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FARMERS-HERDERS' CLASHES IN IFELODUN LGA OF KWARA STATE: A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION ON PEACFUL CO-EXISTENCE

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Abstract

The persistent farmer-herder clashes in Ifelodun Local Government Area of Kwara State raise deep philosophical questions about coexistence, justice, and the moral constitution of communal life. This paper offers a conceptual exploration of peaceful coexistence through the lenses of African communitarian Philosophy, Social Contract, Theory and Ethics of Care. It critically examines the metaphysical assumptions underlying land ownership, resource use, and cultural identity that fuel tensions between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders. The reflection emphasizes that such conflicts are not merely socio-economic but moral phenomena, revealing contrasting worldviews and value systems. By integrating philosophical reasoning with normative inquiry, the study argues that sustainable peace must be grounded in dialogical understanding, reciprocal recognition, and moral solidarity. The study employed mixed methods design by combining semi-structured interviews with sixty participants – 41 farmers and 19 pastoralists form different parts of Ifelodun LGA between 2022 to 2025. Findings reveal that conflict arises as a result of scrambling for the insufficient natural resources their livelihood. The paper concludes that cultivating a communitarian ethic – anchored in respect, empathy, and sustaining peaceful coexistence in Ifelodun LGA.

Keywords: Farmer-herder Clashes, Philosophical Reflection, Peaceful Co-existence.

A. **Preamble**

In Nigeria, clashes between farmers and herdsmen are common occurrences that stretch back to the colonial era but have recently increased in severity. The reality on ground is that the nation is seriously threatened beyond measure and Anaele considered it as a stark terror that is making Nigeria to steadily losing security over their lives, which started slowly and indiscernible to develop into full-fledged programme for Islamization and forceful occupation

of Nigeria.(2020:10-25) It was further observed that, at the initial stage, the crisis was restricted to the northern part of the country but as it is now, it has engulfed the whole sphere of the country and Ifelodun local government area of Kwara State is not spared from this menace. In Ifelodun LGA of Kwara State, the persistence clashes between sedentary crop farmers and nomadic Fulani pastoralists is a resources-based conflict triggered as both parties scrambling for cultivating land, water and grazing rights. (Ahmed, U. 2012). These incidents are rampant in some parts of Kwara South districts - the district that comprised Offa, Irepodun, Ifepodun, Isin, Ekiti and Oke-Ero districts of Kwara State. As a result of this recurrence clashes, many people have been rendered homeless, livelihoods paralyzed, ancestral homeland deserted, and food shortage experienced, some have even suffered physical incapacitation and others lost their lives in this struggle. (Olayoku, P. A. 2006) Before the present outbreak of the menace between the indigenous agrarian farmers and nomadic herders in Ifelodun LGA, Kwara State, both parties lived together harmoniously. However, the whole area is permeated with fear and tension from all fronts currently while the previous peace enjoyed in the said local government area had been eroded away and became a history. The factor responsible for the breakdown of the past harmonious living that led to protracted conflict between these two parties can be traced to scrambling for the arable land, water, and luxurious pasture grasses for their domestic livelihood. Hence, Ifelodun LGA enclave, put sedentary crop cultivators against nomadic pastoralists in cycles of violence that erode lives, livelihoods, and communal bonds. The farmer accused the herder of encroachment into their farmlands while the herder likewise took offense on the way the indigenous farmers monopolizing the natural recourses that belong to all gingering these confrontations.

Philosophically, these clashes reflect the Hobbesian's 'State of Nature,' where contending parties, in this case - Farmers - Herders violently struggle for natural resources without a sovereign Leviathan like authority to enforce order. Farmers as ground tillers represent Lockean property rights from labour mixing with soil, while herders adopt Rousseau's noble rowdy by roaming freely in the jungles but now think otherwise because of the civilization weave: ready to have a permanent place refer to as their own, (McDowell. 1980). This basic conflict between the sedentary farmers whose vocation restricted them to a location and the herders who are nomadic by nature find it difficult to understand each other and by the way create a contradictory worldview that often resulted in conflicts. Such clashes mirror the ancient Greek concept of '*eudaimonia*' – human flourishing through virtuous coexistence (Locke, J. 1988). It is a challenge by modern pressures of population growth, climate variability, and economic desperation. John Locke likewise ruminated on the bounds of property in a state of nature, just as the case of sedentary farmers of Ifelodun LGA of Kwara State defending their enclosures while herders as a nomadic ethnic species held an ideology similar to Heidegger's 'idea of *Dasein*,' unbounded by fences (Ajibefun, M. B. 2018). Yet, in the spirit of Ubuntu: an African philosopher who was accredited with the following statement: 'I am because we are,' meaning that: a true peace is not through conquest but covenant. Both parties need each other and playing vital roles in the economy of the nation.

Peaceful coexistence in Ifelodun LGA, Kwara State is nonnegotiable but morally imperative that call for innovative pathways such as: grazing reserves, conflict mediation councils, and agro-pastoral cooperatives that honour diversity while forging unity. The harmonious relationships in Ifelodun LGA can only be achieve not from division's ashes, but from the determinations to walk the path of peace not minding the cost.

A. Farmers-Herders in Nigeria

Fulani, otherwise refer to as *Fulbe* is a larger tribal family in Nigeria today and some other countries in Africa sub region as well. Their tribal language is *fulfude* and Islam is their generally acclaimed religion and adopted herding as their tribal trademark vocation. In fact, the name *Fulani* has become synonymous with grazing and cattle ownership because, they have engaged in the trade for longer period of time and the arable soil of Nigeria favoued the trade (Turaki, Y. 1993). As it is today, Fulani-herders form an integral part of this country and their presence cannot be ignore in politic, economy, religion, and social interactions of this country. They are stakeholder in the Nigeria economy and a formidable force in the country, but record shows that they migrated to this country from their ancestral homes either in northern and eastern parts of Senegambia or Middle East and North Africa through the northern Nigeria en-route (Ajibefun, M. B. 2018). Odey and Ajor postulated that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to trace the actual date the first crops of Fulani herdsmen migrated to Hausa land in northern Nigeria but they put it around 14th century (Odey, J. S. and Ajor, J. O. 2020), while The Guardian Editorial Board in their write-up of 30th October 2016 postulated that Fulani herders either invaded or migrated to Nigeria soil in 1461 (Editorial Board. 2016).

Azarya then traced the current political, religious, and socio-cultural identity of Fulani pastoralists of West and Central Africa to the 18th and 19th-century jihad (an Islamic war fought by Fulani ancestral father, Othman Dan Fodio, and his emissaries) (Azarya, Victor 1996). Islamic foot soldiers were able to gain the upper hand in the said war. Kingdoms and empires were conquered, which gave them the impetus to claim the right of ownership within the conquered communities in the country, but originally, they did not possess ownership of any part of Africa land. Hence, Fulani gained entrance into Nigeria soil through immigration and warfare, and having lived there for a longer period turned it to be their permanent heritage and land of possession. Statistics, however, revealed an alarming rate of increase in the population of Fulani in Nigeria, both in cities and jungles. Beetseh observed that the population of Fulani in Nigeria has skyrocketed to well over thirty (30) million people because they rarely use artificial birth control methods which enable them to have a high level of procreation (Beetseh, K.I. et al 2021). Hence, their larger population scattered to all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria.

B. Factors responsible for farmers-Herders' Clashes

Before the relationship between the indigenous farmers and the herders in Nigeria turned sour both parties lived together harmoniously in the past at least to some extent; but now, paradigm shift has set in between the two parties which has turn to most enduring rural conflicts. These factors include: political, Economic, religion, and social factors; each shall be considered as follows.

Political Factor

The ongoing clashes between the indigenous farmers with mixed religions ideologies and Fulani herders who are generally Muslims are driven by Political factors. Although, environmental pressures such as desertification and scarcity of natural resources like land, water and grasses have bearing in these clashes but, political decisions often ignite and prolong the violence (Ahmed, I. 2015). Poor or lack of positive responses from the government

to yearnings of the citizenry whenever such clashes are about to erupt usually led to cycles of revenge. In the same vein, unevenly distributions of opportunities and privileges by the government between the indigenous farmers and Fulani settlers often sparks resentment and eventually lead to chaos with devastating effects in between the two parties.

Certain policies either from the state or local government levels - when a party is given a preference treatment over the other can also lead to hostility between them. Whenever a party felt marginalized or denied a certain privilege that considered as his right due to government policy or lack of it often spank the crisis. Ironically, politicians often promote and exploit such crisis for their ulterior motives especially, during election or any related political programmes to gain popularity or secure any political positions. It is unfortunate, institutional leaderships: traditional heads like kings, emirs, egwu and ward heads are sometimes induced to give a preferential judgment with ethnicity favoritism/ highest bidder syndromes thereby pervert free and fair judgment and at such scenario, chaos is inevitable.

Government apparatus such as: police force, military and the likes tried their possible best in curbing the crisis but their best lacked the merits expected by the messes who are at the receiving end and this largely due to poor funding, lack of adequate equipment and training as well as corruptions. Also, state governments sometimes lack the necessary capacity to maintain law and order within their jurisdiction without the federal government coming to their aids, the aids which may not be readily available to them in some instances. The attention of the Federal government is more on oil and less on agriculture – both cropping and livestock farming which is the basis of this protracted conflicts hence, neglecting the security of the rural areas (Ahmed, I. 2015).

Economic Factors

Another major factor responsible for clashes between the agrarian farmers and Fulani pastoralists is economic factor as each party fighting to defend his livelihood by competing over scarce land and water resources. To worsen the situation, the skyrocketing of the Nigeria population coupled with environmental degradation adds salt to the injury. The present condition between the farmers and the herders is pathetic because, each party are counting his loses – both human lives and materials. It started from North – central region before spreading to all the nooks and cranny of the country. Desertification forced the herders to migrate down South from the North in pursuit of green pasture for their livestock. It is unfortunate, herdsmen over step their boundary by grazing freely on the farms of the indigenous farmers and in attempt to defend their farms ensue the crisis.

With more scientific discoveries on health, economy and the like enhance the population growth and it means more land to be occupied as settlements, trading and farming activities; thereby reducing the previous grazing routes earmarked for the herders. With this, cattle would not be able to feed well and their movement will also be hampered, which may lead to unhealthy live stocks. This also bothers on economic value because; cow may lose weight and it may affect its market value which herders would not readily accept hence, the confrontation. On the other hand, farmers have toil throughout the year, some will even take loans to increase the size of their farms; it will be disheartening to find out that such hard labour went down the drain within a tinkle of an eyes by cattle which is heavy economic lost to the farmers.

In such scenario, farmers might be left with no option than to fight back with the last drop of his blood.

Scarcity of resources also have bearing on the economic factor in that, for example, the resources meant for fifty people end up to be scrambled for by five hundred people. The fact is, none of them will have enough and it will affect the productivity of all of them. That is the plight of the indigenous farmers and nomadic herdsmen in Nigeria hence, the persistent attacks at each other. Food stuffs market prices surged beyond the reach of the common man because of this crisis; since the fear of attack, have kept farmers away from their farms which are clear indication of famine. The agriculture sector account for a substantial proportion of the nation's market activity and has historically provide extensive employment opportunities, thereby underpinning a robust economy. Regrettably, the sector's present dire circumstances have already led to the impoverishment of numerous citizens (Ohadiugha, C. J., and Nuhu, D. G. 2025).

Religious Factors

The impact of religion in the farmer-herder's scenario cannot be overemphasized due to religious differences between the two parties involved. It is pertinent to know that Fulani herders are generally Muslim while the indigenous farmers have mixed faiths – some are Christians, others are Muslims and yet, some are Africa Tradition Religion (ATR) adherents. While some may consider religion as irrelevant factor to the crisis, other sees it as one of the key factors in this situation because, Fulani herdsmen considered themselves as the original custodian of Islamic faith and jihadists who take it as duty to spread their fashion of Islam to all nooks and cranny of the country. The differences between the two parties are obvious: in ethnicity, language, culture, and livelihood; religious differences in this situation cannot be ignore (Bisi, 2023).

Until recently, Fulani herdsmen primarily targeted Christian communities, churches, and Christian schools; however, the violence has since extended beyond these groups. It is important to emphasize that the problem does not lie in religion itself – neither Christianity nor Islam – but in the attitudes and perspectives of certain adherents of these religions drives this conflict. The parties engaged in these conflicts are fundamentally mismatched owing to differences in ideology, culture, and worldview. As a result, disputes between them often take on a religious form and religion becomes a symbol of domination, retribution, or exclusion, which further worsens already fragile interreligious tension in the country.

If properly applied, religions could have been the bedrock of peace between the sedentary farmers and Fulani herders in the country. It is rather unfortunate; religions have become a tool of vengeance and aggression in the hands of the fanatic, hence the current situations within the country. Misinterpretations and misinformation have played a significant role on this ongoing crisis within the religious cycles in Nigeria which has literarily turned the country into a state of anarchy. With heretical and apostasy trending among certain religious leaders, the followers can be easily misled through the misinformation. Religious extremists are willing to die as martyr, treating the killing of innocents as a benchmark for securing the eternal bliss in the hereafter.

C. Ifelodun LGA, Kwara State: A Case Study

Ifelodun Local Government Area of Kwara State was carved out of the default Igbomina / Ekiti Province in 1976 the Province which is now divided into five different Local Government Areas - Irepodun, Ifelodun, Oke – Ero, Ekiti, and Isin Local Government Areas of Kwara State. While Kwara State is divided into three geopolitical zones which are: Kwara Central, Kwara South, and Kwara North; Kwara South comprised of Ifelodun, Offa, Oyun, Irepodun, Isin, Ekiti, and Oke- Ero LGAs. Ifelodun LGA is then comprised of nine districts and they are: Share , Oke – Ode, Igbaja, Ora, Agunjin, Idofian, Omupo, Ilere, and Oro – Ago and eighteen political wards. The local government had over 1,000 towns and villages with Share as her headquarters and the largest Local Government Area in Kwara State if not in Nigeria with an estimated land mass of about 206,042 (Jinadu, R.A. 2017). The indigenes of this local government are predominantly Yorubas of Igbomina tribe, but have Nupe tribe in small number who have also naturalized themselves as the indigenes of the local government as well. However, the recent phenomenon is witnessing the influx of Bororo / Fulani herders in large numbers into this land; which is the common phenomena in Nigeria today, without recognizing the landlords met on ground. They are now naturalizing themselves with the native of the LGA, hence, we have Fulani Igbaja, Fulani Oke-Ode, Fulani Share etc.

The accommodativeness of Igbomina people to strangers though, a strength but has negative implications on this Yoruba descent because, they often received folks and foes they could have successfully repelled at outset. This openness to strangers makes both their neighbors and aliens in their land take undue advantage of them and subject them to traumatic experiences. This researcher conducted a series of interviews between 2022 and 2025 in the targeted LGA to assess the level of herders' destructive activities as reported by indigenous farmers. The findings of these interviews are presented below:

In 2025, the guinea corn farm of elder Job Abiodun, a resident of Olayinka – one of towns in Ifelodun LGA was completely wrecked by Fulani's cattle simply because he could not harvest them on time. Also, in 2015, Mr. Matthew, a resident of Igbaja's cassava and yam farms were destroyed by herder's cattle without any compensation. At Baptist church, Oke-Ode in 2023, the resident pastor had farm rice inside the church premises, and when the pastor was not around, herder led his cows inside the church premises and completely ruined the rice farm before the arrival of the pastor. Also, rice farm belonging to Rev'd. Dr. Amodu of Igbaja was totally eaten up by the cattle of Fulani in 2022 without any trace. In February 2023, a group of Bororo herders attacked a man on his farm at Okeya, a neighboring town to Igbaja, they nearly caught off his leg before they left him half dead. The same was the experience in Ilere district in Ifelodun LGA where Mr. Ogunyomi was gruesomely strangled to death in 2017 (Jinadu, R.A. 2017). Cases of such occurrences are rampant throughout the nine districts that make up Ifelodun LGA, Kwara State.

A Philosophical Reflection on Peaceful Coexistence

Peaceful coexistence is often used in political and ethical dialogue, yet its philosophical implications are frequently neglected. Peaceful coexistence as postulated by the United Nations (UN), (Berlin, I. 1969) is not just an absence of war but, when diverse individuals and communities can negotiate their difference without violence, domination, or permanent hostility thereby making peaceful coexistence their moral choice through upholding human rights and justice. Peaceful coexistence in other word is not merely a pragmatic treatment of

persons but to accord individual with fare treatments. This is because; it is an avenue where ethical principles confront the bitterness of historical conflict, unequal power, and divergent worldview to live harmoniously. To enhance peaceful coexistence among men, (Kant Fraser, N. 1997) argued that people must be given due recognition and respect regardless of their background and status in the society rather than seeing them as a threats and obstacles. As Honneth proposed, people developed a healthy sense of identity when due recognition of autonomy, achievements and unique worth are given to that individual. But, when such recognition is withheld due to exclusion, discrimination, or undervalue, conflict and resentment bound to arise that might threaten peaceful coexistence (Honneth, A. 1995). It is pertinent to know that the enemies of peaceful coexistence include: racism, sexism, and cultural marginalization which must not be allow thriving in the society.

It is important to know that, in pluralistic societies, people may hold different moral, religious, or metaphysical worldviews that fundamentally, incompatible with belief system of others. Yet, seen from this angle, peaceful coexistence demands epistemic humility: an acceptance that no single worldview possesses absolute divine or metaphysical certainty, and that alternative perspectives may contain valid, albeit partial understandings. According to Habermas, peaceful coexistence emerges when communication is guided by pursuit of understanding rather than coercion (Habermas, J. 1996) . Under these conditions, disagreement is not a mark of moral failure but an inherent aspect of social life that must be approached with reason, honestly, and nonviolence. Therefore, no society can experience peaceful coexistence, unless such society is free from economic exploitation, cultural disrespect, and political exclusion; otherwise, the oppressed of such society are coerced to accept domination out of necessity rather than conviction. Hence, to have a peaceful society, justice is nonnegotiable or else, crisis is inevitable. Ethically, peaceful coexistence in this stance is not a fixed state but a dynamic process of setting boundary through justice and mutual act. In an increasingly globalized world, local conflicts are seldom insulated from broader international structures shaped by trader warfare, migration, and ecological crises. As a result, peaceful coexistence depends upon respect for international law, and the protection of human rights, and collective cooperation in addressing global challenges. From this perspective, peaceful coexistence constitutes both a local and global philosophical ideal, requiring critical reflection on the justice of social and political institutions while remaining attentive to the moral claims of others across the world.

Conclusion

The study examined farmers-herders clashes in Ifelodun LGA, Kwara State through a Philosophical perspective focusing on peaceful coexistence. It situates these conflicts within ethical theories of justice, communal responsibility and collective human flourishing. The analysis demonstrated that sustainable peace depends upon nominative transparency, equitable management of resources, and culturally responsive mechanisms of conflict resolution. Philosophical resolution of farmers-herder's conflicts in Ifelodun LGA, Kwara State highlighted mutual recognition, restorative practices, and institutional reforms as essential complements to security measures. Policy recommendations emphasize participatory land management, combining ethical insight with pragmatic reforms advances sustainable coexistence and resilience for agrarian community in Ifelodun LGA and Fulani herdsmen as well.

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