the Fulani herdsmen, with whom he has been engaged in running battles, in his farm for the past three years. What of the other dimension of heightened cases of cattle rustling, which is fast turning to a traditional crime, except for the daring application and use of sophisticated weapon to achieve their objectives.



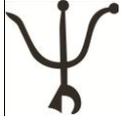
To a lot of analysts, it still challenges their imaginations, to assume that the harmless-looking Fulani herdsmen, with a waist dagger, with maybe a staff for directing the herd of cattle, a small sized powerful shortwave radio set, and occasionally, a bow and arrows, could step up overnight to embark on all these atrocities.

**Table 1 Some documented Fulani herdsmen attacks with location/casualty and destruction**

S/N	LOCATION AND DATES	CASUALTY AND DESTRUCTION	CONFLICT RESO. COMMITTEE
1.	Agatu and Gwer Local Govt. Areas in Benue State on Tuesday 25 <sup>th</sup> March, 2014. (two) days after, at Gbajimba headquarters of Guma Local Govt. Area. April 12 <sup>th</sup> , 2014-Kula settlement in Gwer West L.G.A.	More than 60 killed and many houses burnt, prompting Gov. suswan to seek help from the army. About 55 were killed at Gbajimba with many houses destroyed over 52,000 internally displaced people at camp established by the Catholic Diocese of Makurdi, 2 were killed in Gwer West L.G.A	The army skeletally interfered. Agatu community is constantly updating their conflict resolution scheme as at Nov. 4 <sup>th</sup> 2015
2.	29 <sup>th</sup> March, 2014.3 villagers in Kaduna State (sankwai, takum, marchek) about 250 kilos South of Kaduna metropolis	More than 200 people were killed, while the people managed to kill some of the Fulani herdsman who wore army camouflage uniforms.	
3.	5 <sup>th</sup> March, 2015 Riyan local govt. area of Plateau State	10 people were killed with more than 100 houses burnt	Irked by the upsurge of



			<p><i>attacks</i> and killings by the Fulani herdsmen, most especially in the Middle Belt, on Thursday March 20<sup>th</sup> 2014, mandated its committee on security. Intelligence, Defence, Army and Police affairs to investigate the incidents</p>
4.	<p>6<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Buwa village in Ibi Local Govt. Area at 11:15am  <b>Plateau State</b></p>	<p>Many people were killed and many houses burnt</p>	
5.	<p>Suwa, Bwukulu in Lamurde Local Govt. Area of Adamawa State</p>	<p>Many people were killed in the densely populated settlements, while over 200 huts got burnt.</p>	
6.	<p><b>Ogun State</b> Oja Adan Area (Asa village)</p>	<p>Mrs. Ayesi Balogun was allegedly raped and killed by Fulani herdsmen.</p>	
7.	<p><b>Ogun State</b> at Oja Adan Area</p>	<p>Rampaging Fulani herdsmen killed a farmer and injured many others. The farmers Agbaose Sewoten was killed because he contested the invasions of his farm.</p>	
8.	<p><b>Jigawa State</b></p>	<p>More than 70 recorded cases of conflict since the 2015 planting season.</p>	
9.	<p><b>Anambra State</b> in</p>	<p>A total of 4 people were murdered in</p>	



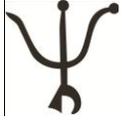
	Ayamelum L.G.A., and Awka north L.G.A	these two areas, while farmlands were destroyed.	
10.	<b>Enugu State</b> (Ezeagu L.G.A)	Many people have been reported injured and many farms destroyed.	

**Source:** Fulani herdsmen attack in Nigeria Google: Wikipedia, Retrieved 30/11/2015

Reactions have continued to come from numerous quarters on both the existing and impending motives for these attacks. To the ordinary Nigerian citizen, the herdsmen are goaded by their age long culture and belief in their right to graze land, and water their herd without limitation or boundary (Oluokun, 2015). Some view this in different parts of the country as a grand design to force their will on the people who may not allow their cattle to graze on their farmlands, in order to see the need for a national grazing land policy, whereby grazing lands would be mapped out in all states and protected for the use of Fulani pastoralists. Accordingly, this 'out-right rubbish' was intended, so that they would colonize everywhere, preparatory to over-running the entire country (Onwubiko, 2015). From a related pedestal, and quite aware of the complexities dictating the Nigerian project, the horrendous atrocities of these herdsmen could agitate the Southern Christian to see the Fulani Muslim herdsmen as simply foot soldiers of the Caliphate who are bent on actualizing what their forebears naively nurtured in their infantile mind-that Allah has given them Nigeria, as the ethnic nationalities in the Middle belt would be their willing tools, while the entire south would be overrun.

This paper succinctly reflected on the complex areas of concern for the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigerian nation, that is exposed to the desperadoes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Generation wars, as launched by the dreaded *Boko Haram* extremists, and the heightened level and spread of Fulani herdsmen violent attacks – the security implications and the challenges of nationhood, the problem of food security under the present 'change mantra' of internal dependency-all these in the face of a seemingly well orchestrated and tactically robust Fulani herdsmen offensive. What of the indefatigable problem of the internally displaced persons (IDPs).

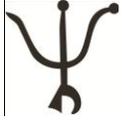
Considering the gargantuan task which global terrorism has placed Nigeria recently, a stable minded Nigeria security personnel, quite aware of the historical adversities inherent, would wish to handle and temper reported cases of these Fulani herdsmen infiltrations and attacks with commonsense and equity. In the face of mounting suspicion and the eclipse of fraternal confidence growing on daily basis, law enforcement agencies within the country are seriously challenged to prove whether these herdsmen are partners in crime with the insurgents and the terrorist, as reported in the *Niche newspaper of 25<sup>th</sup>*



October, 2015, where account was given how Fulani herdsmen disguise sophisticated weapons among their cattle, and courier them trans-nationally from Mali (lawless hub of illicit weapons trade), to rebels, international bandits and *Boko Haram* elements in Nigeria (Ibrahim, 2015). One could understand the ambit through which the above assertion could be probed. It is on record that trans-border sale and transport of illicit light and heavy weapons have continued to thrive in West Africa unabated, even with several machineries put in place to checkmate it. Again, it is not yet engraved within the psyche, practices and operational manual of many Federal security agencies in Nigeria, to embark on conducting random search on the pastoral Fulani either in their temporary habitats in the bush, or while mobile with their herd, heading towards a destination. In the light of this perceived obstructive and foot dragging antics of the various security agencies in the country, one is bound to refer to what Femi Falana, a human rights lawyer retorted after a Department of State Security (DSS) official (Abdulahi Garba) did parade the suspected abductors of Chief Olu Falae, as 'mere criminals, who did not target him as a Yoruba'.

However, it must be said that this DSS drama took place, after the Nigerian police had earlier shown to the public some totally different persons, as the suspected kidnapers of Chief Olu Falae (Onwubiko, 2015). Be that as it may, both groups of suspects openly confessed to the crime, hence awaiting court process. Weeks after these arrests, one wonders why their trial is still elusive, or is Falana's suspicion of a subterfuge becoming a reality? To the security personnel, not accosting, searching, and apprehending these Fulani herdsmen, even when an overwhelming proof exists which lend credence to such, is the beginning of wisdom, after all, believe it not, the long arm of their masters must reach and deal a devastating blow on any that is reported, hence the untutored Fulani herdsmen though of calm disposition, is highly unforgiving and unforgettable so long as any incident revolves around his 'cattle-rearing identity and stewardship'.

Recorded and repeated cases of herdsmen attacks with sophisticated weapons, clad in army uniforms are not just fairy tales or mere fabrications, but existing testaments which may not only see the Nigerian project as favorably tilted to serve the Northern Hausa-Fulani interests, but also searing indications which tacitly confirm what General Yakubu Gowon said, when he retorted that 'there was no basis for the unity of this country, because our world-views are diametrically opposed to 'each other'. If such is so, one may have to enquire thus-where then lies this hush towards nationhood and development. Many a times, it is now quite confusing to the security officials to decipher the brain behind each recorded attack- either the Fulani herdsmen or the Boko Haram terrorists, since large scale application of sophisticated weaponry coupled with massive burning, killing of targeted



indigenes occur. If the Fulani herdsmen could be transporting weapons to ready users and buyers, what prevents them from trading intelligent information's to end users? All these developments infringe on Nigerian's national security.

The depredations of Fulani herdsmen sometimes degenerate into outright criminality, when they engage in forcefully breaking into fenced and locked plots of land with their herds, unsuspectingly stealing and spoiling lots of personal effects, all in the name of pasturing their animals, after all 'they are not the dreaded local thieves and armed robbers'. The perennial feud between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria could have serious implications for food security in the country. This position was recently reiterated, based on the enormous damages already done to most farms in the Middle Belt area of the country. Apart from this, the issue of environmental degradation in the form of soil erosion, overgrazing and climate change (leading to increasing drought, flooding), is becoming a growing challenge. These require a shift in crops and farming practices, which may not be easily accomplished.

### **Psychological Implications**

Activities of these Fulani have created large number of internally displaced persons in Nigeria. These displaced persons are kept in camps within host communities and provided with barely survival level of basic needs. They had tried to help themselves, but were overpowered sometimes because they were attacked at ambush, and they cried out for state protection which is their constitutional rights but could not get that perhaps because their attackers are said to be untouchables. What then is their fate? This condition surely raises psychological pressure, which may through psyche culminate in extreme forms of avoidance or approach behaviours as implied by Obi-Nwosu (2008). Also, it engraves inter-ethnic suspicion in the minds of victims of herdsmen attack. The suspicion deters the smooth inter-personal relationship hence may affect national cohesion and co-existence. It may also lead to reprisal attacks. According to Marietu, & Olanrewaju, (2009) the suspicion has affected the living arrangement of people in mono-religious areas in Nasarawa and Benue states, with Christians and Muslims living in dominant religious clusters. Thus, has widened the cultural gap.

### **Helplessness Theory**

Helplessness theory was propounded by Abramson, Metalsky and Alloy (1989). This theory is used fundamentally to explain the development of, or vulnerability to depression through learned helplessness. It holds that when people are repeatedly exposed to stressful situations beyond their control, they develop inability to make decisions or engage in



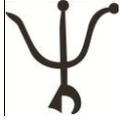
purposeful behavior. Without doubt, devastation caused by the Fulani attackers to lives and property of victims coupled with long period of camp life and associated deprivations depicts a frustrating and hopeless scenario. Under such circumstances of deprivations and restrictions people usually experience low moods, loose interest in the future, and become despondent. The psychological states may degenerate into major depression or even psychotic reactions, in which case affected persons loose the capability to contribute to society and in fact add to the burden of the group. In essence, this theory helps one to appreciate that mental health of victims of these herdsmen could be consequentially compromised and at the long run the country will in a way pay dearly for it.

#### Frustration – Aggression Hypothesis

This theory was propounded by Berkowitz (1989). It holds that frustration always produces an aggressive urge and that aggression is always a result of prior frustrations. Although one of the proponents of this theory latter note that frustration could lead to many reactions. It has been maintained that the urge to aggress will become more dominant as the thwarting continues. Berkowitz (1989), cited in Obi-Nwosu (2014) proposed that the frustration must be decidedly unpleasant in order to evoke an aggressive urge.

In the present circumstances of victims of attacks, it is most likely that their frustration is peaking fast, and for most, it may soon reach the 'spark potential point' to produce reactive behaviours. Aggression may be directed towards self in some races and tribes, however in Africa, with the predominant externality locus of control, it is predictable that aggression will be directed towards perceived sources of frustration: the Fulani and their accomplices or to anything Nigeria if Nigeria is personified as the source of frustration. At first this may seem inconsequential, but over years, more and more people and groups could be affected and socialized into a frustrated federation, then the problem may become more or less like the boko-haram saga. It will surely turn into security crises of great magnitude.

On the part of the Attackers, behaviourists explain that if behaviour is reinforced, it will be repeated. Nigerians have pointed accusing fingers on the Federal Government as tacitly supporting the attackers for primordial reasons. Whether or not this is true is not as important as the fact that the rampage is continuing because Government has not done enough to deter it. The perpetrators are therefore rewarded abundantly, hence they continue in reckless constitutional and criminal code breaches.



## Conclusion

The issue of Fulani herdsmen invading farmlands and destroying crops, most especially during the dry season, has remained a recurrent decimal in Nigeria, most especially within the states of the North- West and Middle belt. The spectacular difference now is the rapidity and the scale of the occurrence, including destruction of houses and businesses. Such harrowing experiences are now slowly enveloping the Middle belt region of Nigeria, and meted out to the South Westerners and South Easterners. The attacks have serious implications for food security in the country. This position was recently reiterated, based on the enormous damages already done to most farms in the Middle Belt area of the country. More importantly, the adverse long term effects can be appreciated by understanding the psychological implications: psychopathology and consequent effect on the economy, and deepening insecurity that may cripple the Country. The herdsmen must be stopped now or the whole country will surely pay the price in nearby future.

## References

- Abramson, L. Y., Metalsky G. I., Alloy L. B. (1989) Hopelessness depression: A theory-based subtype of depression. *Psychological Review*. 96, 358–372.
- Bakare, B. (2015). *Fulani Herdsmen and Food Security*. The Sun Newspaper of Friday Oct 9<sup>th</sup>
- Berkowitz, L. (1989). Frustration-aggression hypothesis: Examination and reformulation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 106, 59–73.
- Bolarinwa, K. (2012). *Conflict Resolution Strategies among Farmers in Taraba State, Nigeria*. Development Note Abuja. Odadi Publishers.
- Ezeonwuka, I. F. & Igwe, U. (2016). Emerging challenges in Nigeria National Security in the twenty-first century, the Fulani Herdsmen menace. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*. 4, 5-19.
- Ibrahim, I. (2015). Fulani Herdsmen Smuggle Arms for Boko-Haram. *National Light Newspaper* 2(23).
- Marietu, T.S. & Olanrewaju, I.O. (2009). Resource conflict among farmers and Fulani herdsmen: Implication for resource sustainability. *African Journal of Political Science and International relations*. 3, 360-369.
- Obi-Nwosu, H. (2008). *Psychological Themes: Awka, DeMercury*
- Obi-Nwosu, H. (2014). *Theories in Psychology: a compendium*. Awka SCOA Heritage.
- Olokun, F. (2015). *Drumbeat of War*. The Source Magazine.
- Onwubiko, P. (2015). *Fulani Herdsmen Expansionist Project*. National Light Newspaper.