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THE TRANSFORMATION OF CONFLICT
BETWEEN PASTORALISTS
AND
CULTIVATORS IN NIGERIA

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SUMMARY

Conflict between pastoralists and farmers has existed since the beginnings of agriculture, but the prevalence of tsetse and low settlement densities kept the incidence of clashes at a low frequency until the twentieth century. In West Africa, the introduction of cheap trypanocides and other veterinary drugs increased herd sizes to levels that compelled herders to seek pastures outside their traditional ecological range. At the same time improved human health has increased overall population and thus pressure on arable land. Nonetheless, the persistence of slash and burn agriculture typical of much of semi-arid and subhumid West Africa allowed the two groups to co-exist, especially through the exchange of crop residues for manure. However, the marked expansion of riverine and valley-bottom (*fadama*) cultivation since the 1980s has meant that herders and farmers are now competing very directly for access to river banks with a consequent increase in conflict. Increasing political control of LGs by representatives of farming populations has meant pressure both to invade land reserved for grazing and to exclude pastoralists from high-productivity areas. In Nigeria, in particular, this conflict has now been subsumed into a broader dichotomy of religion and disputes over access to resources are now framed in religious terms. Increasing availability of modern weapons has increased the intensity and violence of these disputes. It is often said that Pastoral Organisations, such as Miyetti Allah, can play a role in conflict mediation. However, their record in this area is very poor because they are in reality highly dispersed and their ability to lobby correspondingly limited.

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1. Introduction: the changing nature of pastoralist/farmer conflict in Nigeria

The conflict between nomad and the settled farmer goes back to the earliest written records and is mythically symbolised in many cultures (Chatwin 1989). Cain slew Abel, the Chinese emperors built the Great Wall to keep out the marauding hordes. The association of highly mobile pastoralists with raiding and warfare has been crucial in establishing negative stereotypes throughout history. In West Africa, farmers formerly associated pastoral peoples with large-scale military conquest. But with the coming of the colonial regimes and the collapse of indigenous states, conflict between farmers and herders took on a different colouring, becoming more associated with competition for natural resources. Descriptions of such conflict abound in the pastoral literature (e.g. Kaberry 1959; Hurault 1964, 1969-70; Prioul 1971; Gallais 1972, 1977; Awogbade 1983; Blench 1984, 2001; De Haan 1997; Van Driel 1999; Tonah 2000). Nigeria, however, presents a very special situation quite unlike other West African countries, for two reasons; most notably the ambiguous prestige of pastoral culture particular to Fulbe pastoralists but also because of its large and comparatively wealthy population.

This paperⁱ argues that the situation of pastoralists in Nigeria has long been distinct from other African countries but that it was still historically rooted in competition for access to land. Conflict was transformed by key changes attendant on the demographic and veterinary revolution of the colonial era and again by the flow of oil revenues from the 1970s onwards which increased the market for pastoral products. However, in recent years, Nigeria has been constantly racked by civil strife, particularly across the religious divide, and this has reconfigured herder/farmer conflict in new and striking ways. The absence of any concerted government response is a matter for concern in terms of rural development, but also because it is noted by the participants who take it as an opportunity to increase the tension still further. The paperⁱⁱ presents a general background to pastoral/ farmer conflict in Nigeria and traces its evolution up to the present.

2. Pastoralists in Nigeria

2.1 The variety of pastoral groups

Nigeria has a restricted inventory of pastoral peoples, the Fulbe, the Kanuri-related groups, the Shuwa, the Yedina and the Uled Suleiman. The most numerous and widespread are the Fulbe [Fulani] who have expanded eastwards from the Gambia river over the last thousand years and probably entered Nigeria in the fourteenth century. The Nigerian Fulbe are described in a number of classic monographs, most notably St. Croix (1944), Hopen (1958), and Stenning (1959) all of whom studied pastoral clans in semi-arid areas. For the humid and subhumid regions there is relatively little descriptive material. Awogbade (1983) described the Fulbe on the Jos Plateau, while some of the papers in Kaufmann, Chater & Blench (1986) deal with pastoralists in southern Zaria.

By contrast, the other pastoral groups of Nigeria are barely described (though see RIM 1992). The Koyam, Shuwa and related peoples have remained in the semi-arid zone around Lake Chad. With a very few exceptions, they do not come into contact with cultivators, except for their own ethnic group, cultivating in river valleys or catch-cropping at the foot of dunes. However, ecological change and pressure on grazing has produced some surprising adaptations among the Uled Suliman, camel-herders of Libyan origin who now migrate between Niger and NE Nigeria. The desiccation of many former wetland areas combined with pressure on grazing resources has led to them exploring ever further south, and the high levels of water-abstraction that are causing the Hadejia-Nguru wetlands to dry up (Blench *et al.* 2003) have benefited the Uled Suliman by making parts of the zone accessible to camels in the dry season. Since camels exploit vegetation (especially acacias) that is little used by farmers, the potential for conflict is reduced. None of the other pastoral peoples in Nigeria have expanded in the same way as the Fulbe. As a consequence, conflict of the sort common among the Fulbe is not usually perceived as a problem.

2.2 The relocation of the Fulbe in the twentieth century

The cattle-based pastoralism of the Fulbe has thus been the most significant focus of herder/farmer conflict in Nigeria. For a long period, the Fulbe were confined to the edge of the desert. During the twentieth century, Fulbe herders began to migrate through and settle in whole zones that were previously inaccessible to pastoralists, bringing them into contact with previously unknown peoples, cultures and production systems. The consequences of this were a raft of untested interactions between all parties and considerable space for misunderstandings and conflict. The factors preventing their southern expansion in a previous era remain controversial, but it is likely that a move out of the semi-arid region would have resulted in major losses from the trypanosomoses (Blench 1994). Before the spread of firearms in Nigeria, human population densities were low and wild animal numbers (and thus tsetse vectors) still high. This would have created a high level of tsetse challenge for the non-trypanotolerant zebu owned by the Fulbe (Blench 1999). The classic stereotype of Fulbe migration in the colonial period common was a seasonal movement between the semi-arid north and the dry-season pastures along the Niger-Benue system. As the rains gathered pace, tsetse populations expanded and herders were driven back northwards.

Despite this, the gradual exploration of southern pastures led to individuals seeking methods of remaining in these regions all year round. Fricke's (1979) study of livestock production in Nigeria concluded from an analysis of tax and slaughterhouse records that there had been a general shift southward of pastoral herds. The conventional stereotypes of the Fulbe as living in Northern Nigeria are becoming less and less true, year by year. Two major surveys commissioned by the Nigerian government have contributed to a major reformulation of the conventional stereotypes of Fulbe pastoralism (RIM 1984, 1992). The movement into the south-west was markedly earlier than in the centre and south-east of the country for both ecological and religious/cultural reasons. The climatic regime of the south-west is such that the derived savanna loops southwards west of Oyo, almost reaching the coast in Benin and the Togolese Republic. This creates relatively open land without the high humidity associated with forest proper and therefore reduces the disease risk to zebu cattle.

The second impetus to southward expansion of the pastoralists was the unaccustomed security of the colonial era. One reason pastoralists so often become militaristic is because they are comparatively vulnerable. Stock are susceptible both to one-off theft and large-scale cattle-rustling. In an economy where land is not at a premium, it is difficult to deprive a farmer of his working capital. But herders can easily be overwhelmed, especially as so much of their day is spent virtually alone with the animals. For example, until the colonial era, grazing herds avoided the otherwise attractive Jos Plateau because of the threat of armed raids (Awogbade 1983:8-10). The relative peace and security in rural areas from 1910 onwards encouraged exploratory movements towards new pastures.

This southward movement has not been without costs to the Fulbe. Two features of their present society reflect this; extensive sedentarisation and an increase in conflict with the agrarian societies on whom they have traditionally depended for their supply of cereal staples. The Fulbe and the arable farmers among whom they move have traditionally had an interdependent relationship, based both on the local exchange of dairy products for grain, and the periodic sale of animals to provide cash for domestic purposes, such as cloth or marriage payments. Moreover, in many regions, Fulbe management strategies depend on access to cereal crop residues -something arable farmers may encourage because of the perceived advantages of manure as fertilizer. However, in no case are the goods or services pastoralists have to offer essential to the farming community, and therefore the pastoralist is obliged to remain on good terms with farmers if he wishes to continue to exploit the same locale in successive years. If Fulbe herders are unable to build up exchange relations with the farming communities, they can only survive either by settling, by flexible movement patterns that involve encountering new arable communities every year, or by intimidation of the farmers. All of these strategies occur in Nigeria, sometimes practised simultaneously by different Fulbe subgroups. Understanding the structural elements underlying conflict is thus essential to interpreting its recent transformations.

The role played by disease is more controversial. There is little doubt that zebu cattle are progressively threatened by disease in more humid regions -however, the exact diseases and factors responsible remain disputed. The colonial regime instituted both tsetse control measures and made available a range of new veterinary medicines. The tsetse control programmes themselves may have opened new pastures or alternatively, the expansion of population in the Middle Belt coincidentally acted to eliminate both the vectors (by hunting out the wild animals) and the forest habitats of the tsetse fly (cut down for agricultural land) (Bourn 1983). Pastoralists are constantly exploring new terrain, initially on a seasonal basis. In particular, pastoralists are driven not only by the nutritional needs of their herd but by fear of epizootic and chronic disease, particularly skin problems such as dermatophilosis (Wosu 1989).

Within Nigeria, one of the keys to the gradual insertion of pastoral nuclei in high-rainfall areas is the increasing availability of drugs. To keep their stock alive in the humid areas, herders need access to trypanocides and remedies for skin diseases. Up to the 1980s these were not easily available from traders and the prestige of the veterinary services still sufficiently high as to discourage individual medication of stock. The failure of official sources to supply and administer drugs and the development of a more knowledgeable and streetwise network of traders has both given livestock producers a scepticism about the skills of veterinarians and the confidence to use drugs they buy on the open market. In particular, the 1990s have seen 'pour-ons' (i.e. trypanocides that pastoralists can administer directly by pouring on the skin of threatened animals) spread rapidly throughout the region, making possible year-round settlement in quite humid areas.

The benefits of keeping cattle alive in humid areas are considerable. The high price of meat in southern towns such as Port Harcourt makes it worthwhile for Fulbe to bring animals by truck to the edge of the city and fatten them there, even on such marginal grazing as the verges of motorways, by using significant quantities of drugs. This practice has arisen because of the premium price of fat stock, rising transport costs and the economies of scale in herding close to markets. Apart from pastoralists, traders have also realised the potential of the humid zone. There are now recognised locations for 'fattening herds', grassy patches within the forest zone where cattle are fattened for the market.

3. Structural features of herder/farmer interaction

3.1 Underlying conflict elements

The key feature of rural dynamics in Nigeria in the twentieth century has been demographic expansion and consequent expansion of cultivation. Projecting back the census figure to the precolonial era suggests that the human population for the whole Nigerian region may have been as low as five million in the late nineteenth century. Comparison with the 1991 figure of 88.5 million makes it clear how pastoralists and cultivators could have co-existed in the earlier period and why the situation is now so fraught. The ramifications of human population increase underlie other key dynamics in rural Nigeria, particularly relations between herders and arable farmers. Four major themes can be discerned;

- ❑ Increased competition of pastoralists for a dwindling 'stock' of grazing land as agriculture has expanded.
- ❑ The collapse of the system of *burti*, or cattle tracks, intended to separate livestock from farms
- ❑ Movement of pastoralists into new terrain, where language, religion, culture and landholding patterns are unfamiliar
- ❑ Declining importance of the market for dairy products

3.2 Agricultural expansion

The semi-arid zone has always been more populous than the Middle Belt, and the initial expansion of cultivation was in this zone. As the pressure on arable land in the semi-arid zone increased, soil fertility decreased and farmers were obliged to move to regions of uncleared bush or to increase their holding size.

As a consequence, more and more farmers began to settle further and further south in the lightly settled subhumid zone. An analogous process was occurring with tuber-growing farmers increasingly spreading northwards from the densely settled humid zone. With no clear tenure system, Fulbe exploiting the subhumid zone on a seasonal basis increasingly found their established grazing areas blocked by maize and yam farms, created by farmers with no interest in developing exchange relations.

In the colonial era, the perception that human population was encroaching on both grazing land and forest led to the policy of creating Forest and Grazing Reserves. Usually, these were areas where there were few or no inhabitants so resettlement was not a major issue. Grazing reserves have remained policy with the Federal Livestock Department until today and their value has become more evident since mobile pastoralists increasingly need reserved wet season-grazing in order to avoid crop damage. But needless to say, large areas of open bush that have not been cultivated for a long time are also attractive to hard-pressed cultivators. Politicians wishing to attract a rural constituency are then tempted to subvert the legal regime for a temporary rush of popularity. The Nigerian Land Use Decree of 1978, combined with changes in Local Government powers, has shifted the balance of power significantly against pastoralists. The Decree essentially made the Federal Government the owner of all land and removed from chiefs their power to allocate unused or abandoned land. The Governor of a state has the authority to allocate up to 5000 ha. for agricultural or industrial use and a Local Government Chairman the same rights over 500 hectares. Local government reform removed from traditional leaders their power to fine and imprison, making their role more ceremonial than effective. Although chiefs are still respected in parts of the North, in many places the Chairman of the Local Government has effectively displaced them. As a consequence, the Fulbe feel that decisions go against them and that even long-standing agreements can be negated in pursuit of short-term political gain. Box 1 recounts a recent case history in Kebbi State which illustrates the breakdown of trust between Fulbe and farmers and the expanding role of the local authority.

3.3 The growth of *fadama* cultivation

Until the 1980s, the great majority of this agricultural pioneering was based on rainfed cultivation. Rivers remained the preserve of fishermen and were often obstructed by dense vegetation. Where the banks were grassy, herders could graze unimpeded. There has always been some riverine and valley-bottom or *fadama* cultivation in Nigeria, formerly based on techniques imported from North Africa, such as the

shaduf, and producing small quantities of cereals or vegetables in the dry season. The term *fadama* can refer to almost any naturally flooded piece of land but applies particularly to valley-bottoms, where rice is an increasingly common crop, also supplying urban demand. The Hausa and the Kanuri have been the main exponents of these techniques, which were often combined with clap-net fishing in seasonal ponds. The impact of this type of production was limited partly because of the high labour demands and transport difficulties that constrained supply of vegetables to urban markets. A major transformation of this system occurred with the introduction of small petrol-driven pumps, which allowed farmers to raise water in otherwise inaccessible locales and exploit more fertile areas. Combined with improved rural transport and an expanding urban market for horticultural products this has developed into a major sector of the economy. First introduced in the 1970s, and made available on credit in the ADP era of the 1980s, pumps have been supported by a number of other projects since the 1980s, notably the World Bank assisted *Fadama I*. Pumps are now bought and sold privately for *fadama* cultivation, which has become an all-year round activity and has also diffused from the Hausa to many other minority ethnic groups in the North and Middle Belt. Groups

Box 1. Local government versus traditional authorities

Recent events in Kebbi State show how the shifting balance of power can work against pastoralists. A long-standing Grazing Reserve was gazetted at Yelwa in the southwest of the state in the 1990s. The National Livestock Projects Department (NLPD) created a Livestock Service Centre with drugs and supplementary feeds to supply the Fulbe residents of the Reserve. In 1999, the speaker of the Kebbi State House of Assembly, who is from a farming community in the zone, announced that the Reserve was open to settlement by farmers. A rush for land ensued and a significant proportion went under cultivation. Despite protests by the pastoralists and NLPD, and a subsequent retraction by the State, the farmers are still in the Reserve and it seems will not be evicted.

Source: Umaru Hassan (p.c.)

of farmers are finding ways to finance larger pumps and share the water between interlinked fields using increasingly elaborate channel systems.

The expansion of both *fadama* and horticulture has had many positive consequences, notably in income generation, dry-season employment and improved nutrition. However, it has generally had negative consequences for pastoralists. The southern dry season movement characteristic of Nigerian pastoralism depended on unimpeded access to riverbanks, where grass could be found when the surrounding land was largely devoid of nutrition. Cattle could be managed with relatively small amounts of labour as there were no farms where they could potentially stray and cause damage. In the colonial era, and perhaps before, it became evident that friction would be reduced if pastoralist and farmer could agree on stock-routes. If herders would keep to agreed routes and farmers avoid farming across them, conflict would be minimised. A system of *burti*, migration routes, was established by agreement between Fulbe leaders and local community authorities under the auspices of local government or its predecessors. If a dispute arose concerning crop damage or wandering stock, then these committees were usually on hand to resolve issues before they resulted in violence. Sometime in the 1970s, this system began to collapse as farmers increasingly claimed the land across which the cattle passed. Pastoralists, understandably aggrieved, often allowed their cattle to enter the new farms and found that farmers were no longer passive, but either fought with them or took them to court. The problematic issue of customary tenure surfaces once again; pastoralists tend to regard their traditional grazing grounds as 'their' land whereas farmers view undeveloped land as available for cultivation. Horticulture has expanded rapidly and there has been no process of negotiation with herders over migration routes, drinking and grazing access; indeed farmers preferentially farm where cattle have grazed, because the land is particularly fertile. As a consequence, there have been increasing numbers of incidents between cultivators and Fulbe in these areas.

Photo 1. Disputed stock-route in Kebbi State



The area north of Birnin Kebbi on the Sokoto-Rima system represents an interesting example in this respect.

Although now largely occupied by Hausa farmers, both the cultivators and the pastoralists agree that the latter were the first residents of the area. As the farmers expanded they have simply claimed the grazing land without negotiation and now have taken direct action to block all access routes and exclude the Fulbe completely. Interviews with the pastoralist elders in March 2003 suggested that they now realised that they had been completely naïve, as their idea had been that since they were the first occupants of the region their rights to grazing land would automatically be recognised. They also drew the conclusion that withholding their children from school had been a poor long-term strategy, since it meant that now had no representatives with the skills in modern life that would enable them to effectively oppose the farmers.

3.4 Declining importance of dairy production

Classically, the basis of Fulbe subsistence has been the exchange of milk or other dairy products against cereals. Although barter is still occasionally practised in rural areas far from markets, today most producers sell their milk in the market or to dealers, and then buy staples and household necessities with the money. Women are usually responsible for the processing and sale of milk or its by-products and the income they earn from this is at their disposal. Where milk is abundant, as in Borno, they can also control the amount of milk drawn off from the cattle, but elsewhere this is usually controlled by men, whose interest is in calf survival.

The monetisation of these transactions might be expected, but dairying has been declining as the terms of trade for milk against cereals have gradually worsened, even in the north. The reason seems to be the increasing prominence of other status products both for personal consumption and to be served to guests. In

the nineteenth century, travellers such as Heinrich Barth were regularly sent calabashes of milk as gifts. Soft drinks and packaged food have largely replaced milk as a status food. Indeed, population densities around Kano have made fresh milk a very rare and expensive commodity and for the wealthy it has acquired a new prestige. In the humid and subhumid regions, the prevalence of tuber production (and probably also lactose-intolerance) tends to preclude the exchange of cereals for milk. Dairy products can only be sold to small resident northern communities in the large towns, and milk offtake for human consumption is substantially less. The exchange relations typical of the semi-arid zone can no longer form, as farmers are not anxious for cattle to trample their yam-mounds and the Fulbe find nothing to buy. Consequently the communities are more isolated from one another, they often no longer have a language in common and suspicion and misunderstandings more widespread.

4. Upping the stakes: politicised conflict in the 1990s

4.1 Basic themes

It would be unrealistic to imagine that relations between pastoralists and farmers have ever been uniformly good, in the past or present. However, between 1980 and 2003 there has been an unprecedented acceleration in the frequency of violent incidents. These can be said to cluster around a number of basic themes;

- a) Production systems; in the case of farmers, the crops planted, both for sale and subsistence, modes of land preparation, and the means of mobilisation of labour; in the case of graziers, the patterns of stock management, and the terms of co-operation with arable farmers.
- b) Religion; where neighbouring a pastoral group and the agriculturalists do not have the same religion, ideological differences may over-ride mutual economic advantage. Religion divisions on a national scale are increasingly manipulated by politicians for local ends.
- c) Politics; even under military government there was considerable decentralisation to local level and the return to representative democracy has brought into focus both administrative units (states and local governments) and the requirement to find politicians to represent sectional interests. Power in Local Government administrations has been increasingly taken by indigenous farming peoples who do not favour pastoralists' interests

In addition, a more general breakdown of law and order associated with the laissez-faire attitude of elected politicians has encouraged a widespread availability of guns and other weapons in rural areas and a much greater willingness to make use of them in both self-defence and raidingⁱⁱⁱ. Fatal conflicts between farmers and pastoralists are reported almost daily in the newspapers, but no effective action has yet been taken by government to analyse or remedy the causes of these conflicts.

4.2 Ecology to politics

A variety of factors have placed ever greater pressure on the environment, especially in the subhumid zone. The large scale of the Nigerian economy has inevitably meant that farmers are increasingly integrated, both with financial systems, and through improved communications and infrastructure. By comparison, pastoralists, often lacking Western education, stay with increasingly inappropriate models of land tenure and are unable to manipulate the system to their advantage. Farmers with an astute appreciation of power dynamics in modern Nigeria can outmanoeuvre them at every step. This involves a spectrum of strategies from reconfiguring the edicts of traditional rulers, through Local government committees to outright violence, where appropriate. One locale where this can be observed with some precision is the Mambila Plateau, a high grassy upland in the SE of Nigeria. The Plateau is unusually well-documented through a series of studies in the twentieth century which allow the evolution of herder/farmer relations to be traced (Box 2);

Box 2. The Mambila Plateau: a century of conflict

A feature typical of Fulbe expansion in the late nineteenth century was a movement into the high-altitude grasslands of Adamawa (Boutrais 1986). They provide attractive grazing for cattle and generally have lower levels of disease-free. Most of these grasslands are today in Cameroun, but the Mambila Plateau falls within Nigeria. The is almost ideal grazing terrain, with palatable grasses, high rainfall and low disease challenge. However, it has been settled by the Mambila people, who cultivate both its river valleys and increasingly the open grasslands. Percival (1938, cited in Rehfish 1974:11) dates the origin of the Fulbe chiefdoms on the Plateau as far back as 1875. Although raiding may well have occurred even earlier than this, the establishment of permanent hegemony probably only dates from the immediate pre-colonial period and may have reflected the need for more pasture, after the rapid degradation of the highlands in north Central Cameroun (Boutrais 1974). Interviews in 1990 indicated that the first groups of nomadic pastoralists to reach the grasslands from Cameroun were the Rahaaji clan, who arrived in about 1900, only a few years before the Germans (Blench 1991). Mayo Ndaga, Warwar, Mbamnga and Nguroje, chiefdoms dating from this period, were formed originally as slave-raiding bases. The ruler of Banyo surrendered to the Germans in 1901, and shortly after this, several German expeditions reached the area (Rehfish 1974:11). The grasslands were reconquered by British and French forces in 1915-16, and after 1919 came under British mandate. The slave trade ceased, but the dominance of the Fulbe persisted because of a lack of effective supervision by the colonial authorities. Even when permanent authority was established, the colonial policy of boosting the authority of Islamic elites meant that the administration of justice remained in their hands. The consequence has been a century of bad relations between the two groups. Mambila informants complained to Migeod (1925:164,166) in 1923 about Fulbe allowing their cows to trample crops, and he observed at the time that the laws were written in such a way as to favour the cattle-owner. The destruction of the green manure plant *yom* (*Tephrosia sp.*) grown by the farmers was a particular grievance, because without it the fertility of the land could not be maintained (LIDECO 1972). Rehfish (1974:16), also reports this situation, and matters remained the same until the Local Government reforms in the 1970s. With the first return to civilian rule in 1979, the rise to power of the Mambila people in Local Government has altered this pattern. The Mambila people see themselves as the owners of the land, and the Fulbe as intruders (Blench 1984). The customary courts, dominated by a (Muslim) *alkadi*, were inevitably sympathetic to the herders and no longer function. Mambila are largely converts to Christianity with Baptist church being the most widespread on the Plateau and charismatic pastors have largely replaced more traditionally-defined rulers as effective community leaders. The Mambila have been using the authority of the Government to abrogate Certificates of Occupancy issued to pastoralists, and obstructing their annual movements to the valley of the river Donga. Sporadic outbreaks of violence during the 1980s and 1990s culminated in a major clash in early 2002, when the Fulbe were reported to have brought in mercenaries and a number of Mambila villages were burnt down. However, they have no effective long-term protection for their livestock, many of which have been mutilated or killed in reprisal raids. Beginning in the late 1990s, many pastoralists have now left the Plateau or converted their herds into cash and invested in transport.

4.3 Religion

While pastoralists were confined to the semi-arid zones, they shared common religious practice with the farming communities among which they moved, principally the Hausa and Kanuri. The pastoral Fulbe converted to Islam prior to their movement into Nigeria, although the extent to which the nomads were practitioners remains questionable. Whatever the case, by the early nineteenth century the Fulbe in what is now Nigeria had developed an urban, sedentary class including religious scholars. Their commitment to Islam and the dedication of their followers resulted in the development of an effective military machine. The Jihad of Usman dan Fodio was successfully launched in Sokoto in 1804 and within thirty years, the Hausa kingdoms and a number of peripheral kingdoms, such as Borgu and Nupe, had fallen to the Fulbe. This rapidly accentuated the difference between the pastoralists (Fulbe *na'i*) and the urban Fulbe (Fulbe *wuro*). The urban Fulbe took on many characteristics of the peoples they ruled and gradually lost their language, while retaining a cultural bond with the pastoralists which persists up to the present.

The spread of Islamic hegemony was clearly an important factor in encouraging pastoral settlement. As the Jihad pushed towards the ocean, polities such as Borgu, Shaki, Raba [among the Nupe] and Ilorin were established or converted, thereby providing a non-hostile environment for the herders. In the south-west, Fulbe pastoralists moved early in the nineteenth century into the semi-arid savannas of Borgu, the sparsely populated region between Ilorin and the Muslim courts of Nikki and Kande (in present-day Benin). From there, they continued to Oyo and in the colonial era virtually as far as Abeokuta (Smith 1988: 113 ff.).

The impact of the colonial regime was to freeze the establishment of Islamic polities, but paradoxically to encourage the flow of pastoral expansion. By contrast, Christianity was well-embedded in Yorubaland by the 1850s, moved northwards, eastwards and spread out from significant missionary nuclei such as Jos. This competition for souls reached a frontier in the 1960s, when almost all groups had been contacted and had declared some minimal allegiance. Since that date, both groups have competed to intensify adherence, particularly through building churches and mosques. During the 1960s and 1970s, the type of low-level tolerance characteristic of the colonial regime obtained, and syncretic religious forms that incorporated many elements of the displaced traditional religions were common. Nigeria, however, is a large prize for religious entrepreneurs, with a numerous and comparatively wealthy population. Well-funded and highly professional Christian evangelists and Islamic organisations and was targeted it from outside. Whatever their intentions, the effect was to crystallise the beliefs and attitudes of populations professing the two faiths, and particularly in the Middle Belt, where such communities form a mosaic and abut one another in larger towns, to define the relationship in confrontational terms.

The gradual adoption of the Shari'a legal code in many northern states after 1999 has exacerbated the situation still further. This has drawn in several states with a Muslim political elite but a large proportion of non-Muslims in rural areas, such as Kaduna and Borno. The more visible consequence has been violent clashes in the towns, burnings of churches and mosques and a large-scale migration of southern traders back to their home areas or to places with a more supportive administration. However, in rural areas, the effect has been to draw natural resource conflict into the politico-religious arena. The small-scale herder-farmer clashes that typically occurred every dry season and were seen by both parties as about access to resources, are now being everywhere re-interpreted in terms of the larger dichotomies in Nigerian society (Box 3).

Box 3. Case Study: Conflict in the Langtang area

In June 2002, a serious conflict broke out in the Langtang area, some 200 km. SE of Jos, and was still current in May 2003. The main inhabitants of the region are the Tarok people, principally farmers, but the large open savannah between Langtang and the Benue river has long attracted nomadic Fulbe graziers. There are also neighbouring smaller tribes such as the Boghom as well as substantial settlements of Hausa, notably at Wase (east of Tarokland towards the Benue) and the ferry-crossing at Ibi (southeast). The Tarok have maintained good relations with the Fulbe for a long time and are now themselves substantial cattle owners, often as a result of sending their sons to be trained in herding by the Fulbe. The Tarok are overwhelmingly Christian, although traditional religion also plays an important role in maintaining social

order, whereas the Hausa and Fulbe are strongly Muslim. The Tarok, moreover, have a long tradition of military service, and many of their leaders are ex-generals.

Apparently, a fight broke out in Yelwa, near Shendam (in SE Plateau State) at the end of June 2002 between Christian and Muslim residents, over friendship between the Christian girls and Muslim boys. This resulted in the burning of churches. Fleeing Tarok families brought the news to Langtang South, inciting attacks on Hausa-owned businesses in various settlements in the region. Prompt intervention of the security services brought about a temporary calm. However, it appears that a substantial number of Hausa and Fulani, armed with modern weapons and some at least from outside the region, regrouped and began attacking Tarok settlements from a base near Wase. Local people claim that mercenaries from Niger and Chad were involved although this is hard to verify. At this point, Tarok church leaders seem to have turned funds collected for evangelisation to the purchase of modern weapons. Igbo traders appear to have had some guns in readiness for self-defence and were soon able to supply automatic weapons from Enugu. In general, government reaction seems generally to have been inaction, although there is a report of a pitched battle at Kadarko, near Ibi, where the Mobile Police were forced to retreat. Government-controlled media made no mention of the situation for some three weeks, when they reported (falsely) that things were back to normal. The lack of official action was so marked that one of the leaders of the Tarok, Rev. Maina, took the unusual action of placing newspaper adverts in the independent press pleading for a more effective response from government.

Since this date there has been open armed warfare between Tarok and Hausa /Fulbe and the whole region is a no-go area. Women and children have fled into refuge areas and well-organised groups regularly burn down villages in remote areas. Soldiers have been sent to key flashpoints such as Wase, but since they will not enter the bush and meet the armed groups on their own terms, this is a largely ineffective response. A proposed peace summit called by Plateau State Government between Jos-based leaders was held in the last week of August 2002 after being several times postponed. The summit produced twenty-four resolutions for action by the State Government but these have yet to be acted upon. The elections in May 2003 distracted the political elite in Jos in the preceding months from paying attention to this rather serious situation. Four mini-summits were co-ordinated in September 2002 by the Abuja-based Institute for Peace and Conflict resolution for traditional rulers, religious leaders, youth and NGOs. However, Langtang-based Tarok have said they are reluctant to accept any resolutions coming out of these. In the first months of 2003 there were a series of minor outbreaks of violence culminating with another major conflict in Langtang in March. In June, the well publicised murder of Muslim travellers passing through Langtang lorry-park has reminded the indigenous populations that the conflict is alive.

Another consequence has been the uncharacteristic arming of small communities and the development of weapons workshops. Although a few hunters had Dane guns, their manufacture is now widespread and even herdboys now go to the fields armed. This has probably been the spark for a second serious conflict, this time with other neighbours of the Tarok. In October 2002, a dispute over stolen cattle between Tarok and their northern neighbours the Boghom escalated into an all-out warfare with many dead. This was initially more surprising, since Tarok and Boghom frequently intermarry. However, the Boghom are predominantly Muslim, however, and a low-level dispute about cattle and markets was rewritten as a religious issue, with Muslim Boghom attacking Christians. Chronic insecurity in rural areas and a new availability of weapons functions to expand conflict beyond its original boundaries.

These episodes illustrate the transformation of community conflict. An underlying ethnic conflict is enlarged through religious affiliation; the original issue may not have been the Fulbe, but they have been drawn in, because they are both mobile and vulnerable and because it has become increasingly easy to play the religious card. The consequences of government failure to restrain expanding private ownership and trade in modern weapons is now highly apparent. They also show that the churches have now become wealthy and are no longer willing to remain passive. They are highly organised and willing to fund ethnic agendas and confront armed attacks.

5. The nature of government response

The response of government to the issue of herder-farmer conflicts is discouraging. Essentially it consists of policing; major incidents are dealt with in the same heavy-handed way as other categories of community conflict. The army and the police are sent in, usually days after an incident, they set up roadblocks for a month or so and then return to barracks. Such troops are neither well-armed nor highly motivated to go up against an effective guerrilla force with a detailed knowledge of the terrain; thus the killings continue. Any Fulbe in the area are likely to be arrested and to pay a substantial sum to be released regardless of their involvement in the incident. Press accounts of these episodes are almost hyperbolically prejudicial to the pastoralists, since they almost inevitably report farmers' accounts verbatim and play on readers' stereotypes of Fulbe as violent, unpredictable nomads. But no attention is given to the structural features that underlie conflict and as a consequence no effort is made to try and rethink policies.

Clashes are taken much more seriously at the levels of State and Local Government in the sense that their constituencies put pressure on the authorities for longer-term solutions. Local initiatives have been set up in many areas; typically committees that include leaders both of the pastoral groups and other community leaders. In addition, pastoral organisations such as Miyetti Allah (for Fulbe) and Al-Haya (Shuwa and Kanuri) are playing some role in mediating disputes. With characteristic Nigerian entrepreneurial ability, a number of NGOs have been established, ostensibly to introduce conflict resolution techniques. Such bodies are more notable for their proximity to amiable donors than for any long-term progress in the field. Whatever the case, the situation continues to deteriorate, in part because there is little or no internal co-ordination within government, so that one arm may be taking actions that exacerbate conflict while another grouping is trying to resolve it. For example, encouragement to *fadama* cultivation takes place not only within the context of World Bank projects but through the work of River Basin Development authorities (RBDAs), through increases in impoundments for dams controlled by the Federal Ministry of Water Resources (FMWR) (Blench et al. 2003; Blench, Daniel & Hassan 2003). In most cases, especially in developments funded by the Federal Government, no attempt is made to take into account the interests of a wide range of stakeholders.

The core of the problem is a disequilibrium of power at the local level; for all that the meetings include some pastoral leaders, everyone in the room knows that those calling the meeting and setting the rules represent the farmers. Pastoralists are uniquely vulnerable compared with farmers; their cattle can be confiscated and they can be seized and only released on payment of a fine which they can pay by selling stock. Pastoral organisations, too, look better on paper than in reality, partly because there can be a financial interest for the mediator in resolving, for example, crop damage disputes. Herders often accuse individual Miyetti Allah representatives of corruption and indeed in several states, Kaduna and Kebbi for example, the Fulbe have formed their own more local organisations to represent their interests.

In the main, the attitude of government is reactive; where the level of complaints are relatively low they hold meetings and committees sit and produce sonorous resolutions on which no action is taken. Where the situation is more serious, they send in the military, set up road-blocks for a few days and hope the problem goes away. The heightening pitch of conflict, especially in the Langtang area, strongly suggests that this reactive approach has no long-term effect except to increase public distrust of soldiers.

6. Conclusions

Fulbe in Nigeria are now pressing on the limits of the territory that can be exploited through nomadic pastoralism, both in terms of available pasture eastwards and southwards to the limits of the tsetse belts. This is reflected in extensive sedentarisation and an increase in conflict with the agrarian societies on whom they have traditionally depended for their supply of cereal staples. As they press ever further south into the tuber-growing areas, the basis for exchange relationships decreases and the cultural gap between herders and farmers widens. If Fulbe herders are unable to build up exchange relations with the farming communities,

they can only survive by becoming sedentarised, or by shifting to quite different production strategies such as breeding for beef.

Dispute resolution mechanisms sponsored by government functioned until the 1970s, though there is evidence that they were weighted towards herders' interests. Since the 1980s, the frequency of violent clashes has increased, with a further acceleration since the introduction of democracy at the end of the 1990s. Widespread availability of modern automatic weapons and improved communications are exacerbating the intensity of conflicts, and these are being increasingly interpreted as religious and/or political even though the underlying drivers may be competition for access to resources. Ethnicity remains a major factor in recruitment to the conflicting parties and is crucial in raising funds. Government is unwilling to acknowledge the scale of conflict for reasons that relate to its external political presentation. The local press has played an important role in making public various situations but they are generally partisan. World media have taken almost no interest in these matters. Action by the authorities to quell violent conflict has been minimal or ineffective, leading to a perception by communities that they should take responsibility for their own security. Judicial commissions held subsequent to conflicts do not result in effective action. Strategies of conflict resolution, however framed, will have little impact unless the political will to both follow up and enforce agreements is present, which would require a major change in political culture in Nigeria.

Government is unable, or unwilling, to act decisively, in part because of its self-absorption in local matters and self-interest. The lessons from other regions of Africa are certainly not encouraging. The type of chronic insecurity that has now engulfed the quadrilateral formed by Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia and Northern Kenya may yet become characteristic of much of the Nigerian Middle Belt. A significant difference with the Horn of Africa is that the majority of the populations in Nigeria are settled farmers with access to considerable resources and willingness to protect their communities which could make the conflicts more bloody and more sustained.

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ⁱThe information for this paper is based on fieldwork in Nigeria 1979-2003, but in particular my work with Nigerian pastoralists was enriched during my period as ground coordinator of the National Livestock Resource Survey of Nigeria in 1989-91 (RIM 1992). The first version of this paper was a Review Paper prepared for DFID, Nigeria in 2002 but since then I have been contracted to specifically investigate conflict in the Hadejia-Nguru Wetlands (in February 2003) and in Kebbi State (March 2003). This version has therefore been adapted to include some experience and insights from this new fieldwork. For obvious reasons, my informants on the subject of very recent events must remain anonymous.

ⁱⁱ Blench (1984) similarly covers the topic of pastoralist/ farmer conflict but its rather optimistic conclusions have been severely compromised by the events of the last two decades.

ⁱⁱⁱ The parallel with the growth of survivalist' groups in parts of the American mid-West is irresistible.