

Old Testament measures for quelling resource wars: Panacea for the Nigerian experience



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In human history, there has always been one form of war or the other, including resource wars, leading to the wanton destruction of lives and property. Nigeria is not an exception to this ugly global phenomenon. For instance, there are two major resource wars in Nigeria – war over oil and farmers and herders wars that have taken more deadly dimensions in recent times. In fact, the much talked about insecurity in Nigeria is basically about the herder and farmer clashes and the insurgency in the North-East. While acknowledging the political measures deployed to contain the situation, this article presents solutions from the religious perspective, to complement the existing measures that have largely proven to be inadequate. Resource wars occurred during the time of Abraham. However, he averted the violent consequences by the peaceful mechanism he adopted. Therefore, this peaceful mechanism modelled from Abraham and compensation approaches can be applied to the Nigerian situation, especially among Nigerian Christians while interfaith dialogue will accelerate discussions with non-Christians. Thus, this biblical and pragmatic model outlined in the Bible can be implemented in the search for peace and reconciliation. To achieve the aim of this article, historical and hermeneutical methodology was engaged.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article moves between Old Testament and measures for quelling resource wars. It is therefore by intention interdisciplinary. There are implications for the understanding of Old Testament narrative text and how it could be deployed to address the issue of resource wars.

Keywords: Old Testament; resource; war; Panacea; peaceful mechanism.

Introduction

Of all challenges that Nigeria is facing, that of insecurity is cardinal. Insecurity arising from criminality, terrorism and banditry is regrettable but that which arises from series of agitations for resource control is unprecedented and grave. While insecurity arising from mere criminality can be contained and that of terrorism and insurgency are localised, that of resource control is widespread and often times overwhelms the security agencies; therefore, this makes it to generate serious concern. In Nigeria, there are two major resource wars. Initially, it is the militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria over oil and gas. Ideally, the main intention of the war in the Niger Delta is not necessarily and exclusively battling over resources but activism over environmental devastation and degradation. Azeez (2017) captured this opinion thus:

[T]he continued environmental degradation and growing immiseration of the majority of the people in the area led to the emergence of environmental activists, who are committed to raising local and international awareness of the problems caused by oil corporations. (p. 23)

The resource war is that which exists between crop farmers and herders. While that of the war over oil and gas is located at the Niger Delta regions, that of crop farmer and herders is seen all over Nigeria. Apparently, these two resource wars are categorised under what Onuoha (2020) calls material conflict which according to him can never be resolved absolutely but can only be managed, hence the exigency of this article. The peculiarity of the war between the farmers and herders is that while in the Niger Delta region, the militants are seen battling with the federal government and the multinational oil companies over the unfriendly environmental activities, while according to Azeez (2017), Nigerian state was complicit, in the case of the farmers and herders, we find a certain nationality – the Fulani – battling with the indigenes of the places they are struggling to rear their animals.

The truth is that herders moving downwards towards the Middle-Belt and down the southern states are moving into regions where high population growth in the recent times has heightened

pressure on the farmland (Eze 2014; Madu 2012), escalating the incidence of clashes over crop damage, water pollution and cattle rustling. The result is the increasing violence witnessed today in those areas. This view is supported by Cabot (2017:9) when he said that 'climate change is thus putting a strain on delicate relationships between farmers and herders, because of its effect on Common-Pool Resources (CPRs)'.

The war that has been on for decades became more pronounced recently as a result of the current reality of climate change. This is because the current realities associated with climatic change have almost predisposed the northern part of Nigeria where the herders usually come from to desertification. Drought and desertification have degraded pastures and dried up many natural sources of water across Nigeria's far-North. The only option is for the herders to migrate towards the southern part of Nigeria. Supporting this position, Ude (2018) opines that 'historically, since the existence of Nigeria, the Fulani herders have grazed their herds in the north and intermittently in other areas. But incremental drought with resultant desert encroachment forced them to regularly look southwards for greener grazing areas'. The end of this war is not at sight as long as climate change continues to unleash its 'venom'.

Apart from the climate change factor, insecurity in the North-East occasioned by banditry and cattle rustling in North-West and Central prompted an increasing number of the herders to migrate down the south. According to Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016), cattle rustling has recently become a major internal security concern in Nigeria, with the country's northern region as the epicentre. Reports of bandits with automatic weapons storming herders' settlements and farms with the mission of killing people and pillaging cows proliferate. Virtually all of the states in the northern region of Nigeria are affected by cattle rustling. In Plateau State, cattle rustling activities are prevalent in eight (Mangu, Bokkos, BarkinLadi, Shendam, Jos South, Riyom, Langtang North and Langtang South) out of the 17 local government areas (Abimaje & Akingbohunge 2014; Achor 2014; Aminu 2014).

Unfortunately, the federal government and most times the state governments' response to the crisis is poor, lethargic and inadequate. It therefore becomes highly imperative to engage in a discussion that would bring remedy to the looming large-scale war, hence the topic of the discussion 'Old Testament Measures for Quelling Resource Wars: Panacea for the Nigerian Experience'. The major challenge in the resource war among the farmers and the herders unlike that of the Niger Delta is the religious and ethnic bias associated with it. Within the background of the thought of

every member of the communities where the herders operate is the understanding that herders are Muslims who want to dominate their places and forcefully convert them to Islam.

It is basically believed that once the herders, usually the Fulani herders, move down in search of pasture for their animals that they are on religious mission branded 'Islamization Agenda'. In support of this die-hard belief, Nkwoji and Awodeyi (2018) revealed that:

[T]he first step in Islamization is the establishment of a Muslim community in a non-Muslim community. The secrets of Fulanis in the spread of Islam is that they hide behind the primitive and awkward culture of nomadic animal husbandry where herders leave their ancestral lands, crossing state-boundaries to graze their animals on lands and farms in other states. It is in fact the first step in the march to Islamization. (p. 13)

Although this view is frequently denied by the government and the security officials, it has become deep seated in the hearts of many non-Muslims. Nkwoji and Awodeyi (2018) further insists that it was true that the Fulani herders are on Islamisation mission when he averred that:

[F]rom all indications, not only do herders lead in Islamization, they do it with such sophistication that their host community is always caught napping, being as it were, abandoned by security agencies to their fate. (p. 18)

Again, the understanding that the Fulani herders are on ethnic cleansing is also being canvassed all over the place within the study context. Also, some believe that the Fulani are on a mission of ethnic cleansing. Accordingly, one of the respondents in Oju of Benue State Idoko Adakole (cf. Table 1, pers. comm., 02 July 2021) whose farm was attacked in 2020 and two of his cousins were killed by the rampaging Fulani herders averred that 'the ulterior motives of the Fulanis in Benue was to wipe us the indigenous people away and take over our land...not just to graze their animals'. He continued and said 'their mission is simple... they are for ethnic cleansing'.

Azeez and Aliyu (2016) reports that whatever motive the herders have, that of being compelled by the effect of climate change and insecurity in the North to move downwards in search of greener field and more secured place is more empirical and cardinal. The conflict is fundamentally a land-use contest between farmers and herders. It has taken on dangerous religious and ethnic dimensions, perhaps because most of the herders are from the traditionally nomadic and Muslim Fulani who make up about 80% of Nigeria's pastoralists (Ducrotoy et al. 2016), while most of the farmers

TABLE 1: Details of the interviews regarding the farmers and herders clashes.

No.	Name	Age (years)	Occupation	Location	Date	By whom
1	Idoko Adakole	57	Farmer	Oju Benue State	20 June 2020	Researcher
2	Gbenda Ajeh	47	Farmer	Otukpa in Benue State	02 June 2020	Researcher
3	Maria Adama	36	Farmer	Agatu in Benue State	28 June 2020	Researcher
4	Alhaji Dauda	66	Herder	Katsina-Ala in Benue State	02 July 2020	Researcher

No., number.

are Christians of various ethnicities. In support of this position, Toromade (2018:19) opines that 'with the cattle herding business being closely associated with the Muslim Fulani people; the killings have been tinged with ethno-religious sentiments...'. Supporting this position, a new report detailing the sustained attack on Christian communities by Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria's central state of Benue concludes that the number and ferocity of incidents are evidence of ethnic cleansing (World Watch Monitor 2017).

Arising from this standpoint, it becomes very apposite to evolve a religious model of resolving the age-long insecurity of lives and property thrown up persistently by the farmers and herders clash in Nigeria. Considering the religious disposition of Nigerians even when Nigeria is a secular state is neck-deep in religion. According to Mbiti (1970), Africans are notoriously religious, Nigerians inclusive. Bearing that in mind, the religious model being canvassed here is from the Old Testament around the personality of Abraham who is an acceptable personality among Nigeria Christians.

Government approach to resolving the farmers and herders clash

No sane and committed government would sit on the fence in the case of senseless and reckless attacks on its citizens under any guise. In the case of the farmers and herders clash no doubt, the government, particularly the federal government, is struggling to contain the carnage. A number of approaches have been employed by the federal government in this regard. They include, but not limited to, deployment of troops to flash points and plans to establish cattle ranches across the country.

In terms of security, the Federal government is providing security to the affected places. Troops are regularly deployed to the flash points (Oriola 2021). Operation bases are flagged off by both the Army and the Air Force in those affected areas. The police are not left out in the whole exercise of containing the attacks and counterattacks in the form of reprisals. The whole security architecture may not be all-round efficient but no doubt the situation is improving. As much as the security forces deployment to those areas seems good, it is apparent that the security situation in those areas has not gotten better. There is high tension in those areas. The grudges are still there. The wanton destruction of lives and farm produce and farmland is still ongoing.

The next approach the federal government is engaging is the discovery of the cattle routes and setting up of cattle or ranches (Ojukwu, Osuchukwu & Enemuoh 2020). Despite the potentials of this mechanism in minimising the frequency of the clash, it has not yet rescinded. There is suspicion on the part of the hosts who believe that the federal government led by a Fulani man has something religious and ethnic up its sleeves they want to achieve through that.

It is therefore understandable why this article is of the opinion that the approach by the federal government towards controlling the clash is grossly inadequate. The intelligence aspect of the security agencies is at very low ebb. It is obvious that security agencies do not have or gather enough intelligence to be able to foil any attack nor do they position themselves strategically to obstruct reprisals from the victims of the attack. This development is grossly inadequate as regard the magnitude of the clash between the farmers and the herders.

Moreover, the eagerness to bring the culprits to book is quite discouraging. Adequate dispensation of justice to the victims of the clash is lacking on both sides. While those whose cattle are rustled never find the perpetrators arrested and punished, farmers whose farmland and crops have been destroyed never had justice and corresponding compensation. There is mounting agitation and grudges.

In view of the foregoing, it becomes imperative to bring on board another mechanism to contain the farmers and herders clashes in Nigeria. This article has a model that has nothing to do with the use of weapons. It took into consideration the misrepresentation of the real causes of the clash that have to do with insecurity in the North and demographic, environmental, social and economic dynamics, as well as criminality.

Again, the fragile relationship among the various ethno-religious components in Nigeria is considered by this article in coming up with the model. In further consideration of the religious disposition of Africans and Nigerians in particular, this article presents a religious model of containing or resolving farmers and herders clash in Nigeria, which is 'Compensation Model in Exodus 22:5'. The model recognises the fact that resource war can emanate among people of the same religion and ethnicity. The particular point of war here is not about tribe or faith rather competing interests on few available resources. This model is channelled towards Christian policy makers to advance and advertise it through seminars, workshops and bills at different fora of legislative bodies.

Old Testament approach

We have got an Old Testament approach that would diminish the bloody and deadly clashes between the farmers and the herders. It is called Compensation Model (Ex 22:5). The book of Exodus belongs to the family of Pentateuch, which is also called the Law [*Torah*]. Specifically, Exodus means departure from Egypt by the Israelite, so the book provides the legal framework that will guide them (Obiorah 2014) on the way of holiness and hence the legislative code prevalent in the book (Hardin 2003). According to Clifford (2011), the book of Exodus is the second book of the Pentateuch and was edited by priestly redactors in the 6th century BC. The text under study deals with judgements concerning burning another's field (22:5-6).

However, as earlier mentioned, the Old Testament is replete with cases of farmers and herders clash. The Old Testament era featured nomads including Abraham. Therefore, God could not have distanced Himself from the affairs of His people including how to relate as farmers and herders. This should be brought to bear in the Nigerian experience.

Among the Israelites, there were crop farmers and herders, when they began to clash as a result of herders allowing their animals to stray into other people's farm, God did not keep quite. He rose to the occasion as He always did and came up with a legislation that addressed the issue and hence the Compensation Model in Exodus 22:5. In Old Testament theology, compensation is captured in two different foci, one is regulation dealing with employer and employee, and the other one recommends restitution against the person who dives his cattle to damage another's field (Henry 2023; Tuttle 1988). The former focus is the line of thought apparent in this article. As Nigerian constitution does not provide for animals to move freely, destroying peoples' farmland, this article serves to provide an alternative option to the problem of farmers and herders conflict especially to policy (Falana 2021). This model of containing the clash between the farmers and the herders places a great responsibility on the owners of the animals. By this, they either ensure that their animals do not stray into someone's farm or would pay commensurately for the damages done. According to Gill (2019:9), this rule is a general rule with the Jews, that when any damage is sustained, he that does the damage is obliged to pay with the best the earth produces. This rule provides a calm and healthy relationship among the herders and crop farmers. Wesley (2019) saw it similarly and hence he averred that:

[T]he Jews hence observed it as a general rule, that restitution must always be made of the best, and that no man should keep any cattle that were likely to trespass upon his neighbour, or do him any damage. (p. 1)

Ellicott (2019) sees it in another dimension. He sees animals straying into someone's farm and destroying it like Fulani herdsmen usually do as voluntary injury and such voluntary injury was to be more than compensated. The amount of produce destroyed was to be exactly calculated, and then the injurer was to make good the full amount of his neighbour's loss out of the best of his own produce.

This is grossly lacking in the approaches deployed by the government in Nigeria in the case of the Fulani herdsmen and farmers. This grows bitterness on the side of the farmers. Their businesses are destroyed by another person in a bid to do his own business and nothing happens. Deploying security men in those areas is good, but considering the damage done to these farms, compensating them would assuage their hearts and would go a long way in reducing the number of cases of cattle feeding on people's farm, thereby reducing the frequency of the clashes between the farmers and the herders. Again, if a farmer knows that when his farm is destroyed by the cattle of the Fulani herdsmen

that he will be adequately compensated, there would not be any reason to engage in a fight. According to Gbenda Ajeh in his late 40s (cf. Table 1, pers. comm., 20 June 2020), a farmer based in Otukpa, Benue State, the annoying part of the whole thing is that one would even take loan and raise a farm only for the herders to allow their cattle graze on the farm, thereby destroying the whole farm without any form of compensation. This is, according to Gbenda, unacceptable. Maria Adama (pers. comm., 02 June 2020) a farmer in the same location in Agatu in Benue State lent her voice saying, if there is a compensation plan on the ground, once the animals graze on my farm thereby destroying the farm, I would just report the matter to the appropriate authority and the evaluation of the damage will be done and appropriate compensation made. This view canvassed by Maria was the views of some other women farmers in the area. Young women like Akoche, Agbenu and Achieni (Pers comm., 02 June 2020) express similar views on compensation. With this, there would be peace and the clashes would have been contained. Similarly, Alhaji Dauda (cf. Table 1, pers. comm., 28 June 2020), a herder around Katsina-Ala in Benue State reveals that:

[S]ometimes, the younger herders who work for us allow the cows to graze into people's farms. We don't like the damaging of people's farms. But any time a resolution was reached that we should pay certain amount of money to compensate the farmers whose farms were destroyed, we do so gladly.

This Compensation Model is lucrative and efficient in such cases, where the herders are actually and purely looking for vegetations to feed their animals. It does not cover areas where the alleged ethnic cleansing is taking place. Places where AK-47 wielding herders were seen raping women, kidnapping farmers from their farms for ransom, killing and maiming people in their farms, slaughtering and sacking indigenous people from their ancestral lands are exceptions to this model. This is because the activities mentioned by the so-called herders fall short of the known and real activities of herders who go about looking for the green grasses and water to feed their cattle.

The applicability of the Old Testament Model to the Nigeria situation

While the federal government has provided some political interventions to contain resource wars in Nigeria, it has become imperative to provide religious interventions that would be complementary in nature. It is the position of this article that because Nigeria is a highly religious nation, using religious instruments or model like we have here in solving national problem would be effective. Nigeria is dominated by two leading world religions – Christianity and Islam.

Incidentally, these religions are referred to as Abrahamic religions with Judaism. According to Jones (2023:par. 1) New World Encyclopaedia:

These religions claim that Prophet Abraham (Hebrew: Avraham; Arabic: Ibrahim) is their common forefather. These religions account for more than half of the world's total population today. The Prophet Abraham is claimed by Jews as the ancestor of the *Israelites*, while his son *Ishmael* (Isma'il) is seen in Muslim tradition as the ancestor of the Arabs. In Christian tradition, Abraham is described as a 'father in faith' (cf. Rm 4), which may suggest that all three religions come from one source. In modern times, leaders from all three Abrahamic faiths have begun to interact and engage in constructive *Inter-religious Dialogue*. They have begun to acknowledge their shared spiritual riches to help overcome the pains and prejudices of past eras and move forward to building a world of religious co-operation (Jones 2023).

Islam claims to uphold the Torah. In the Hadith, collected sayings and incidents from the life of Muhammad, the Prophet himself directly addresses the question of whether Muslims should believe the Hebrew Scriptures. According to an account attributed to a companion of Muhammad named Abu Hurairah, Jewish 'People of the Book' used to read their scriptures to Muslims in Hebrew and explain the readings in Arabic. In response, Muhammad is reported to have said, 'Do not believe the people of the Book, nor disbelieve them', but say, 'We believe in Allah and whatever is revealed to us, and whatever is revealed to you'. As noted by Rabbi Allen Maller in an essay for *Islamic City*, the passage is not an outright rejection of the Hebrew Bible, but reflects the Islamic doctrine that both the Quran and the Hebrew Scriptures express eternal truth (Green 2017). From this point of view therefore, it is the position of this article that Christians believe the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) as expressing eternal truth. In that case, Nigerian Muslims and Christians should believe it too. Considering their population in Nigeria, it becomes apparent that when the adherents of the two leading religions adopt a position, its impact would be largely seen in Nigeria. At this juncture therefore, it is pertinent to assert that raising a policy from the Old Testament to tackle resource war in Nigeria as regards farmers and herders will go a long way in containing the ever-rising clash between these two members in the agricultural business.

Recommendation

This article does not in any way support the view being canvassed in some quarters that the herders vacate the areas where they are currently grazing their animals. Instead, this article is asking the various stakeholders to accept the reality staring at us on the face that we have to live with these clashes unless we deploy innovative measures to contain the 'war'. Pursuant to this therefore, the article has the following recommendations to offer:

1. People of southern Nigeria should bury the thought that Fulani herdsmen in southern Nigeria should go back to the north rather a policy of restitution and should be made to complement other efforts.

2. The federal government and indeed all other tiers of government should ensure that proper justice be meted out to the culprits who allow their cattle stray into people's farms and cause damage to their farm by way of prosecution and adequate compensation.
3. The security operatives should be on the ground with massive motivations from the government to engage more in intelligent gathering and ensuring that perpetrators of these heinous acts be apprehended and brought to book.

Conclusion

This article considers that since conflict among farmers and herders has persisted right from the Bible times, it should be of immense help to approach the issue from faith-based perspective. Therefore, we find a model that can evolve peaceful relationship among the herders and farmers in Nigeria. It is called the Compensation Model. In this model, God gave rules governing several activities of Israelites, particularly the herders and farmers among them. In this model, He prescribed adequate compensation to any farmer whose farm was overrun by cattle. This model provides a condition where one whose farm is destroyed by cattle receives commensurate payment for his damaged farm from the owner of the cattle. The reason for the cattle to stray into one's farm is not a matter of consideration at all. With this, there was no need for fight.

It is believed that when the Federal government compliments the deployment of security forces with this religious and biblical model in the attempt to forestall the clashes emanating from the farmers and herders clashes that the desired goal will be achieved.

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

Authors, U.C. and U.V.E., conceived the idea presented in the article. U.V.E. provided the exegetical framework while U.C. analysed farmers and herders conflict in Nigeria. Both U.C. and U.V.E. discussed the methodology, and hermeneutical implications of the research, and analysed how, Abraham for example, could assuage farmers and herders clashes in Nigeria.

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