

## Herdsmen and Farmers Crisis in Ekiti State, 2014 - 2018: An Interrogation

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### Abstract

*This study examined the farmer and herder crisis in Ekiti State between 2014 and 2018. The research also traced the history of the Fulani in the State. A retrospect and review of the facts was made, in order that scholars would have an insight on perceptions as well as the strategic challenges that brought to fore the crisis. The study relied on documentary data. The documentary data were sourced from newspapers, journal papers, internet sources and correspondence. The documentary was subjected to internal and external criticism for authentication, and then to textual and contextual analyses. It also complimented the secondary data with few primary data, from unprinted sources. The research identified the influence of climate on the crisis.*

### Keywords

economy, peace, herders, climate change



### I. Introduction

Nigeria covers an area of 923,768km. The countries bordering Nigeria are the Republic of Benin to the west, Niger to the North, Chad to the East and the Gulf of Guinea to the South of Nigeria (Duyile W. A., Nwachukwu, Ediabonya, & Olofinba, 2020 (Daily Times, 1985). The Ekiti people are one of the largest historical subgroups of the larger Yoruba people of West Africa, located in Nigeria. They are classified as a Central Yoruba group, alongside the Ijesha, Igbomina, Yagba, Igbira and Ifes (Babatola & al, 2018). Ekiti State is populated exclusively by Ekiti people; however, it is but a segment of the historic territorial domain of Ekiti-speaking groups, which historically included towns in Ondo State such as Akure (the current capital and largest city of Ondo State), Ilara-Mokin, Ijare, and Igbara-oke. Ogbagi, Irun, Ese, Oyin, Igasi, Afin and Eriti in the Akoko region, as well as some towns in Kwara State, are also culturally Ekiti, although they belong to other Nigerian states.

Ekiti people by geography, their group name are synonymous with their natural habitat and location. The name Ekiti is a derivation of an earlier term, Okiti, which means "Hilly" in Yoruba, as characterized by the generally hilly terrain of the areas which the Ekiti inhabit (Babatola J. E., 2018 (Akintoye, 1971)). Historians in their study of the physical features of Ekiti have severally and consistently noted that the boundary between the two sub-ethnic areas of Ekiti and Ijesha is covered by a range of precipitous hills otherwise called the Efon-range, which is often about 600 feet above sea level (Babatola & al, 2018). The land to the south of the hills is forest-covered with occasional stretches of low scrub, while to the north has a greater part flowing with small belts of forest along the waterways (Babatola & al, 2018). The Ekiti cover an area of 8,557 km<sup>2</sup>, and are culturally bound by the Igbomina to the north and the Ijeshas to the west (the traditional Ekiti-Ijesha cultural boundary at Ipetu-Ijesha) (Aremu, 2016). While the other group in the scope of study, the Fulani originated with the Berbers of North Africa around the 8th or 11th century AD (Abbas G. , 2008). Over a millennium ago from AD 900 - 1900, they spread to

most parts of West Africa and some areas of Central Africa (Abraham, 2017). The Fulani people were predominantly Muslims.

In the opening of the 18th century, there were revolts between the Fulani and the Hausa community. The Fula origin also known as Fulani are a mass inhabitants widely dispersed in all of Africa, but most predominant in West Africa (Ajayi & Oyewale, 2017 (Adeleye, Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria, 1804-1906, 1971)). The main Fulani subgroups in Nigeria are Fulbe Gombe, Fulbe Adamawa, Fulbe Sokoto, Fulbe Mbororo, and Fulbe Borgu. Fulani herdsmen, also referred to as pastoralists, are nomadic or semi-nomadic herders whose primary occupation is raising livestock (Adeleye, 1981). Nomadic herding is a practice that entails moving with herds from one place to another in search of greener pasture. A pastoral Fulani family is the traditional herding unit (Manga, 1986). In the case of Ekiti State, the first set of Fulani nomad settlers in Ado Ekiti, came purposely to transact business and to propagate Islam. It was evident that during the reign of Oba Atewogboye (1836-1886), the first Muslim Ewi of Ado; that allowed for the accommodation of the Fulani, as such embracing the Islamic religion. The first set of Fulani settlers moved from Pategi via Ilorin to Otun Ekiti in the 18th century and Ayede Ekiti in the 19th century during the Kiriji war before their inward migration to Ado Ekiti (Ajayi & Oyewale, 2017). Majority of the Fulani migrants came into Ekiti land as slaves and casual workers, especially, during the Ekiti Parapo war. Most of the slaves were part of the Afonja team at Ilorin.

Another view from scholars suggests that Fulani clerics must have reached Ekiti before the eighteenth century – perhaps as early as the seventeenth century – for Otun-Ekiti had been a renowned commercial center since 1578 (Ajayi & Oyewale, 2017). This could be further strengthened by the fact that such Ekiti products as kolanuts were items of trade found as far as North Africa and Asia before the nineteenth century (Babatola & al, 2018). Other school of thought agreed that Ekiti had a Muslim ruler at Ado-Ekiti named Ewi Ali Atewogboye. But it was learnt that the king had accepted Islam before his ascension (Babatola J. E., 2018). Atewogboye's acceptance of Islam before his ascension indicates that Islam had been known there during the reign of his predecessor, Ewi Owaroloye (r. 1808-36) or even earlier thereby implying the facts that the clerics who were Fulani have already had contact with the Ekiti people for centuries hence making them centuries old in Ekiti land itself. Some Fulanis can claim the true owners of Ekiti. They have lived in Ekiti State for centuries. Defining the concepts of indigene and settler in a particular area could be difficult task especially in the context of continuous population movement over time and across cultural spaces may make them not considered an indigene.

In addition, the fact that the northern jihad atmosphere was no more conducive as a result of the crisis cum war, which made some of the Fulani peasants to move from the northern Nigeria space to some Ekiti communities. The Fulani's who were also clerics helped to spread Islam to Ekiti during the eighteenth century. The Fulani economic activities consisted of farming, hunting, weaving, and trade. Trade seems to have been the usual way for the Fulani clerics to spread Islam. Islam through the Fulani's, functioned as the vehicle through which Islamic culture infiltrated the Ekiti people's culture, the frequency of the ensuing social interaction facilitated economic activities between towns and villages and helped maintain a considerable degree of cultural homogeneity (Ajayi & Oyewale, 2017). This situation assisted the diffusion of new ideas, cultural behaviors and lifestyles – among the two ethnic groups – in Ado-Ekiti. On the Positive, the jihad even in the midst of seeming inconsistencies, the 1804 Usman dan Fodio's jihad can be said to have brought about a temporary and relative stability into Hausa land (Aremu, 2016). It

was affirmed that the unity in the North, made the Fulani's a threat to other cultures, Ekiti inclusive (Abbas, 2012). The strategy of enforcing Islam on the Hausa may be considered dangerous to communities as Ekiti. Added to these, are criminal activities such as Cattle Rustling, Terrorism, Banditry, and many more. It is in such context of criminality that duff detailed to the modern parlance in the 21st Century. These acts of criminality among the Fulani have made the socio-economic and socio political relations between them and the Ekiti people strenuous and difficult; hence the crisis that often erupted among the groups.

Crises refer to a time of intense difficulty, danger, or uncertainty, often requiring immediate action to prevent harm or damage. Crises can take many forms, such as natural disasters, public health emergencies, economic downturns, political upheavals and social unrest. Crises can have severe consequences, including loss of life, damage to property and infrastructure, and long term social and economic effects. Effective crises management requires careful planning, coordination, and communication among all stakeholders involved, including government officials, emergency responders, and many others. Crises have forced millions of people to flee their homes and become refugees. This displacement can lead to social and economic instability, and it can have a long term effects on individuals and societies. The experience of crises can cause physical and emotional traumas, both for soldiers and civilians. Crises have often driven advancements in technology, including medical technology, transportation and communication. While these advancements have had positive impacts, they have also been used in future conflicts, leading to more destructive and deadly wars (Solnit, 2009).

There have been clashes in myriads of communities across Ekiti towns on the incessant herdsmen/farmers conflicts from 2014 to 2018. The crisis have taken new dangerous dimension to the extent that the clashes have become so frequent culminating into killings, kidnapping, and in some cases burning of vegetations cum invasion of communities. For instance, various communities in Ekiti State such as Ikole Local Government of Ekiti State where herders attacked three women residing in a plantation in the Irele areas of the Ikole Local Government Area of Ekiti State (Ogunjobi, 2020). Herders invaded the village early hours of the morning on 7th April 2015, destroyed properties and burnt down houses (Nathaniel, Olutegbe, Oke, & Ogungbaro, 2022). Also, farmers lament as herdsmen destroy multi-million naira maize farm in the State and felt disgusted at the impunity of the group . The farm covering about 235 hectares of land is at the state forest reserve in Aduloju farm stead located along Ado-Ijan road in Ado local government area of the state (Fayose, 2018).

In each of these little wars, lives were lost, property worth billions of Naira destroyed and houses were burnt. Many people have attributed the conflicts to different factors such as historical undertone, backdrop of nomadic pastoral activities. Others also attributed the causes of the conflicts to factors such as migration due to the Ozone Layer depletion, Boko Haram insurgency, policy on land law and land resource control system. The crisis had also an infrastructure connotation. Infrastructure can be categorized into three:

- Economic Infrastructure are those infrastructure put in place to help solve economic problems.
- Social Infrastructure can be regarded as those infrastructures that are meant to attend to the need of social problems in a given society
- Political Infrastructure is known to be of political administration (Duyile, 2020)

Inadequate Economic, Social and even Political Infrastructure can be considered some of the reasons while these small wars continued unabated. It is an additional factor to already established positions such as terrorism, topography, and climate change. Nigeria is plagued by small wars. The Nigerian Civil War for instance was a watershed in Nigeria's

history. The Principal Actors in the Nigerian Civil War can be referred to as the Federal Government of Nigeria under the leadership of Major General Yakubu Gowon on the part of Nigeria. The Biafra side was headed by Lt Colonel Odumegwu Emeka Ojukwu (Duyile, *Nature and Impact of Involvement of the Navy in the Nigeria Civil War, 1967-70*, 2016). Other smaller wars such as the Niger Delta Crisis, Boko Haram crisis, and the Herds Men-Farmer crisis came four decades after the Civil War. On Niger Delta crisis, the Ken Saro Wiwa and Ogoni environmental agitation; the Ijaw and Itsekiri crisis, the Ijaw and Ilaje crisis, and some other minor issues encouraged the militancy that erupted in the 21st century. However, strange this could be, these events nurtured the later militancy of the 21st century. For instance, during the Ijaw and Itsekiri crisis or the Ijaw and Ilaje crisis; weapons that were used became a fulcrum for training and use of small and light weapons that encouraged the agitation against the federal government. These crises encouraged military discipline, military strategy, oil bunkering, and the necessary weapons to be used for the civil strife against the other tribes and the state (Duyile, *BUHARI ADMINISTRATION AND THE NIGERIAN NIGER-DELTA REGION, 2015 – 2021*, 2023). For the Boko Haram crisis, issues that as to do with religious schisms, fanaticism, poverty, modernization...etc were but few factors that engendered the crisis; the war may actually have started in the month of July, 2009, when Mohammed Yusuf was arrested. The real crisis actually began when Boko Haram retaliated by attacking some police station in Maiduguri killing over one hundred people (Duyile, Adu, Jegede, & Buhari, 2020). Yoruba (including Ekiti) plays insular politics despite the urban nature of the state.

These reasons more so causes are germane to finding a solution to the crisis, with a view to understanding the actual factors that engendered the conflict so as to take proactive measures that could put a solution to the herders/farmers conflict. The continuous neglect of finding adequate solutions to the crisis poses a great threat to peace, unity, security and socio-economic cum political development of Ekiti State and Nigeria at large as any problem in any part of the country directly or indirectly hindered national development and growth. The research aim of this paper was therefore undertaken with a view to focus on historical developments and events majorly, in the Governor Ayodele Fayose, period of governance in Ekiti State. The herdsmen attack on farms had also encouraged more youths to jump into the 'Japa' train. The Japa phenomenon is about Nigerian youths migrating to Europe, Americas, and Asia (Duyile & Nwachukwu, 'Japa' Phenomenon And Nigeria Students In The Mix Of A Proxy War in Ukraine, 2023). The Nigerian State profits only if these youths send home remittances. It should be noted that the political logic of Yoruba (which also includes Ekiti State) politics has been one which is scheduled or insular in nature (Duyile & Ojo, *Electioneering and Violent Political Protests in South Western Nigeria*, 2021). Although insular, the Ekiti people are accommodating to foreigners and do everything within their power to make them comfortable. Ekiti State has no littoral link; Nigeria is a maritime nation that has not made full use of the potentials of the sea (Duyile, *The Sea Factor in Nigeria's National Security*, 2015). What this means for Ekiti State simply are those herders only come in through land platforms. Nigeria's dependence on Western and Chinese companies also means that local industries are subsumed, making it difficult for farmers to find alternatives to farming hence a difficult livelihood for many Ekiti State youths. For instance, a local construction company named Iyalabaki in Ekiti State could no longer compete with better equipped Chinese Construction Companies such as Charvet; that got the contract to build local roads in Ekiti State like Ijesa Isu to Ikole Single lane road, Otun Ekiti to Igogo road, and Ijesa Ekiti to Igogo road (Aremu & Duyile, 2018). The dilemma established through this crisis was that the youths were in some cases forced to migrate out of Nigeria or to other states in the country. The frustrating attitude of

the Herdsmen did force an accelerated at an uncontrollable rate the migration of Ekiti youths from the state. Nigeria's large population and roughly over 50% of the total population of the region makes it an important nation in West Africa (Duyile, Economic Integration in West Africa, 1960-1975: An Enquiry into the Past, 2021). Ekiti is a part of Nigeria and the movement of Youths from Ekiti to other Nigerian States as Lagos and even outside the country makes the crisis an internal and global problem.

## **II. Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Farmers-Herdsmen Conflicts in Ekiti State**

There has been an increase in crop cultivation in all parts of the country, with the major change appearing to be crop farming covering large areas in Taraba, Benue, Nasarawa, Jigawa and parts of Cross River, Oyo, Ekiti and Niger States. In the same instance, extensive grazing has also expanded with the main expansions covering lands in Taraba, Plateau, Kogi, Ekiti and Kwara States. Research on the study of land use by some authors showed that crop cultivation or farming consumed 43,778.60km of the Nigeria's total land area, while extensive grazing consumed 21,913.75km of the country's total land area. The researchers further revealed that the increase in the land use by herders brought about some form of overlap, that is, an extension or encroachment of grazers into available farmers land space for utilization for their own interest. Farmers, however, see the land as their domain; most see themselves as natives to that settlement. Conflicts arose in Ekiti as a result of loss of crops cultivated in the land which the people considered as the basis of their social, economic and spiritual existence. A high percentage of conflicts in Ekiti arose from land disputes (Adesina, 2008), hence a conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers over grazing land.

The inability of the state (government) to address the indigene and settler phenomenon in Nigerian constitution, the unresolved issues of grazing land and water spots which are central to the economic survival of both the herders and farmers, and the Nigerian land tenure system which has had serious implications for land acquisition by the peasants and the low class are factors that keep the conflict lingering, since the economic lives of both the farmers and herders revolve around the use of land resources (Abbas G. , 2008). The somewhat criminal activities of Fulanis engaged in Kidnapping, Cattle Rustling, and Terrorism; adds to the menace of these groups wherever they do reside. Thus, causes of herdsmen/farmers conflicts are linked to economic interests cum criminality, included in inequitable access to land, diminishing land resources, antagonistic values among user groups, policy contradiction and non-recognition of rights of indigenous people.

Other scholars attribute the conflict between farmers and herdsmen to ethno-religious and reprisal factors. This is buttressed by the International Crisis Group Report of September 19, 2017 where it was observed that the conflicts, particularly herdsmen attacks on farming communities have spawned dangerous political, economic and religious conspiracy theories. Noting that one of such perception theories is that the attacks are part of a longer term Fulani plot to displace indigenous populations and seize their lands. While among Christian communities, herdsmen attacks are widely seen as a subtle form of Jihad, the International Crisis Group Report added. It is such conspiracy theory that had made it a dangerous conflict in Ekiti State

In September 21, 2015, herdsmen numbering over 20 were equally reported to have abducted a former Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) and chieftain of Afenifere, Chief Samuel Oluyemisi Falae on his 77th birthday after invading his farm in

Ilado Village, Akure North Area of Ondo State. After the incident, the kidnappers were said to have demanded N100m ransom but later regained his freedom after he was reportedly rescued by the former Inspector General of Police, Solomon Arase. Following Falae's Kidnap, the Afenifere cultural group called for the expulsion of the herdsmen from the South-West (by extension Fulanis). On the same day, farmers in Lagun, Iyana Offa, Atagba, Lapata and the surrounding communities in Lagelu Local government area of Oyo State reported that they were attacked by herdsmen who also stole valuables from them (Punch, 2016). Saki, Ago-Are, Oje- Owode areas of Oyo state have been severally reported of having severe encounters of farmers and herdsmen (Vanguard, 2016). In each of the conflict, lives and properties were reported to have been lost and villagers displaced (Adeleke, 2018).

It is insinuations like these and beyond in other neighboring States (not necessarily mentioned) in this study that engendered Ayodele Fayose to declare war against the herdsmen. Ekiti state had its own share when Fulanis were alleged to have killed two residence in the State. Fayose assertion may also have been initially provoked by an earlier attack reportedly carried out by herdsmen on the 20 May, 2016, at Oke Ako, where five people were allegedly killed. The killing could serve as a gateway to seek legal backing against the crisis. Governor Ayodele Fayose, then promulgated the Ekiti State Anti grazing law tagged "The Prohibition of Cattle and other Ruminants Grazing in Ekiti State" was passed by the Ekiti State Legislative Assembly and signed into law by the State Governor, on the 30th of October 2016. The law was the outcome of an executive bill sponsored by the Ekiti State Government to regulate, prevent and control indiscriminate cattle grazing and other matters connected therewith. The law which contains eight parts was structured to douse this crisis. However, the law seems not to be effective at bringing about the much desired change for sustainable management of commons and achieving a peaceful coexistence among stakeholders in Ekiti. The ineffectiveness of the law may have forced Fayose to raise an alarm that Fulanis want to attack the Ekiti people in 2018 and accused the Federal Government for supporting the herdsmen. Fayose was allegedly indicted of making inciting comments capable of affecting the integration of different tribes in the State when he said farmers in his state should begin to use any means to protect themselves against militant Fulani herdsmen. Many people misconstrued him to mean that he has ordered farmers to take guns against the Fulani. In a report, in one of the Nigerian Newspapers, he was quoted from his twitter page, as writing – "The message is simple: Don't take laws into your hands, but defend Ekiti and its people. The creation of an Anti – Grazing Marshalls that includes the local hunters was his home grown policy to check the excesses of the Herdsmen.

Aside of the general effects on loss of lives, animals, farm crops, there are soil erosion, poisoning of water and displacement of farmers and pastoral problems. There is usually counter attack in entirely unaffected places in reaction to the loss suffered in farmers – herdsmen clashes elsewhere. The conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Ekiti State has several facets. Until last twenty years, the disagreements between herders and farming communities used to be resolved by negotiations and the baales and herder communities leaders. Simple solutions such as a herder must compensate the damage in a farm, if he couldn't control his animals and prevent them damaging the growing crops. During the dry season if herders would like to use some laid fallow farms as grazing land they would ask for permission from the land owner before using it. More than 90% of nomadic herdsmen in northern Nigeria are ethnic Fulanis and the majority of the Fulanis are Muslims.

### III. Results and Discussion

Herdsman attacks since the 20th century had in most cases been anchored on vegetation to feed the herd. Thus, the issue is traditionally regarded as a conflict between herders and farmers, or broadly seen as that between herdsman and farming communities. One major security and developmental challenge that has attracted much national discourse in the recent past is the conflict between herdsman and farmers in different parts of the country. The crisis has become a recurring decimal, especially in Ekiti State and indeed a time bomb, which appears not to have been given the desired policy and security attention by government at all levels. It could be argued that some Fulanis can claim without missing words to be a part and parcel of the state more so an indigene of the State. This research has proven that the Fulanis have lived in Ekiti State as far as many centuries and have a right to claim part ownership of the state. A group that has lived very long in Ekiti is found as a culprit ( dangerous herders activities associated with the Fulanis in the past few years especially during the second Fayose administration or so portends a serious security threat to peace, unity, and socioeconomic development of the country and Ekiti State in particular. Empirical studies are replete with stories of massive killings arising from the conflicts between herders/farmers across various States in Nigeria particularly Ekiti State. In consequence, the sedentary Ekiti agrarian communities have resorted to self-defense through local vigilante groups. This has further aggravated violence, with destruction of lives and properties.

The protracted conflict between pastoralist herdsman and sedentary farmers in Ekiti cost the State economic losses. The climate change which affects the whole world and exacerbates the conflict in Ekiti state, buttressed by already existing problem such as disagreements on sharing the land, got bigger by time under that ineffective state authority. The population growth, climate change, desertification, oil boom, industrialization, illegal armament of non-state groups, ineffective security personnel, impunity etc. are some of the most important reasons of the ongoing clashes.

### IV. Conclusion

The study employed case study research design to interrogate into the phenomenon of farmers-herdsman conflicts and used secondary data such as books, research articles, newspapers and government publications in Nigeria. The data was content analyzed. The study found that farmers-herdsman conflicts are not caused by a single reason but are propelled by multi-causal factors, such as limited resources in the face of greater need and shortage of land as well as climate change among others.

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