

Cattle Rearing and Livestock Farming on The Mambilla Plateau, Northeast Nigeria

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Abstract-This analysis examines the agrarian sector as a strong rural base, with emphasis on cattle rearing and livestock farming as the bedrock for agricultural development and ultimately rural development on Mambilla Plateau, northeast Nigeria. In fact, without cattle rearing and livestock production, all efforts at improving farmers and pastoralists would be a waste. A cattle rearing, also called livestock farming in Mambilla Plateau, is all about mass breeding of cattle such as cows, oxen, bulls, bullocks, and calves, among others. The science and art of rearing livestock is to obtain beef and fats for proteins and for the purpose of making profit. It is undoubtedly profitable and thriving business due to the value of meat, fats, skins, and other cattle byproducts.

Indexed Terms- Cattle Rearing, Livestock, Mambilla Plateau.

I. INTRODUCTION

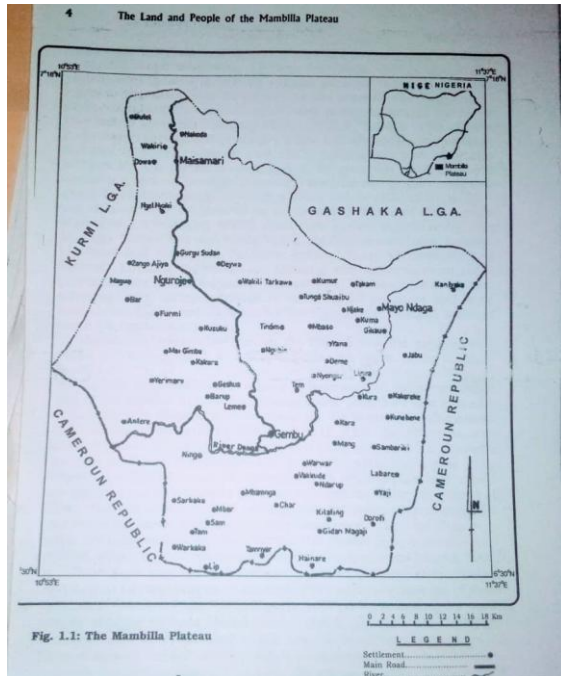
The Mambilla Plateau demonstrates how indigenous knowledge, adaptive grazing methods, and participatory government can sustain cattle rearing and livestock farming in Nigeria's highlands, despite security and climate stresses. However, a cattle rearing was one of the key foundations for development in the rise of sedentary and nomadic human civilisation. The other key fundamental foundation for human development and civilisation is farming plants for human consumption. Cattle rearing and livestock production go pari-passu. Both are businesses or activities of working on or managing farms and livestock, which are age-long occupations of the people of African societies and the world in general.¹ In other words, the activity of cattle rearing and livestock farming is not confined to Mambilla Plateau alone, but it is a global phenomenon. As we shall see in this chapter, it is not the economic activities of the Fulani alone, but other ethnic groups in Southern

Africa, East-Central Africa, and other parts of the world also practice cattle rearing. The history of cattle-rearing activities among the Fulani and other ethnic groups in Africa and the world in general is a hereditary economic activity. It began in antiquity.² However, there are other ethnic groups that also copied or apprenticed the occupation.

II. THE MAMBILLA PLATEAU

The name "Mambilla Plateau" was derived from the mountainous area of the region in northeastern Nigeria, specifically in present-day Taraba State. Etymologically, the name was coined or crafted from the original inhabitants of the plateau. The Mambilla ethnic group were said to be the original inhabitants, or aborigines, of the area since time immemorial. Various names have been synonymously used for them. Some of these names are "Norr," "Norbo," "Nyo-bo," and "Mambilla" itself. All these are variants of the same word.³ Alternatively, the area is referred to as "Membire" land. However, the Germans, as authenticated by the written evidence of their documents, knew the areas as "Mambilla."⁴

In terms of geographical location, Mambilla Plateau is located between latitudes 50°30' to 7°18' N and longitudes 100° to 11°37' E. It has a total landmass of 3,765.2 km², forming the southernmost tip of the northeastern part of Nigeria (see fig. 1.1).



Looking at the map above, the plateau is presently in the Sardauna Local Government Council of Taraba State, with its headquarters at Gembu. It is “Cameroon locked” in its southern, eastern, and almost half of its western parts. As seen on the map, Kurmi and Gashaka Local Government Areas border it to the northwest and northeast, respectively. The Mambilla Plateau is in many ways one of the most interesting tourist parts of Nigeria, having several unique physio-biotic, socio-political, and economic characteristics not found in any other part of the country.

Travellers to the plateau have described its many unique features in so many ways, depending on their interest and also time of visit, so to speak. It is a mountainous region with the highest elevation, coolest weather, waterfalls, and heaviest rainfall with a long rainy season. The plateau possesses numerous striking features not found in most other locales or places. Thus, Kirk-Green describes the area as follows:

...Grassy highland with the best ranges in Nigeria and some of its most majestic scenery. It is a mountainous country, wild and hard of access, and so broken by the valleys of the Benue's southern tributaries.⁵

Moreover, Frantz Chadbourne argued that it has “West Africa's highest elevation, its coolest weather, and some of its heaviest rainfall and best grassland.”⁶ This beautiful and yet difficult area to access is a powerhouse for Fulani and Mambilla cattle rearers. The area is also a centre of attraction to tourists and public excursions.

III. THE MAMBILLA ETHNIC GROUP

Having seen the geographical location of the study area, let's turn to the peopling inhabitants of the plateau. The earlier inhabitants or immigrants of the plateau were the Mambilla or Membere ethnic group, who by and large were considered as the original aborigines. Like most other early inhabitants of the Adamawa Massif, the Mambilla belong to the semi-Bantu linguistic family. And presently constitute the single largest ethnic group on the plateau. The Mambilla of Nigeria and the Mambilla of Cameroon regard themselves as a group with a common identity. And they have been in their homeland for upwards of five hundred years. The majority of them live on the Mambilla Plateau in the Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba in Nigeria. Whereas, a small fraction of Mambilla migrants left the plateau for the Ndom plan (also known as the Tikar Plan) on the Cameroon side of the international border as well as in a couple of small villages, such as New Numba, further north towards the towns of Gashaka and Banyo in the present Republic of Cameroon. It is essential to note that the preferred ethnonym is spelt Mambila in Cameroon and Mambilla in Nigeria. “Norr” is also used (the word for person in Nigerian dialects of Mambilla). In Nigeria, they refer to themselves as “Norr” (the people). While in Cameroon there is a collective noun “Ba” that is used in the unmarked sense to refer to the Mambilla.⁷ The populations of different Mambilla villages speak different dialects of Mambilla or closely related Mambiloid languages. They also share a set of closely related cultural practices, in particular the conjunction of masquerade and oath-taking called “Suu,” “Shua,” “Sua,” or “Shuaga.”⁸ In those days, the majority of them were farmers, but today, they practice both farming and cattle rearing as their occupation.

IV. FULANI OR FULBE ETHNIC GROUP

Cattle rearing and livestock farming on the Mambilla Plateau are known generally because of the activity of Fulani or Fulbe nomads. Who are the Fulbe or Fulani? Where is their original abode in Africa? Is cattle rearing their hereditary economic occupation, or do they copy it from others? These are some of the few questions we need to answer in this chapter. Apart from the Mambilla or Membere ethnic groups discussed above as the original aborigines of the plateau. The second major groups of settlers on this big mountain are the cattle-raising Fulbe, or Fulani, of Mbororo stock, speaking a Sudanese idiom of the Afro-Asiatic family akin to the languages of the Republic of Senegal. The Fulbe, or Fulani, whose early home in the Western Sudan was in the region of the Senegal basin, are today one of the most widely distributed people in the West African subregion. They are found practically with their cattle in every West African state from Senegal in the west to the Central African Republic in the east.⁹

The Fulani, or Fulbe, in their first well-known habitat of the Senegal Valley, emigrated as a product of the intermarriage between the non-Negroid nomadic infiltrations from the north, mainly Berber elements, and the local population of the Senegal River Valley. According to Armstrong, the Senegal valley “functioned as a differentially permeable member.”¹⁰ Thus, the whole Senegal Valley functioned as a kind of Berber trap. Those who moved into it gradually became assimilated through intermarriage with their darker southern neighbours. This had been the situation several thousand years ago. The product of this intermarriage is perhaps the Fulbe or Fulani. Today, the Fulbe are in three categories: (1) Mbororo, (2) Fulbe Na’s, and (3) Fulbe Shi’e (housed or settled Fulani). That is, nomadic, semi-nomadic, and the sedentary or settled Fulbe, respectively. The Mbororo are a small subgroup of the Fulani ethnic group. They are traditionally nomadic cattle herders and traders in the Sahel subregion and parts of West Africa. Fulani are found in Nigeria, northeastern Cameroon, southwestern Chad, the western region of the Central African Republic, and the northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is essential to note that all three categories mentioned above owned cattle and also dwelt in cattle camps.¹¹ And cattle rearing is their

means of livelihood. It was on the basis of the Fulani migration and scattering all over West Africa that Bello Z. Abubakar says:

*The general mass migrations of the Fulbe in search of grazing land within the western Sudan had been from Senegal, the region of Futa Toro and Masina eastwards. The migration started in the 11th century or earlier; before their migration in the region took the form of small groups, sometimes a branch of a clan comprising not more than ten people, and in most cases a family. By the beginning of the 14th century, advanced parties of the migrant Fulbe had reached Hausaland. And by the end of the 16th century, they became numerous in West Borno, and some of them penetrated into the Adamawa emirate (northeastern Nigeria and northern Cameroon, including the whole of the Mambilla plateau) and even beyond the middle belt region.*¹²

From the above quotation, the main fundamental reason for their migration or movement was principally for better grazing lands for their cattle and partly for the Islamisation of other non-Muslim ethnic groups.¹

V. CATTLE REARING: LIVESTOCK FARMING AND ANIMAL HUSBANDRY: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Cattle rearing and livestock farming are two different terms entirely. The two terms in a strict agricultural sense are not the same or synonymous. Specifically, cattle rearing is only concerned with the management or breeding of cattle for food requirements like beef or meat, milk, fats, et cetera, or for labour purposes like ploughing, irrigation, et cetera, whereas livestock farming is a general term, and in a broader sense, it involves both cattle rearing and animal husbandry generally. Thus, a cattle rearing is also part and parcel

of livestock farming. It is also called livestock farming. Then, what is cattle? Cattle are domesticated bovid ungulates and are widely kept as livestock. They are prominent modern members of the subfamily Bovinae and the most widespread species of the genus called bulls. Young female cattle are called heifers, young male cattle are called oxen or bullocks, and castrated male cattle are known as steers. Cattle are commonly raised for meat, skins, milk and dairy products, leather, and ploughing; as draft animals, they pull carts and farm implements. However, in India, cattle are sacred animals within Hinduism and may not be killed. Small breeds such as the miniature zebu are kept as pets. Cattle are widely distributed all over the globe. They are found not only in Africa but also in Europe, the Americas, Australia, Asia, et cetera. They are of separate species or subspecies and are further divided into over 1,000 recognised breeds.

Livestock are the domesticated animals raised in an agricultural setting in order to provide labour and produce diversified products for consumption such as meat, eggs, milk, fat, leather, and wool.¹⁴ The term is sometimes used to refer solely to farmed ruminants, such as cattle, sheep, and goats. Whereas, the breeding, maintenance, slaughter, and general subjugation of livestock is called animal husbandry. It is part of modern agriculture and has been practiced in many cultures since humanity's transition to farming from hunter-gatherer lifestyles. In other words, animal husbandry is the branch of agriculture concerned with animals that are raised for meat, fibre, milk, or other products. It includes dry-to-dry care, management, production, nutrition, selective breeding, and the raising of livestock. Animal husbandry is the controlled cultivation, management, and production of domestic animals, including the improvement of the qualities considered desirable by humans by means of breeding. In a nutshell, animals or cattle are bred and raised for utility, that is, food and fur. And also for sport pleasure and research.¹⁵

VI. CATTLE REARING AND LIVESTOCK FARMING ON THE PLATEAU

Cattle's rearing is part and parcel of livestock farming; both are activities that are geared towards mass breeding of cattle and other domestic animals for the central objective of getting beef, fats, and skins. It is,

of course, a thriving and profitable business because of the usefulness of beef, fats, skins, and other byproducts from the cattle.¹⁶ On the Mambilla plateau, due to its climatic conditions explained above, there are both pastoral or nomadic cattle rearing and sedentary cattle rearing. A sedentary cattle rearing is more common on the plateau than pastoral nomadic rearing. Cattle rearing, or farming, involves the rearing and management of two types of cattle. One group or category of cattle is for food requirements like milk, beef, fat, et cetera. And the other categories of cattle are for labour purposes like ploughing and irrigation farming during the dry season. Cattle's ranching on the plateau is the most common economic activity; in fact, the Mambilla are known for their species of cattle in the whole of Nigeria, and cattle ranching on the plateau are the most common feature. Cattle ranching can be defined as the large-scale rearing of cattle for various agricultural purposes. Then, what is a ranch? A ranch on the plateau is an area of land, including various structures, given primarily to ranching, the practice of rearing grazing livestock such as cattle and sheep. Nomadism, or pastoralism, is less practiced on the Mambilla Plateau. Sedentary cattle rearing is the most common practice on the plateau.

Moreover, pastoral farming or nomadic cattle rearing involves movement from place to place or region to region for the purpose of rearing cattle. However, on the plateau, there is very little nomadism but only sedentary cattle rearing. That is why their cattle are special with a special taste when they are being cooked. Our finding reveals that, on the plateau, there is also mixed farming, which incorporates both livestock and crops on a single farm. Some mixed farmers grow crops purely as fodder for their livestock, particularly cattle. Whereas some crop farmers grow fodder and sell it to cattle rearers or livestock farmers. It is important to note that what is practically happening on the plateau is that there is pastoral farming. The pastoral farmers are known as grazers, while in other cases, they are known as pastoralists. The terms are used interchangeably. However, pastoral farming is a non-nomadic term of pastoralism in which livestock farmers have some form of ownership of the land used, giving the farmer more economic incentive to improve the land.¹⁷ Unlike other nomads, pastoral farmers on the plateau are sedentary and do not change locations in search of

fresh resources or grasses. On the plateau, pastoralism is a form of animal husbandry where domesticated animals (livestock) are released onto large vegetated outdoor lands (pastures) for grazing. The large outdoor land is ranched. The herd species, which include cattle, sheep, goats, and horses, are confined within the ranch. Commenting on pastoralism and cattle rearing on the plateau, Bashir Hamajo says:

Traditional pastoralists on the plateau tend to keep herds of cattle for economic purposes and for food but not for prestige. However, they are not subjected to long foraging treks (nomadism). Such practices are widely considered suited or fitted on the Mambilla Plateau.¹⁸

Cattle rearing and livestock farming are not confined to the Fulani alone on the Mambilla Plateau. Thus, this lucrative but cumbersome business is undertaken by both Fulani and other ethnic groups in the region. Therefore, the Mambilla, Panso, Kumbo, Kakka, and many other tribes engaged in it. To the Fulani, cattle's rearing is their ancestral and traditional economic activity. The fact is that everywhere you find Fulani, you find cattle. It is essential to note that cattle rearing and livestock farming on the Plateau were encouraged and are still being encouraged by the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI). The ILRI set up the Malabo Montpellier (MaMo) Panel of experts to guide and accelerate progress towards food and nutrition security in Africa.¹

VII. POPULATION AND TYPES OF CATTLE ON THE PLATEAU

Based on the report by Frantz Charles on the rate of animal increase, it is estimated that there are over eight million head of cattle presently on the Mambilla Plateau. Even though there are varieties of other types of livestock, including sheep, goats, poultry, et cetera, cattle remains the most dominant economically important of all. Some of the major cattle types found on the Plateau are Rahaji, white Fulani, and Gudali (Adamawa type). Today, the ownership of cattle has been extended to almost every ethnic group on the plateau, not only the Fulani. However, the following

subgroups of Fulani are still easily recognised as dominating the ownership of the types of cattle specified against the ones in the table below.

Table 1. Cattle Types and Ownership among the Fulani of Mambilla Plateau

Cattle Type	Group of Fulani Owners
Rahaji Zebu of Red Fulani	Bawankolen, Mayonkolen and Autankolen and few Tukankolen families. These species of cattle are found mostly in the middle zone of the plateau.
White Fulani Bunaji	Bawankolen, Kawankolen Gadamanko'en and small groups of Dunaji and found mostly around Maisamari, Yelwa and Kan Iyaka areas

Source: Charles Frantz (1981) Development without Communities: Social Fields Networks and Action in the Mambilla Grasslands of Nigeria.

As seen in table 1.1 above, the Rahaji, also known as the Red Fulani or Zebu cattle type, are the most common species on the Mambilla Plateau, particularly in the middle and northern zones. They are mostly raised by the Fulbe. The mature cattle are large-framed with an average height of 115 cm. They are short with broad heads, long lyre-shaped or crescent horns, and unpigmented hide,²⁰ as shown in figure 2 below:



Figure: 2.

After Rahaji, the next group of cattle that runs second in terms of population or number, as shown on the table above, is the Bunaji or Takanaji, generally called

the white Fulani. They have a light, wiry head; a fairly long, narrow muzzle; medium-length, lyre-shaped horns; pigmented skin; a grey coat of variable shades; a hump over the top of the shoulder and neck; and a fairly broad, deep chest. They have large breasts and are on average about 130 centimetres tall,²¹ as shown in figure 2 below:



Figure: 3.

The third or last group or species of cattle commonly found on the plateau, as shown in table 1.1, are the gudali types, which are of mixed origin, mainly a crossbreed between white Fulani and shorthorn cattle. They are characterised by very variable coat colour: white, black, red, or pied. They have a light, narrow, long head with medium-length lyre-shaped horns.²²

On the whole, the Rahaji cattle are fairly large animals compared to others and have more regular conformation. The White Fulani are of low structure, and the humps are longer than they are wide. Rahaji white Fulani and Gudali cattle account for 35.2%, 35%, and 29.8%, respectively, of the total number of cattle on the plateau, whereas male and female cattle account for 22.4% and 77.6%, respectively, of the total number. They are highest because they are kept basically for biological reproduction. Besides cattle, the Fulbe, Mambilla, and other minority ethnic groups also kept and raised fowls, hens, cocks, chickens, et cetera. The Fulbe on the Mambilla do not keep fowls, and so the only goats seen are the West African black dwarf types kept traditionally by the Mambilla tribe and other minority ethnic groups. Pigs are now known on the plateau. However, sheep are known but rare, as

they are raised by the Fulbe in limited numbers. The Uda type, or breed, is the species kept by the Fulbe.

VIII. LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT SYSTEM ON THE MAMBILLA PLATEAU

The livestock management system on the plateau is of the intensive category. The stock raisers have practically become settled and sedentary, and their herding enterprises are thus more receptive to an evaluation towards incentive forms of animal husbandry. The organisation of herding on the plateau presents marked differences in comparison with the semi-nomadic stock raising practiced by the other Fulbe of the Nigerian lowlands region. The fact is that there are several hundred herding units and local ranches on the plateau. Each of these herding enterprises can be broken down into a number of herds. The younger children in the families or some hired people (Gainoko'en) normally do the herding and/or rearing labour on a hired basis. A.L. Tukur says:

*Wealth among the Fulbe Mambilla and other minority groups on the plateau who are mostly stock raisers is assessed by the number of cattle they possess rather than by the possession of other commodities.*²³

The science and arts of cattle rearing is carried out all over the plateau in varying degrees of concentrations from one area to another. For instance, in the northern areas, because of the rich pastures and, most importantly, the less difficult geography and proximity to market centres like Nguroje, Kakara, Mayo Ndaga, Gembu, Mbaso, Maisamari, et cetera, there is a higher concentration of cattle. On the other hand, the southern parts, that is, across Mayo Wukari, including places like Tamyia, Dorofi, and Mbanga, have relatively few herds of cattle. This is because of difficult topography that tends to retard movements of animals.

Consequently, the significance of livestock to the overall development of Mambilla in particular, and Nigeria in general, cannot be overemphasised. The majority of the people of Mambilla engage in stock raising as their source of livelihood. The income derived from the sales of cattle is used in purchasing

foodstuff and other necessities of life. Dairy products are good sources of food in most households. And herding enterprises have been providing employment opportunities to the majority of the Fulbe and Mambilla youths and other tribes as well, who undertake herding labour on a hired basis guided by mutual agreements. Animals' dung is a good source of manure for farm crops. Cattle from the plateau are exported to other parts of Nigeria and even beyond. They form a major source of revenue or income to the individuals and to the government as well as a source of protein to the people.²⁴

CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated that cattle rearing and livestock farming are two of the major economic activities on the Mambilla Plateau by both the Fulbe and Mambilla ethnic groups. Although the Fulbe are regarded as the second immigrant community, economically, culturally, and politically, they dominated all other ethnic groups on the plateau. The cattle on the plateau are generally known as Mambilla cattle; the lingua franca on the plateau is Fulfulde, and even in terms of political hegemony, the Adamawa emirate, ruled and headed by Fulani, dominated the whole eastern states with the exception of Borno and Yobe. Fulbe and cattle are intrinsically and naturally inseparable, just like the Bantu people of Southern Africa and their cattle. In view of this fact, Mambilla Plateau pastures and grazing land served as a "lure" to cattle rearers. Mambilla is known because of its natural and climatic condition, which attracted cattle rearers. The plateau served as a permanent abode to cattle rearers because of its grazing pastures and favourable climate. Cattle rearing and livestock farming generally are sedentary on the plateau.

The economic importance of cattle cannot be weighed on any scale. Life on the plateau runs smoothly with cattle. Cattle to a Fulani or Mambilla man are like a bow and arrow and/or dane gun to the traditional hunter. The richness or otherwise of an average Fulani is determined by the number of cattle he or she possesses. Therefore, their means of sustainability or livelihood depended solely on cattle.

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