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where lush vegetation pitches Bororo herdsmen
against farmers

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Lush vegetation, vast landscape, quiet ambience are the qualities that merge to give Igangan, Ayete and Igboora the beautiful greenery that is a delight of herdsmen. However, following constant clashes between farmers and herdsmen, sometimes resulting in gruesome murders, the most recent being 27-year-old Samson Olaosepe's killing last week. KEHINDE OYETIMI, after a visit to these communities, reports the saddening peculiarities that have come to become the norm.

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Ayete

“Please do not talk to my father. He is yet to come to terms with the death of his son. It is a most tragic experience. How does one quantify the loss of a dear brother? My brother was killed like an animal by two herdsmen. His offence was that he asked them to drive their cows off his already cultivated farmland,” Bisi Olaosepin, whose brother was hacked to death, struggled to hold the tears back as he relayed to Nigerian Tribune the horrible experience that culminated in the passage of his brother.

The gruesome murder of 27-year-old Samson Olaosepin who, like his father, knew no other life safe farming, was regarded by residents of Ayete and Igangan in Ibarapa North Local Government Area of Oyo State, as one death too many.



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Bisi, brother of the deceased

Bisi pointed, with shaky fingers, at the patch of farmland where Samson met his death. "I was not around when the deed was carried out but the gory sight of my brother made my heart sink. We are farmers and we have been in this for many years. My siblings and I would always come to help my father in the farm. This is Igangan and farming is our life. The large expanse of land that you find here and the rich soil has attracted herdsmen and other farmers who are not indigenes of this place. Despite the crude farming tools that we employ here, the harvest is usually rich considering the fertility of the soil.

"But I must quickly add that these herdsmen both Fulani and Bororo—that is how we refer to them — have been with us for many years. I grew up to know them. It is usually a common sight to find them herding their cattle on the large expanse of vegetative land. I grew up knowing the challenge that farmers here are faced with when it comes to clashes between the herdsmen and farmers. Their cows eat up our crops and when we resist, lives are lost," he said.

Vegetation like no other

Bisi's apt description of the vast vegetative landscape that Igangan, Ayete, and Igboora are known for is without doubt. From Ibadan, through Eleyele to Eruwa, as one approaches Igboora, the spread of the landscape provides a ready-grazing meal for cows and an enticing delight for every herdsman. Intermittently, a sight of herdsmen in company of their cattle comes into view. The lush, green scenery and the quiet ambiance give Igboora, Ayete and Igangan a pastoral uniqueness desirable by any herder.

With its headquarters in Ayete, the local government area has other notable towns like Tapa and Igangan. Also, these towns have a number of villages that make them up. Alaagba, Obada, Konko,




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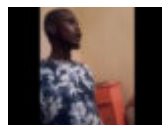
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Oja-Isale and Ajise are some of the popular markets in the local government area. Despite the differences in topographical spread—Ayete’s hilly contours, Igangan’s vegetative spread—the two towns, including Igboora, have a nomadic presence of herdsmen through many decades.

These unique qualities, as Nigerian Tribune would gather, have formed the reasons behind the attraction for herdsmen both within and from “neighbouring countries. My father told me as well as other elderly farmers that because of rich natural landscape, for many years even herdsmen find their way from neighbouring countries here. Unfortunately, while these herdsmen find ready foliage for their cattle, they have been threatening our lives. When we plant crops, we are usually sure a good harvest. These herdsmen allow their cattle wander on our farmlands thereby causing irreparable loss for us. They come and go. Usually attempts to get them apprehended can be difficult and even when we try to make them pay, they usually resort to violence.

“On the day that my brother was killed, my father was on another farmland, a short distance away, just as my brother equally worked on another farmland. With a desire to know his affairs, my father sent a boy of primary school age who was already dressed for school to go see how my brother was faring. On getting there, this boy noticed that my brother was having an altercation with two herdsmen. Their cattle were destroying the crops on the farmland my brother was cultivating. The boy said that my brother was appealing to them to take their cattle away so as to stop the waste that was being visited on the crops. On hearing the verbal exchange and the brandishing of machetes, the boy ran towards the community to look for help. By the time help would come, we met my brother in a pool of blood with deep cuts all over his body. Before we could take him to get medical help, he died,” Bisi said.

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A father's agony

The deceased's father, 50-year-old Solomon Olaosepin, hissed when again confronted with the narration of his son's death. Lean-faced, embittered by the tragedy that traumatised his life, he could barely articulate his thoughts. Nigerian Tribune met him in his farm alongside some of his children.

"Where do you want me to start? How does a father narrate the death of his son?" Mr Solomon started. Pointing towards the patch of land where his son was brutally wounded, he said "he was butchered like an animal. They ran after him, he fell, stood up and continued running. But I guess he fell once again and that was his final fall. They caught up with him and finished him. After his death, his brothers and friends have insisted that they would finish the portion of land that he was tilling when he met his death. They have been encouraging me and insisting that I continued farming so as not to be consumed by the heartbreak of my son's death. But whether in the farm or at home, what comfort can anyone give me following the death of my son?" he asked.

A history of nomadic presence

Like in many parts of Oke Ogun, a major region in Oyo State, Ibarapa, which includes Igangan and Ayete, has commanded a huge presence of herdsmen through the years. Mr Solomon, when asked the reasons behind the huge presence of herdsmen in his community and other adjoining communities, told Nigerian Tribune that "Before I was born, my forbears lived with the herdsmen. We were told that these herdsmen would usually pass through lands with vegetation while they foraged for grass for their cattle. They were nomadic. They didn't stay for long. But there was really no friction.



“While I was a boy, the relationship between the farmers in my community and the Fulani herdsmen was cordial. Whenever the herdsmen were accused of damaging crops on the farms, they apologised and ensured that they paid for the damage done. But unfortunately in the last few years, they have started becoming very aggressive. The ones among these herdsmen who have been causing so many headaches are the Bororo. They are not Fulanis. They are aggressive as herdsmen and when people try to engage them in any meaningful dialogue, they easily get angry and resort to violence.”

Another farmer, who simply identified himself as John, frowned upon the threats that daily attend their lives and livelihood as a result of the struggle for land between the farmers and the herdsmen.

“We are tired of these clashes. We are the original owners of the land. Why should anyone come here and destroy our crops because of the need to feed their cattle? When we confront these herdsmen, they tell us that they have been grazing this stretch of land for many years. They insist that as children, their parents took them through these places and it would be unfair for anyone to tell them that they cannot have their cattle graze here. The death of the young man is just one of the many of such attacks. If you travel to many parts of this region, you would be shocked to find farmers who met their deaths in their farmlands. How did we get to this point? Where do they expect us to go? Where do they expect us to farm? Something must be done to stop this. They do not speak our dialect neither do we understand what they say. Their cows destroy in a moment what we take months to cultivate. One of the more painful parts of our loss is that we use crude implements in farming. Ours is not yet mechanised farming. Imagine how we toil day and night and then some herdsmen come around with their cows and eat up or destroy our crops.”



Herdsmen have used lands for many generations and appropriated them —Prof Obono, sociologist

While addressing the issue, Professor Oka Obono of the Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, stated that through many generations, herdsmen have travelled through many lands and have grazed. With time, they have appropriated these lands and are therefore shocked when confronted by farmers who claim to be owners of the spaces.



Igangan

“Conflicts occur between pastoralists and farmers because they do not share the same concept of space. The nomadic pastoralists have been using territories and spaces over long generations and have mentally appropriated them. And then suddenly one day, they may arrive in such appropriated territories and be confronted with new obstacles that prevent them from continuing their traditional modes of life.

“The southward migration of the Fulani attracts hostile reactions from host (usually farming) southern communities. The response of Nigerian pastoralists has been to maintain a sedentary base on the outskirts of communities, which can be swiftly dismantled to take advantage of grazing opportunities elsewhere or to avert attacks,” he said.



Speaking further, he asserted that as a result of desertification and other environmental forces which have been realised because of climate change, many of these herdsmen are pushed down southward in search of better pastures. "Grazing lands are threatened by desertification and other environmental forces, intensified by climate change. The regular pastoralist response has been to migrate. Migration presents challenges that undermine the very reason for moving encounters with sedentary communities that may be hostile to cattle that destroy crops or compromise biodiversity," he argued.

Anger against the state

For farmers, who have been affected in these clashes, they have usually accused the police of not doing enough in their search for justice. Yet, the herdsmen have also argued in many fora that they are being unfairly treated.

An official of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps who spoke on condition of anonymity about the death of Samson stated that the clash between herdsmen and farmers started a long while ago. "Our parents are farmers. Many of them who got caught in these clashes would go to the police. Unfortunately their confidence in the police has waned because of the alleged bribery of the police by the herdsmen. These farmers usually claim that they do not get justice. They believe that they police are complicit. When such cases are reported to us, we do the little that we can. But when it involves bloodshed, we hand over to the police. The state should do all in its power to ensure that the appropriate thing is done to stop this," he advised.



Farmers are scared of visiting their farms —Oba Adeoye, Asigangan of Igangan

In an interaction with Nigerian Tribune, the traditional ruler of Igangan, the Asigangan of Igangan, Oba Lasisi Adeoye took a historical dimension into the crisis. According to him, "Fulani herdsmen and Bororo herdsmen are not the only non-indigenes in this place. We have others like the Igbo people, we have Hausas and people from many parts of the country. For many years, our interaction has been cordial. We usually hold meetings with the intent of fostering peace and harmony among our people. The meetings also have in the agenda an appraisal for security. We hold meetings at the local government and even at the state level.



Oba Adeoye

"The issue between the herdsmen and farmers stems from the fact that they are all involved with land. The truth is that as Nigerians, we are all entitled to live in any part of the country. The herdsmen deal with cows and these cows graze. On the other hand, farmers till the ground. However, farmers would not allow these cows to destroy their crops. There are times when farmers and herdsmen have misunderstanding. But what we have observed is that these herdsmen are usually the ones to blame when such disagreements occur. Here in Igangan, we have no other occupation except farming. We have vast expanse of lands. The Fulani herdsmen do not have designated grazing lands. They go from one place to the other. Except



the government gives them specific grazing lands, we cannot give them.

“We are appealing to the government to create grazing lands, so that this crisis can stop. Agriculture involves both animals and plants. It is a serious problem for us when these animals destroy crops. There are times that when these cows destroy farmlands, the herdsmen would run away. When they are confronted, they get aggressive, brandishing machetes. We appeal to our people to be patient. When there is a crisis between herdsmen and farmers, we report to the police. When it is difficult to address, the issue is taken to court.

“The case of the boy, who was killed, has been taken to the police headquarters. One of the herdsmen, who were allegedly involved in the atrocity, was apprehended and he is in police custody. We want this resolved. Many farmers are afraid to visit their farmlands because of the fear of being caught in these clashes.”

While confirming the death of Samson, the Police Public Relation Officer of the Oyo State command, SP Adekunle Ajisebutu, told the Nigerian Tribune that “the case has been transferred to the state criminal investigation department for further investigation.”

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