

WEEKEND LIFE

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Brothers at daggers drawn Hausa, Fulani kinship threatened by quiet, bruising war

For centuries, Fulani and Hausa ethnic groups have lived together in brotherhood with shared aspirations and values. In recent years, however, the two have seen rising hostilities leading to deaths and the embarrassment of their cherished heritage. **Adewale Adeoye**, who visited some northern states examines the nature of the clashes and the prospect of conflict prevention and peace building.

IT was sundown in Maiduguri. The hot afternoon was fading into a cold night. At a modest home in the city centre, we all sat on a vast, old but beautiful Arabian rug stretched across the large sitting room. The veiled women walked in and out, placing different types of food in a stretch of oriental plates. The dinner was served on the floor, according to medieval custom, each reaching out to his taste while the children waited for the adults to lead in the ancient buffet.

Our host, an aristocrat close to 70, sat on a vast leather-made rug that distinguished his

status as the head of the house. The dinner lasted about one and a half hours during which the two telephone lines of our host buzzed with intermittent calls from prominent Northern leaders, almost all of them raising the same issue: violence in Northern Nigeria and the threat to prosperity of the poor and the elite.

Across the road, there is a Mosque. The Imam was shot in broad day light, he said in low tones after he had narrated how he himself escaped two incidents of bomb attacks believed to have been planted by teenagers. He said in Yobe, an Islamic library established centuries ago was burnt into ashes complicating the problem in understanding what the extremists really want.

However, of the security challenges facing the North, he said the most menacing is the violence between Fulani and Hausa, a strange development that began only a few years ago.

"We have had very unusual security problems, but the most frightening is the violent conflict between Fulani and Hausa ethnic groups," he said, admitting that the Northern ruling class strives to undermine the enormity of the problem even as the hydra headed challenge refuses to subside.

"The North is under siege by terrorists, but the most terrific is the recent clashes between Fulani herdsmen and Hausa. It is spreading."

Indeed, a strange whirlwind is blowing,

leaving a ruinous path. For the first time in modern history, the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups, who for centuries had lived together and even defended each other are now at daggers drawn. Many see the trend as a major threat not only to the peace of the two great civilizations but also to the prosperity of Nigeria and even the West Africa sub-region where the two are widely spread and remain some of the biggest ethnic groups. Observers think the worst is that the violence is common among the masses, who are in the majority. Across the North, victims of the crisis are nursing their wounds.

"In Kano, one Hausa farmer displaced by the Fulani-Hausa conflict narrated his experience to this reporter. Ebony dark, hefty, stocky with aggressive, probing eyeballs, his name fits into his intimidating physique. Mumtumu. His full name is Aliyu Musa Gobir, but his peers call him Baba Mumtumu Giwa, meaning the Giant Elephant. In his 50s, he has eight children from three wives. He grows cash crops which he inherited from generations and made not less than a million naira every month until February this year when his fortunes crashed like a pack of cards.

At midnight on a cold Sunday night, armed Fulani men invaded his farmhouse in Katsina State. They killed one of his children, his look-alike. One of his wives and a daughter, 15, were taken captive. Mumtumu put up a fierce resistance, using his weight to crush on the floor two of the young invaders until he saw an AK 47 rifle pointed to his head.

"I couldn't go to farm all the time. I had to plan my movement because I may be attacked. The situation became dangerous when they killed my son and took away my wife. I left Katsina state for Kano."

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•Suya seller at work

Hausa, Fulani kinship threatened by quiet, bruising war

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He said in a soft voice that did not equate his giant physique.

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"I never thought that Hausa and Fulani could fight. We are brothers, of the same faith, but now we are killing each other."

He told our reporter as he wrecked his weight on the wooden chair outside his grocery shop in the suburb of Kano.

The story is becoming all too familiar. Fulani cows are stolen on no grounds at all or on charges that the cows destroyed farms owned by Hausa farmers. Many times the rustlers hack down the nomads. In return, the Fulani mobilise to retrieve their cows and in the process employ counter-violence.

In the ensuing bad blood, each ethnic group recruits foreigners of their own ethnic stock, raising the specter of a large scale sub regional conflict. The notable actors have substantial population: Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Senegal, all in West Africa.

A security source told our correspondent that supporters of the two ethnic groups are fueling the crisis by importing illicit weapons for pitched battles.

Tall, skinny Mdiro, a Fulani had his own bitter pill. His hometown in Adamawa saw unprecedented theatres of blood and anguish. He left for Dutse but the situation turned worse as the conflict between the Fulani and Hausa soon got to him. He said he had lost half of his cattle to Hausa rustlers who now operate a local vigilante he believed targeted the Fulani ethnic stock.

In one encounter while he grazed his cows in Adamawa, he received calls that his home had been attacked, his children wounded in a night raid by people he said were armed Hausa.

Yet his most painful encounter was the attack on his pregnant second wife. The attackers also did not spare his aged mother whose head was battered.

"We know the attackers; they are Hausa bandits," he lamented, swearing that the attackers had crossed the redline.

In Abuja, a Fulani scholar, who did not wish to be named, blamed the crisis on the failure of leadership and the growing poverty which continue to fuel ethnic identities. He said the selfishness of leadership is eroding the solidarity that once brought the North

together as one entity.

"Ahmadu Bello united us. The Fulani and Hausa saw themselves as one. But that heritage is now under threat," he told the reporter.

A similar feeling was expressed by a Fulani settlement in Ekiti visited by our correspondent. Baamu, whose parents had lived in Itapaji for over 200 years, said the Hausa-Fulani clashes are a threat to everyone. "We are worried, I must tell you. It may displace many of us, he said in Yoruba.

For centuries the two were welded together by the strong chain of religion, politics and culture. Both are largely of the same Islamic faith, share the same Hausa language, similar culture and common territory. The Northern leaders of the last century did a lot to unite the two ethnic groups.

Since the 1900s when representative government began in Nigeria, Fulani and Hausa political expression had been defined territorially while both have expressed similar or the same positions on national and local issues to the extent that most Nigerians coined the phrase Hausa-Fulani as if they are one single ethnic group.

The two have also produced scholars of global fame while due to Arabic origins of most names, it is difficult to distinguish between who is Hausa or Fulani.

"We are the only ethnic groups in Nigeria which for centuries had lived as if we are one. Crises between Fulani and Hausa were almost inconceivable until now."

Tanko Ahmed, a former top civil servant told the reporter in Abuja. While the Fulani

are found in many West African countries like Chad, Cameroon, Gambia, Mali and even Senegal, the Hausa are also indigenous to the listed countries, extending their presence to Southern Sudan where thousands of Hausa descendants had settled centuries ago either on their way to or from Holy Pilgrimage in Mecca.

The Hausa in Southern Sudan are also demanding for greater participation in the political affairs of the country. This means if the clashes continue, it could destabilise many countries.

"I couldn't go to farm all the time. I had to plan my movement because I may be attacked. The situation became dangerous when they killed my son and took away my wife. I left Katsina state for Kano"

A top security official who does not wish to be named told our correspondent that the Nigerian authorities should find the means of resolving the lingering grudge warning that if left unattended to it might spill over into a sub-regional crisis.

Our correspondent's visit to some Fulani settlements in the North indicated uneasy calm, the same in Hausa communities.

It is not as if the political leaders are doing nothing. In April this year, Bauchi State governor, Bala Mohammed, imposed a 24-hour curfew to prevent a pre-empted violent uprising in the state after violent clashes between

Gudun Hausawa and Gudun Fulani communities. The death of two people killed by one of the sides stirred the revolt.

The state Police Commissioner Umar Sanda, said the governor visited the communities to assuage frayed nerves. "I will make sure I give you the required leadership. It is my duty to make sure I come here to ensure peace in this place," he said.

The conflict is also spreading to other parts

of the country. In August this year, Hausa traders and Fulani herdsman clashed in Sapele. No fewer than 10 people were wounded. The stabbing of a Hausa boy alleged to have stolen an item of a Fulani herdsman prompted mob revenge by Hausa traders mostly from Nasarawa State. The police led by CSP Harrison Nwabosi intervened to prevent further escalation. One Ibrahim Umoru had said the boy stabbed was mistaken for a thief.

In Zamfara State with a large population of both Fulani and Hausa, the conflict has also been noticed.

Not too long ago, violence sparked during the Eid-El Kabir festival between the two groups in Dangulbi, Maru Local Government Area of the state. Herdsmen had attacked Kongo and Bangon Garaci, killing six.

Isah Dan Hauwa, who lives in the area, said the invaders burnt 13 motorcycles prior to the attacks. More than 2,000 cows were said to have been stolen in Bingi, Yar, Katsina, Maji Fanda Haki and Matankari, where some armed men kept stolen cows before they were taken to the market.

Hausa communities, in response to the challenges, have set up Yan Sakai, a militia group dominated by Hausa amidst reports of extra-judicial killings and highhandedness.

"Yan Sakai target Fulani. They kill and maim our people. They carry out extra judicial killings," a Fulani cow dealer, Dan Musa, told our reporter in Kano. He said the relations of those killed were resorting to revenge killings.

Some argue that the current crisis in North West often dismissed as acts of banditry is essentially a Hausa revolt, questioning the loss of their ancestral territories during the 1804 Jihad, now rising against Fulani lords who now own the vast land through the Emirate system.

In Sokoto, Kebbi and Jigawa states, the situation is not different. In rural communities, clashes between Hausa and Fulani communities have been most astonishing if not embarrassing to the ruling elite from both sides that need the unity of ethnic communities in the North to sustain their political influence and control.

A member of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in Zamfara, who does not wish to be named, said the Fulani/Hausa conflict remains an ill wind that blows no one any

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Brothers at daggers drawn

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good. In other countries apart from Nigeria, Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups are distinct from each other. But in Nigeria, the blood-bound alliance finds its logic in the irony of history. The tie between the Fulani and Hausa ethnic groups in Nigeria was planted in the womb of time around the 1800s. For centuries from 900 to 1520AD, Hausa land extended to most of today's Northern Nigeria with an organised state ruled by the Habes or Sarki.

From 1500s, the Hausa territories were ravaged by wars, raids from the Bornu North East neighbours; from the north by Berbers, Tuaregs and Arabs and from the kingdoms of Ghana, Mali and Songhai. Scholars remark that it is a salute to the Hausa impressive level of technology and of statecraft in the medieval times that the Hausa people survived the earliest serial conflict. Hausa had dominion in many of today's northern states at the period with Kano and Zazzau being some of its most flourishing city states.

The Hausa had a flourishing civilization. Kano Hausa government, for instance, was formed in 998 BC with Bagauda as its first ruler. In 1349, it was led by Sarkin Kano Ali Yayi said to be the first Kano Muslim king. In 1421, King Dauda reigned, during which Kano became a tributary state to Bornu Kingdom.

Rumfa, who died in 1499, developed Kano into a centre of learning and trade and even introduced the Ajami, the writing in Hausa.

The history of Kano changed with the 1804 Jihad led by Uthman Dan Fodio. The late Dr Baba Omojola, who had done extensive research on the relationship between Fulani and Hausa, said the Fulani entry into the Northern Nigeria political history could be traced to the fact that the incursion was influence by the attacks from the Tuaregs around 1050, plus the brutal assaults at the hands of Berbers and by Sonni Ali who raided and attacked them.

The Fulani were said to have been one of the first ethnic groups in Africa to adopt Islam. The growth of the faith enriched the spread of the Fulani ethnic group. Historians believe the 1050 attacks engrained in them the spirit of warfare to survive the rage of their foes.

Their natural sociology appears to have helped them. Some have described the Fulani as having an innate sense of what is decorous and proper, polite and respect for their seniors, capable of great fortitude of bearing tremendous pain or affliction without showing feelings, reticent in their affairs, having a deep sense of shame, if unjustly humiliated.

Omojola said Fulani is prone never to forget such instances when treated with malice. Of the intelligence of the average Fulani, there can be no doubt. But Omojola said their "character in general would appear to retard their advancement".

They are nomadic. But there are also sedentary Fulani, who tend to play remarkable roles in the politics of any country in which they happen to settle. Noted for their talents, the Fulani are believed to contribute immensely to the intellectual development of any country in which they settle.

The Fulani are among the most fanatic Muslims in the Western-Sudan and had established theocracies and have done more to transform to Western-Sudan, argued Omojola. They form a considerable percentage of the ruling classes in West Africa. Highly cultured, the traditional Fulani is said to be balanced in their judgment and are extremely diplomatic in matters of statecraft.

Their dominant presence across West Africa began in the 11th Century when the Fulani split into three groups with one migrating to present day Nigeria. Among the Toralbe Fulani was Uthman Dan Fodio esteemed for his piety and learning. He subsequently led the 1804 Jihad, exploiting to the brim the tyranny of the Hausa Habes over their subjects. It was the Jihad that made the lordship of Fulani over Hausa territories constitutional.

He was offspring of Adids, said to be among the first Muslim Army in West Africa. He was said to have been introduced to the study of Quran at age 7. He grew to become pious, dedicated and loyal to the faith. He



•Farmers in the Northwest

studied under renowned scholar, Shaikh Jibrilla b Umar, from where he developed the statecraft of how to lead a social, cultural and political order. He studied in Agades and was reckoned to have visited the University of Timbuktoo where he buried his head in the famous library of letters and theology.

He published several books. In one of his books, Wa Lamma Balagtu, he claimed to have been chosen and that God called him in a spiritual encounter. He charmed the people through resistance against paganism and the imposition of heavy, punitive taxes by the Hausa Habes. The Jama'a, including the Hausa masses, soon saw him as their saviour.

In 1789, Fodio had become so famous in Hausa land that it was difficult for the Hausa kings to check his leaps and bounds. History says that in 1789, the Gobir King, worried by the rising resistance against his rule, offered Fodio gift of 500 mitgate of gold. The Shehu refused but listed three demands, according to multiple accounts; to be allowed to call people to God, respect for any man with turban and not to burden Muslim Jama'a with taxes. To these the Sarki Bawa Jan Gwarzo agreed.

In excitement, Fodio's brother Abdullahi was said to have celebrated the victory with a poem Tazinu'l Wara gay. Yunfa, the Gobir King, worried by Fodio's expansionism, attacked Degel, a stronghold of the Fulani, forcing the Shehu to flee, known as Hajira marked by his followers.

In 1804, this emboldened him to plot the Jihad that eliminated the Gobir dynasty that had been treasured for many centuries. The Shehu fled to Gudu where he raised a strong army that embarked on an almost irreversible war of conquest that took over the Hausa ancient territories. Some historians argue that Yunfa's mistake was to have ordered all Fulani

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to be killed; a discretion that made all Fulani, poor and rich, to seek refuge under the leadership of the Shehu.

The Sarki of Katsina, Kano, Zazzau, Daura and Adar rose against the Shehu, with the whole Hausa land rent in war and blood. The Shehu won, giving flags to his children and cousins over Hausa land and ending an epic page in Hausa political history.

The Fulani domination was made stronger by the fact that they adopted the Hausa language, with the Fulani mother tongue, Fulfulde, playing a lesser role in political and economic affairs. With the British coming, the conquest of Sokoto in 1903, the subsequent amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, the Fulani inherited the power, prowess and magnitude of the Northern hemisphere.

With the budding crisis between the two, some Hausa are already equating the lingering clashes with the scope of Hausa renaissance to reclaim lost territories and heritage seen in the emergence of some pro-Hausa fronts calling for renewed, exclusive Hausa identity.

Prof. Toyé Olorode, in a chat with our correspondent, blamed the skirmishes on the failure of the ruling class. He said they have failed to address the essential needs of the people prompting the masses to seek refuge in ethnic shells. He listed corruption, lack of an all encompassing programme of people's liberation as some of the oil that ignites ethnic identities.

In a chat with *The Nation*, the Deputy General Secretary, Nigerian Labour Congress, Denja Yaqub trace the discord to absence of good governance, lack of justice, lack of respect for the rule of law combine to

fuel feelings of isolation while the near collapse of state institutions is creating a space for ethnic warlords to perch. He said climate change and the grabbing of land reserved for grazing by the rich is forcing nomadic Fulani to seek survival by alternative means.

Speaking with *The Nation*, President, United Middle Belt Peoples' Congress (UMBPC), a lawyer, Abuka Onalo Omobaba, said the entire north is worried about what he described as the collapsed of the fabric that used to hold the North together.

He said: "The country is near collapse. The Fulani-Hausa conflict is dangerous. If it can set the entire North ablaze. It's a product of bad leadership."

Omobaba was twice Secretary General, Arewa Youth Consultative Forum (AYCF) but left to establish the Middle Belt coalition, saying the idea of a united north was fading. He said restructuring the country would reduce the flaming fury.

There have been other efforts by civil society organisations led by the Centre for Human Rights Research and Civic Education (CHRICED) based in Kano and led by Zikirullahi Abdullahi, to provide the platform for peace building.

His group, with the support of MacArthur Foundation, had been hosting meetings between parties in conflict in the North to ensure greater understanding and peace building.

"We realise the enormity of the problem at hand. We shall do our best to ensure the unity and prosperity of the people. We shall bridge the crack and ensure conflict prevention," he told our correspondent in Abuja.

Speaking with our correspondent, the President, AYCF, Mallam Shetima Yerima, said his group was aware of the dangers the Fulani-Hausa conflict poses to brotherhood in the North. "We realise there is a problem. Under President Buhari we have become more divided along Muslim, Christian compounded by inter-ethnic row," he said.

Shetima, in response, has set up a coalition of ethnic groups in the North, moving from one community to the other educating the ethnic groups to work and live together in peace. He said the violence between Fulani and Hausa is worrisome but caused by a "few elements", warning on the danger of hasty generalization.

He said before the February general elections, his group will bring the warring parties together where they will make "a common statement to work together as brothers" and shame discord.

He said even though "things have fallen apart", the centre will be made to hold, and firmly too.

For Adamu, a Fulani who ekes out a living selling yam in Mile 12, Lagos, "We need to work together. If there is crisis, the poor will suffer, the rich will go and hide", a phrase shared by his bosom friend of 30 years, Mustapha, of Hausa origin, married to a Fulani woman and who survives by collecting scraps which he sells to big companies in Lagos.

The two plan to travel together in same vehicle to Sokoto before the new year.

"Walahi, Hausa and Fulani (Fulani), no get froflem (problem). Na pew (few) bad foele (people) they cause wahala," said Mustapha, tapping the chin of his friend in a gesture of affection.



•Fulani herdsman