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**Islamic Prescriptions for Cattle Rearing: A  
Complementary Approach towards Curbing Farmer-  
Herder Clashes in Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

The recurrence of violence across Nigeria is worrisome. Among the incidents are the clashes between Fulani Muslim herders and Christian farmers, especially in the middle belt and parts of southern Nigeria. Efforts of the government at curbing these clashes have not yielded desired results. Can religion (Islam) complement governmental interventions in the resolution of the problem? This paper focused on a historical and analytic exploration of this question. It was found that clashes were caused by the open grazing system of cattle rearing adopted by Fulani

herdsmen. This system exposes cattle to dangers, destroys crops on farmlands, and causes collisions on roads/highways. It was also revealed that the non-adherence to Islamic prescriptions on animal welfare was an important additional factor. The paper posits that criminal activities such as rape, killing, and destruction of property alleged to have been committed by Fulani Muslim herders are condemnable and punishable by Islamic law. To achieve better results in the search for peaceful co-existence, it is recommended that the federal government and state administrations establish ranches and grazing reserves, implement the National Livestock Transformation Plan, and collaborate with religious leaders to motivate herders to keep Islamic laws of cattle rearing.

### **Keywords**

Cattle rearing, herder-farmer clashes, Islam, Nigeria, open grazing

### **Introduction**

Nigeria, a plurality country with a diverse cultural background, has continued to witness insecurity since the return of democracy in 1992. Unfortunately, the insecurity challenges have become pronounced in the insurgency of *Boko Haram*, banditry, and kidnapping in northern Nigeria. In the Southeast, the struggle for secession by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has continued to reverberate, while the Southwest has been witnessing cases of kidnapping and separatist activities for the establishment of a Yoruba nation. The administration of President Muhammadu Buhari has been accused of tribalism under the aegis of Fulanisation due to alleged criminal acts being perpetrated by Fulani herders in the country. The Fulanisation agenda is hinged on the premise that President Buhari, a Fulani man, supports herders from his ethnic group when they are alleged to have caused conflicts through open grazing of cattle.

The movement of Fulani herders from the North to the South in search of pastures for their cattle has caused a series of conflicts with the farmers who claim that cattle destroy their crops. It seems that all six geo-political zones have witnessed herder-farmer clashes. The conflict has assumed an ethno-religious dimension, as evident in recent conflicts over land resources between the Fulani Muslim herders and Christian farmers across the country. The conflicts are more pronounced in the Middle Belt

in the North Central. Since 1999, it has been reported that herder-farmer violence has claimed several thousands of lives and rendered many people homeless<sup>1</sup>.

Scholars of various disciplines including history, sociology, political science, and religion have addressed the menace of conflicts among the herdsmen and farmers in the Northern and Southern geo-political zones. Mortiz sees the herder-farmer conflict as a local struggle over resource use within the context of the larger political economy. It is a conflict in which a limited number of local people are involved in skirmishes over crops, animals, water, and land. A herder is defined as a pastoralist who keeps herd animals. In other words, a herder is a person in charge of the activity of herding the animals to pasture<sup>2</sup>. A farmer is also defined as an agriculturalist that lives primarily off farming or a person cultivating a particular plot of land. It is often observed that the majority of the farmer-herder clashes have occurred between Muslim Fulani herdsmen and Christian farmers, resulting in ethno-religious hostilities<sup>3</sup>.

The Nigerian government has made attempts to curb the herder-farmer clashes through some projects but the efforts have not yielded desired results. Since 2000, urban conflicts, particularly in Jos and Kaduna, have been violent, claimed several lives, and destroyed valuable properties. The fact that the clashes have been linked to ethnicity and religion calls one's attention to address the herder-farmer conflict from a religious perspective. What provisions does religion, especially Islam, make for Muslims who rear animals? How should animals be catered for according to Islam? These are the issues this paper intends to address with a view to proffering solutions to the lingering problems of herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria. Before delving into the main thrust of this paper, let us briefly examine cattle rearing as a profession in Nigeria.

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<sup>1</sup>A. A. Jeremiah, "Herders against Farmers: Nigeria Expanding Deadly Conflict" retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/252-herders-against-farmers-nigerias-expanding-deadly-conflict> downloaded 28/8/2021).

<sup>2</sup>M. Mortiz, "Changing Contexts and Dynamics of Farmer-Herder Conflict Across West Africa" Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable> *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Review Canadiann das Etudies* vol.40 (1) (2006) pp.1-40, Taylor and Francis Ltd, downloaded 12 April 2018).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, pp.22-23

## Cattle Rearing As a Profession in Nigeria

Cattle rearing is an aspect of animal husbandry. It is a lucrative livestock-rearing business in the world today. The cattle production system can be extensive and intensive which largely depends on local conditions, climate, available feeding components, herd size, etc<sup>4</sup>. Cattle rearing is said to be a lucrative and thriving business due to the milk and other products gotten from cows. There are a lot of benefits derivable from cattle rearing. These include milk, beef, cheese, skin, fur, dairy products, etc. Statistics show that there are about 38,200 licensed and registered livestock farming businesses in the USA alone, which is said to have provided job opportunities for about 62,500 people. Besides the USA, beef cattle farming is very large and active in other countries like Germany, Egypt, Argentina, Israel, China, Turkey, and Nigeria. Cattle rearing deals with the mass breeding of cattle (calves, steers, bulls, cows, heifers, bullocks, and oxen) to make a profit<sup>5</sup>.

In Nigeria, cattle are mostly reared by Fulani people. They are said to have been the largest semi-nomadic group in the world and are found in West and Central Africa, especially from Senegal to the Central African Republic. In Nigeria, some Fulanis live as semi-nomadic herders. They herd animals across vast areas. They are often linked with the Hausa people, having lived together for a very long time<sup>6</sup>.

Different breeds of cattle are reared by Fulani. These include Azawat, Sokoto Gudali, Wadara, White Fulani, Ndama, Kekeku, Kuri, Brown Swiss, Holstein, Jersey, etc. Cattle breeds can be categorised into three major groups, namely beef cattle, dairy cattle, and dual purpose. For clarity purposes, beef cattle are reared to produce meat; dairy cattle are reared to produce milk while dual-purpose cattle are capable to produce meat and milk. Dairy cows are extensively grazed, which is said to be the traditional way of cattle farming. Cattle rearing is good in arid regions and that is why Northerners have the highest number of cattle farmers<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>P.P. Rajkumar, "Cattle Farming" retrieved from <https://agribiz.info/agriwiki/article/cattle-farming/> downloaded 5/9/2021.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid

<sup>6</sup>N. Mukaila "Making Sense of Nigeria's Fulani-Farmer Conflict" retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36139388> downloaded 28/8/2021

<sup>7</sup>E. Johnson "Cattle Rearing Business Plan in Nigeria" Retrieved from <https://www.liveandwingit.com/download-cattle-rearing-business-plan-in-nigeria-pdf/> downloaded 3/8/2021).

It is important to note that there are traditional and modern cattle farming systems. In traditional cattle farming, the cows are a local breed and they are small in size. The traditional method is an open graze system whereby cattle move from one place to another while in zero grazing, they are pure-bred modern cows, which are larger and more productive than the traditional ones. In the traditional method, cattle move about the land, sometimes destroying the fields, leading to clashes between the crop planters and cattle farmers as is being experienced in the Middle Belt and Southern part of Nigeria. As a reactionary measure, farmers too sometimes poison the water sources and farmlands, thereby, killing innocent animals. The herders of the traditional method spend much of their time with the herd, whereas modern cattle farmers can diversify their role by investing in other forms of agriculture<sup>8</sup>. It is observed that Fulani herders often carry sticks, cutlasses, and knives to meet their daily needs while grazing their cattle but later had to resort to carrying AK 47 rifles to defend themselves against cattle rustlers.

On cattle rearing in Nigeria, Johnson writes:

Cattle rearing in Nigeria is for hides/skin, meat, and dairy products but meat production is the highest in the chart followed by dairy. Nigeria's dairy industries comprise milk, cheese, yogurt, ice cream, butter, and infant formula<sup>9</sup>.

The economic importance of cattle rearing in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. It provides meat and milk for human consumption. It is also suitable to pull plows on farms by using cattle for plowing land. Cattle rearing provides hide and skin, blood meat and bone meal for feeds for farm animals, and a source of employment and income for people. It is also a source of fertilizers, as the dung of cattle serves as a good manure for plant growth<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup>A. Christou "Comparison between traditional and modern cattle farming" <https://www.comundos.org/en/content/comparison-between-traditional-and-modern-cattle-farming>, downloaded 5/9/2021

<sup>9</sup>E. Johnson Cattle Rearing in Nigeria" Retrieved from <https://www.liveandwingit.com/download-cattle-rearing-business-plan-in-nigeria-pdf/> 3/8/2021).

<sup>10</sup>"Livestock farming in Nigeria" Retrieved from [www.nigerianfinder.com/livestock-farming-in-nigeria](http://www.nigerianfinder.com/livestock-farming-in-nigeria) 10/8/2021.

## A Historical Overview of Farmer-Herder Clashes in Nigeria

Historically, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, pastoralists had been driving their cattle east and west across the Sahel, south of the Sahara desert, including Northern Nigeria. Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some herders started moving further South due to drought experienced in the far North and relative peace in central and southern Nigeria. As the herders moved southward looking for pastures for their cattle, so they had clashes with farmers. Since 1999, a lot of media and academic literature have been documenting violent and persistent fatal clashes between herders and farmers across Nigeria. In 1999, it was reported that more than 19,000 people were killed. Since 2000, farmer-herder conflicts have been taking place in Jos and Kaduna. According to Global Terrorism Index, 800 lives were lost in 2015 in the clashes between farmers and herders<sup>11</sup>.

Between 2016 and 2019, an unaccounted number of people had been gruesomely killed in the clashes between farmers and herders that were recorded in Adamawa, Agatu, Benue, Nimbo, Enugu State, Plateau, Taraba, and Kajuru Local Government areas of Kaduna State. The killings involved children, women, farmers, and Fulanis as well as the destruction of worship centres and residential buildings<sup>12</sup>. Oluremi and Olusegun, while enumerating frequent clashes between herders and farmers, explain the clashes:

A gruesome attack on Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State was reported in February 2016 in which about 7000 people were driven from six villages by Fulani herdsmen....Fulani herdsmen in Enugu State in April 2016 also attacked Ukpabi Nimbo in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area on 25 April 2016, killing over 40 people. Two days after, the Ukpabi Nimbo attack, there was another attack by the Fulani herdsmen in the Umuchigbo Community in Enugu East Local Government Area of Enugu State and over 200 people were

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<sup>11</sup>Retrieved from "herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria" Retrieved from *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, 12/8/2021

<sup>12</sup>Ibid

killed and houses were razed. They have left their footprints in virtually every part of the country.<sup>13</sup>

Scholars of diverse disciplines including history, sociology, and political science have identified various factors responsible for the frequent clashes between herders and farmers in Nigeria. Jeremiah states that among the principal factors or drivers of the clashes are climatic changes, population growth, loss of grazing reserves, technological and economic changes (new livestock and farming practice), crime (rural banditry and cattle rustling), political and ethnic strife, and cultural changes<sup>14</sup>.

In their study, Gabriel and Joseph attribute traditional institutional factors, land acquisition by capitalist farmers, contamination of streams, rape, destruction of crops, indigenisation, the porosity of Nigerian borders, impunity, and nepotism as the main causes of herders and farmers crises in Nigeria<sup>15</sup>. Okonoye and Fawenu state that the factors responsible for conflicts between the herders and crop farmers in Nigeria include unauthorised encroachment into farmers' farmlands by the Fulani herders, lack of political will by the government to arrest and punish the offenders, and the inability of the government to respond quickly to distress calls and early warning signs<sup>16</sup>.

### **Government's Efforts towards Curbing Farmer-Herder Clashes in Nigeria**

Of recent, some states have started legislating against the open graze system, a move which did not go down well with the Fulani herders and their associations. It was reported that the anti-open grazing law was made by Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau, Taraba, Zamfara, Enugu, Ekiti, and Ondo states. The law was criticised by the zonal leader of the Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore (a

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<sup>13</sup>O.J. Okonoye and B.O. Fawenu "The Concept of Restitution in Exodus 22:5-6 as a panacea to Conflict between Fulani and Crop farmers in Nigeria, *LASU Journal of Humanities*, Ojo, Lagos, Faculty of Arts, 13 (1&2), pp. 63-64.

<sup>14</sup>A. A. Jeremiah, "Herders against Farmers: Nigeria Expanding Deadly Conflict" retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/252-herders-against-farmers-nigerias-expanding-deadly-conflict> downloaded 28/8/2021).

<sup>15</sup>N.T. Gabriel and N.T. Joseph "Political and Religious Implications of Herders and Farmers Crises in Nigeria" *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies* 2019, 6 (2), 1-12 Sryahwa Publications.

<sup>16</sup>O.J. Okonoye and B.O. Fawenu "The Concept of Restitution in Exodus 22:5-6 as a panacea to Conflict between Fulani and Crop farmers in Nigeria" *LASU Journal of Humanities* 2019, Ojo, Faculty of Arts 13(1&2) 60-77



Fulani socio-cultural group in charge of the north-central states), Gidado Bebeji, saying that the herders would leave Benue State because they did not understand the content of the law. Since 2018, several attacks and clashes have been happening between herdsman and farmers. Though Miyyeti Allah absolved itself from the attacks, another body, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), was said to have claimed responsibility for the attacks, which were said to be in response to anti-grazing laws made by some states in Nigeria<sup>17</sup>.

Federal Government had also attempted to curb the frequent clashes between the herders and farmers in the country. It is on record that in April 2014, President Goodluck Jonathan's government inaugurated an inter-ministerial committee on grazing reserves to end the crisis between the herders and farmers in the country. In the same year, the government set up a Political Committee on Grazing Reserves chaired by the then Benue State Governor, Gabriel Suswam. The Governor's Committee called for the recovery of all grazing routes encroached upon by farmers. The Committee also recommended that the Central Bank of Nigeria should release a total sum of N100 billion to the 36 state governments in the country for the creation of ranches in their respective states.

It was reported that the money which was released for the creation of ranches by the Central Bank was looted by the state government and since the defeat of President Jonathan in 2015, no report has been heard about the money released for the creation of ranches<sup>18</sup>.

Since 2016, the administration of Muhammadu Buhari was said to have embarked on some projects to create transhumance corridors through the Middle Belt in a bid to curb the conflicts between the herders and farmers. The project, which was mostly supported by the Northern governors, was vehemently opposed by their southern counterparts. In 2019, President Muhammadu Buhari tried again to create Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlements<sup>19</sup>. His proposal was met with opposition from Nigerians, especially in the southern parts of the country. President

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<sup>17</sup>O.J. Okonoye and B.O. Fawenu "The Concept of Restitution in Exodus 22:5-6 as a panacea to Conflict between Fulani and Crop farmers in Nigeria" *LASU Journal of Humanities* 2019, Ojo, Faculty of Arts 13(1&2) 63-64.

<sup>18</sup>A. A. Jeremiah "Herders against farmers: Nigeria's expanding deadly conflict" <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/252-herders-against-farmers-nigerias-expanding-deadly-conflict> downloaded 28/8/2021.

<sup>19</sup>Ruga Settlement "Sahara Reporters," 28<sup>th</sup> June 2019



Buhari was accused of having a Fulanisation/Islamisation agenda by promoting his Fulani tribesmen at the expense of other tribes in the country.

In an attempt to curb farmer-herder violent clashes in Nigeria, Federal Government initiated a plan in 2019 known as The National Livestock Transformation Plan purposely to restrict the movement of cattle by encouraging nomadic herders to switch to sedentary, more mechanised livestock production as it is obtainable in the developed countries. The plan was aimed at establishing ranches in public grazing reserves and improving services around them, including securing water to irrigate pastures and grow fodder.

To implement the plan, seven pilot states of the federation were identified: Adamawa, Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Plateau, Taraba, and Zamfara. Going by the plan, it was hoped that by 2028, the seven states would have built a total of at least 119 ranches, creating over 2 million new jobs for Nigerians<sup>20</sup>. On March 15, 2021, the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development launched the National Livestock Breed Improvement Programme to improve the genetic makeup of dairy cattle to achieve milk and meat yields from the nation's herds<sup>21</sup>. On May 17, 2021, it was widely reported that the 17 Southern governors in Nigeria met in Asaba, Delta State, where it was declared that there would be an anti-grazing law, come September 1, 2021 by all the southern governors to solve the clashes between the herders and farmers in the region<sup>22</sup>.

What should be the lasting solution to these incessant clashes and violent attacks among the Fulani herders and farmers in Nigeria? The rest of this paper shall examine the Islamic prescriptions for cattle rearing. The study shall also proffer some pragmatic solutions to the lingering problem of the crisis between the Fulani herders and farmers across the country.

## **Islamic Prescriptions for Cattle Rearing**

Generally, cattle are cows and bulls that are kept on a farm purposely for the production of milk and consumption of meat

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<sup>20</sup>A. A. Jeremiah "Herders against farmers: Nigeria's expanding deadly conflict" <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/252-herders-against-farmers-nigerias-expanding-deadly-conflict> downloaded 28/8/2021.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid

<sup>22</sup>Full Communiqué: Southern Governors Call for National Dialogue, Ban Open Grazing, 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2021 retrieved from [www.thisdaylive.com](http://www.thisdaylive.com) 6<sup>th</sup> July 2021

gotten from them. In the last few decades, animal rearing, including cattle rearing and production, has become commercialised and industrialised in Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt. Belonging to the animal world, cattle's benefits are mentioned in the Islamic texts, the Glorious Qur'an and Hadith. It is said that there are over 200 verses of the Qur'an and some Quranic chapters that are named after animals. Among them are *Suratul-Baqarah* (Chapter on the Cow/Heifer), *Suratul-Ani'ām* (Chapter on the Cattle), and *Suratul-Fīl* (Chapter on the Elephant). This is to show that as human communities are relevant, animals' kingdom is also useful and relevant to the human world. While referring to the numerous benefits derivable from cattle rearing, Allah says:

And in cattle (too) you have an instructive example. From within their bodies, We produce (milk) for you to drink; there are, in them, (besides) numerous (other) benefits for you; and of their (meat) you eat. And them, as well as ships, you ride<sup>23</sup>.

In another place in the Qur'an, Allah further mentions the purpose of creating cattle when He declares:

And Cattle He has created for you (men): from them, you derive warmth and numerous benefits and of their (meat) you eat. And you have a sense of pride and beauty in them as you drive them home in the evening and as you lead them forth to pasture in the morning<sup>24</sup>.

From the above Qur'an verses, it is clearly understood that cattle rearing, either for commercial or personal purposes, is beneficial and useful for human beings.

Cattle rearing from the Islamic perspective is a permissible and lucrative occupation due to its numerous benefits mentioned in the Qur'an. Today, cattle provide human beings with food through milk, butter, cheese, yogurt, and meat which are gotten from cattle

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<sup>23</sup>Q23:21-22

<sup>24</sup>Q16:5-6

on a daily basis. They also provide human beings with clothing and furnishings<sup>25</sup>.

Considering the numerous benefits derivable from cattle rearing, herders or cattle owners are enjoined by Prophet Muhammad to treat their animals (cattle/cows) kindly. While discussing the kind treatment towards animals, the Prophet is quoted in one of his traditions, reported by Abu Hurairah, as saying:

While a man was walking, he felt thirsty and went down a well and drank water from it. On coming out of it, he saw a dog panting and eating mud because of excessive thirst. The man said "This (dog) is suffering from the same problem as that of mine. So he (went down the well), filled his shoe with water, caught hold of it with his teeth and climbed up and watered the dog. Allah thanked him for his (good) deed and forgave him. The people asked: O Allah's Messenger! Is there a reward for us in serving (the) animals? He replied: Yes, there is a reward for serving any animate (living being)<sup>26</sup>.

From the above tradition, it can be deduced that cattle rearing is a good deed if properly done by providing what to eat and what to drink for the cattle. The kind treatment given to the thirsty dog in the above-quoted hadith can be likened to taking proper care of cattle by protecting animals' lives from danger, cruelty, and other forms of maltreatment.

Beating cattle with sticks in a circus show and forcing them to run from a long distance to another, especially under harsh weather conditions, are considered cruelty from the Islamic perspective. Islam prescribes good shelter, food, and water for cattle being reared either for commercial or personal purposes. It is also important for herders and cow owners to provide good sanitation, medication, and shelter. From the Islamic view, the appropriate shelter for cattle should fit the physical and medical needs of the cattle. The dwelling places of the cattle being reared

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<sup>25</sup>S. Faruqui "Animal Welfare in Islam: All your Questions answered" retrieved from [www.https://muslimhands.org.uk](https://muslimhands.org.uk) downloaded 26/9/2021).

<sup>26</sup>M. M. Khan (Trans) "The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari Arabic-English, vol. 3, Riyadh- Saudi Arabia, Darussalam Publishers and Distributors, 1997, p.317

should not pollute the environment or spread diseases to other organisms<sup>27</sup>. Cattle and other animals must not be maltreated while they are alive. Exposing animals to danger and other forms of cruelty may lead to Hellfire. Prophet Muhammad is reported by Abdullah to have said:

A woman was punished because of a cat. She imprisoned it until it died and she entered Hell because of that. She did not feed it or give it water when she imprisoned it and she did not let it eat from the vermin of the earth<sup>28</sup>.

Prophet Muhammad, in other traditions, condemned the beating of animals and forbade striking, branding, or marking them on the face. He was reported to have cursed and chastised those who maltreated animals and commended those who showed kindness towards them. He also instituted radical changes against the practices of cutting off the tails and humps of living animals for food. Prophet Muhammad, while admonishing the herders, said:

The worst of shepherds is ungentle, who causes the beast to crush or bruise one another<sup>29</sup>.

While explaining the traditions of Prophet Muhammad on kindness towards animals, especially cattle, Faruqi writes:

...Allah appreciates us giving water to animals, having considering for their suffering, especially during the heat... Show the softness of your heart and it can extinguish your sins; just like charity to people. It can even be *sadaqahjariya* for you<sup>30</sup>.

In the Muslim world today, cattle rearing has taken a technological and scientific dimension, with many companies springing up as animal farms for the production of dairies and meats for human

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<sup>27</sup>T. S. Nazari "Animal Welfare and Utilization limits in Islam" retrieved from Animals in Islam from *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia* downloaded 23/9/2021

<sup>28</sup>N. al-Khattab (Trans) *English Translation of Sahih Muslim vol. 6* Riyadh Darussalam Global Leader in Islamic books, 2007, p.101

<sup>29</sup>Hadith Muslim retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih/700/pmc/articles/pmc5332932> 20/9/2021

<sup>30</sup>S. Faruqi "Animal Welfare in Islam: All your Questions answered" retrieved from [www.muslimhands.org.uk](http://www.muslimhands.org.uk) 26/9/2021

consumption. For instance, Almarai is one of the largest dairy farms in the world, milking over 93,000 dairy cows in the Arabian Desert in Saudi Arabia. The farm has provided a lot of job opportunities for over 2,750 people. Since, 2000, Almarai has been running five farms with a little of 25,000 dairy cows and 14,000-15,000 replacement heifers<sup>31</sup>. Open grazing of cattle has become an archaic or old traditional system in some countries. It has even been outlawed in other countries.

Nomadism, herding cattle from one place to another, was eliminated in Singapore by Lee Kuan Yew while the late Libyan President, Muammar Gadhafi, banned nomadism in Libya<sup>32</sup>. How we can adopt Islamic prescriptions for cattle rearing as a veritable solution to curbing farmer-herder clashes in Nigeria is the next issue this paper will address.

### **Proffering Islamic Solution to Curbing Farmers-Herders' Clashes in Nigeria**

The insecurity arising from rearing cattle through open grazing in modern Nigeria requires urgent and proactive action from the stakeholders in the indivisibility of the corporate existence of the country. Considering the Islamic prescriptions for cattle rearing earlier discussed, it will be a worthwhile academic exercise to proffer solutions to the farmer-herder conflicts from the perspective of Islam. Islam is described as a religion of peace and allows peaceful co-existence to reign supreme in a multi-religious society.

Cattle rearing is a recognised and permissible profession in Islam and its practice is expected to be in tandem with the modern system approved by Islam. An open grazing system that exposes cattle and their herders to danger and criminal activities is condemnable in Islam. It is observed in the Southern part of the country, especially in Yorubaland, that some under-aged children are being used as herders of cattle among the Fulani Muslims. Such children are deprived of quality education which Islam enjoins every Muslim child from age six to acquire.

Besides, herders' encroachment and intrusion into the farmlands where crops are planted is against the Islamic ethical teaching on respect to privacy and ownership of landed or residential property. This injunction which enjoins every Muslim to

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<sup>31</sup>Almarai Dairy Farm retrieved from [www.agriland.ie](http://www.agriland.ie) September 26, 2021

<sup>32</sup>Yemi Adebawale "Extolling Open Grazing in 21<sup>st</sup> Century retrieved from [www.thisdaylives.com](http://www.thisdaylives.com) June 19, 2021

respect people's privacy and their residential property can be found in the Glorious Qur'an where Allah commands that:

O you who believe! Enter not houses other than your own until you have asked permission and saluted those in Islam. That is best for you so that you may heed. If you find no one in the house, enter not until permission is given to you. If you are asked to go back, go back that marks for greater purity for yourselves and God knows well all that you do<sup>33</sup>.

The above Quran verse refers to the refined, decent, and well-ordered private life of Muslims. It is an injunction for the privacy of people. It implies that a Muslim cannot enter another person's place or land, or have access to another person's property without permission from the landlord or the owner of the property. By extension, this Qur'an injunction can be applied to the farmer-herder relationship in Nigeria. In a situation where a farmer plants crops for consumption and commercial purposes and does not give access to herders to herd their cattle on his farmland, entering into such farmlands is not only condemnable but it is also against the Islamic ethical teaching on respect for privacy and ownership of landed property.

Rearing or grazing cattle in an unapproved place or farmland will be considered, according to a hadith, as a forbidden act by a shepherd who grazes his cattle in a forbidden area. This is contained in the hadith where Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: "...he who falls in the ambiguous things falls into the unlawful, just like a shepherd who pastures (his cattle) round about the forbidden area is on the way to pasturing them in it..."<sup>34</sup>. The true interpretation of this hadith is that grazing cattle on a forbidden farmland is not proper for a shepherd because such a place (farmland) does not belong to him.

Cattle rearing, from the Islamic perspective, ought not to have caused an ethnic or religious problem in Nigeria. The fact is that Islam condemns and preaches against tribalism, ethnicity, racism, and religious intolerance in a plural society like Nigeria. The Islamic scripture (the Glorious Qur'an and authentic Hadith)

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<sup>33</sup>Q24:27-28

<sup>34</sup>Hadith 6 of al-Nawawi Collection culled from M.O.A Abdul (1981) *The Sayings, Acts and Deeds of Prophet Muhammad*, Lagos, Islamic Publication Bureau.....pp 76-77

strongly condemns whoever proclaims or encourages racism or ethnicity. In the Qur'an, Allah stresses the importance of the unity of mankind and recognises the equality of races and tribes in the world (Q49:13). Islam also allows freedom of religion and plurality of religion in a multi-religious society (Q2:256; Q10:99-100; Q109:1-6). While condemning promoters of tribalism, Prophet Muhammad is quoted to have said:

He is not of us who proclaims the cause of tribal partisanship; and he is not of us who fights in the cause of tribal partisanship; and he is not of us who dies in the cause of tribal partisanship<sup>35</sup>.

From the above quoted Qur'an verses and hadith, it is clear that the alleged *Fulanisation or Islamisation agenda* of President Muhammadu Buhari or of any other group of people in Nigeria is against the Islamic teachings on tribalism, ethnicity, and religious tolerance.

In the course of rearing or grazing cattle in the Middle Belt and other southern parts of Nigeria, some Fulani Muslim herders have been alleged to have been involved in armed robbery, rape, kidnapping, destruction of crops, and killing. Herders are also accused of carrying AK-47 assault rifles while grazing cattle openly. This has caused a proliferation of small and large arms into Nigeria and consequently threatens the security of the nation, whose borders are porous and uncontrollable<sup>36</sup>.

It is important to state that Islam is against the open grazing of cattle or any occupation/profession that will cause or lead to the loss of lives and properties, or other criminal acts such as rape, kidnapping, and armed robbery. This is because all these criminal acts are condemnable and punishable by Islamic law. To maintain peace and security in a Muslim community, Islamic law prescribes punishments for some criminal acts. These include *Zina* (fornication, adultery, and rape), *Qatl* (killing/homicide), *Hirabah* (highway/armed robbery), *Sariqa* (stealing/theft), and *khamr* (drinking intoxicants/hard drugs)<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup>Hadith from Tirmidhi and Abu Daud on the authority of Abu Hurairah culled from B. Aisha Lemu *Islamic Studies for Senior Secondary School Book 1*, Minna, Islamic Education Trust, 1992 pp.62-63)

<sup>36</sup>N. Mukaila "Making Sense of Nigeria's Fulani-farmer conflict" retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36139388> 28/8/21, Y. Adebawale "Extolling Open Grazing in 21<sup>st</sup> Century retrieved from [www.thisdaylives.com](http://www.thisdaylives.com) June 19,2021.

<sup>37</sup>Doi. A.R.I *Shariah: The Islamic Law*, London: Taha Publishers, 1984, pp. 229-268. Intentional killing (*Qatl*) attracts the death penalty, rape/fornication/adultery (*Zina*) is



From the foregoing discussion, the position of this paper concerning the criminal acts alleged to have been committed by Fulani Muslim herders is that any person herding cattle or farming land is found guilty of any of the criminal acts (rape, stealing, armed robbery, kidnapping, and killing punishable by Islamic legal system) should be prosecuted in the Nigerian courts. Allowing offenders to go unpunished will not curb farmer-herder clashes in Nigeria and this is against the spirit of *Maqasid Shari'ah* (objectives of Islamic law) which include security of life and property, protection of human dignity, family lineage, and religion of every creature on earth<sup>38</sup>.

Islam, through its scripture, also offers a conflict resolution mechanism whereby conflicts/clashes or disputes among warring parties could be amicably resolved (Q49:9). This is known as *sulhu* (peaceful dialogue/reconciliation) which was employed by Prophet Muhammad and his companions to maintain peace by resolving the conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims during the Treaty of Hdaybiyyah in 628 CE. One of the terms of the Treaty of Hdaybiyyah was that the warring parties would refrain from hostilities and violent clashes against each other and their friendly tribes<sup>39</sup>.

This historical event is aptly captured when Rahim explains some terms of the Treaty of Hdaybiyyah:

The Treaty of Hdaybiah provided that the Muslims and the Quraysh (non-Muslims) were to observe a truce for ten years and were not to engage in any act of hostility. If anybody wished to join the Prophet or enter into a treaty with him, he should have the full liberty to do so. Similarly, if a Muslim desired to go back to the Quraysh or to maintain relations with them, the Prophet would not interfere in his affairs<sup>40</sup>.

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punishable by 100 lashes if it is fornication, rape attracts the death penalty. Highway/armed robbery (*Hirabah*) is punishable by death if it involves killing and imprisonment if it does not involve killing) Stealing is punishable by cutting of hand or fine or imprisonment depending on what is stolen while drinking intoxicant/hard drugs or dealing in the sale of hard drugs is punishable by flogging with 80 lashes, imprisonment, or death penalty if it is drug pushing

<sup>38</sup>Islamic Education Trust *Shari'ah Intelligence: The Basic Principles and Objectives of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Islamic Education Trust, Minna, 2015, pp 161-212.

<sup>39</sup>A. Rahim *Islamic History*, Lagos, Islamic Publication Bureau, 1987, pp37-42

<sup>40</sup>A. Rahim *Islamic History*, Lagos, Islamic Publication Bureau, 1987, p. 35

The above historical record shows that Christian farmers and Fulani Muslim herders in Nigeria can resolve their conflicts through peaceful dialogue which can be initiated by traditional rulers or the government. The fact is that some cow owners in the southern part of the country are neither Muslims nor Fulani, and some farmers may be Muslims or Fulani. Not all Fulani are Muslims. There are Fulani Christians in Nigeria. In other words, the Fulani herder may not be the owner of the cattle he rears; the cows may belong to influential people (Muslims and non-Muslims). What is important is that for a peaceful co-existence to reign among different tribes and religions in Nigeria, particularly among the farmers and herders, peaceful dialogue should be one of the mechanisms to resolve the conflict amicably as prescribed by Islam.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper has been able to establish the fact that cattle rearing, through the open grazing system, has been causing a lot of clashes between farmers and herders in Nigeria. Efforts of the Nigerian government at finding lasting solutions to the crisis have not been fruitful. The Islamic prescriptions for cattle rearing are hinged on the kind treatment of animals, which encourages proper feeding, good shelter, and provision of health facilities for cattle. The numerous benefits derivable from cattle rearing, which are acknowledged in the Islamic scripture, should draw the attention of Fulani herders, cow owners, and the Nigerian government to modernise the cattle-rearing profession. This can be done through the provision of grazing reserve areas, ranches, and other modern methods of cattle rearing to maximise the socio-economic benefits of cattle rearing, which will provide, among others, food security and employment opportunities for the Nigerian populace. From the Islamic perspective, cattle rearing should not have caused an ethno-religious crisis in a multi-religious society like Nigeria, because Islam strongly condemns tribal partisanship, religious intolerance, bigotry, and prejudice. All criminal acts alleged to have been committed by Fulani Muslim herders are not only forbidden but also punishable in Islamic law. Adopting the Islamic approach to curb farmer-herder clashes in Nigeria, as discussed in this paper, will complement the government's efforts towards resolving the clashes.

The paper offers the following recommendations to curb farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria. The government at all levels

should legislate against the open grazing of cows across the country. The Nigerian government should also see cattle rearing as a profession or business enterprise that can generate employment opportunities for the citizenry and income for the government. Hence, the establishment of grazing reserve areas and ranches for cattle rearing should be urgently embarked upon. The Federal Government of Nigeria should ensure the implementation of the National Livestock Transformation Plan to modernise cattle rearing and production. Part of the plan is the establishment of cattle farming companies/industries for the production of dairies and meat in large quantities. This can be achieved by creating an enabling environment for foreign investors and other stakeholders to establish cattle farming industries across Nigeria, thereby, providing job opportunities for the unemployed. The southern state governments should be cautioned against thwarting the Federal Government's effort to curb farmer-herder clashes by not making lands available for the creation of Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) in their respective states. The Nigerian government should also create agencies for animal welfare that will be in charge of curbing all forms of cruelty and maltreatment towards cattle in Nigeria. Hence, allowing cows to roam about the Nigerian streets and highway roads, exposing cows to eat poisonous grasses/food on farmlands and other untold hardships towards cows should be stopped. Promoters and perpetrators of conflicts, violent clashes, and criminal acts among the farmers and herders should be prosecuted without delay. The Nigerian judiciary system should handle cases involving farmer-herder clashes with fairness, justice, and equity. Nigerian religious leaders and preachers, including missionaries, pastors, and imams, across the country should use their pulpits to preach peace, tolerance, and peaceful co-existence among the Christian farmers and Fulani Muslim herders, in particular, and among the adherents of different faiths, in general. The Nigerian government should compensate herders for cattle rustling and farmers for the destruction of crops/farmlands and provide adequate security for both groups. Adhering to Islamic prescriptions for cattle rearing and refraining from criminal acts by Fulani Muslim herders would go a long way in restoring peaceful co-existence among farmers and herders across the country.