

Reporting the Herders-Farmers Conflict

Representations and Perceptions of Non-State Actors in Online
Nigerian News Media.

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Abstract

The Herders and Farmers conflict, a recurring issue in various countries in West Africa, presents a complex interplay of socio-economic, environmental, and political factors. Amidst this intricate landscape, non-state actors emerge as significant players whose representation in news reports shape public understanding and policy responses. This study examines how non-state actors involved in the Herders and Farmers conflict are portrayed in news media narratives and perceived by audiences. The study was divided into two parts: in the first study, utilising qualitative content analysis, 208 news stories were examined to discover how the actors in the Herders' conflict have been represented in 4 online newspapers. The news coverage presented the Fulani Herders as the perpetrators of the conflict, with primes of the stereotypes of the Fulani Herders as Warlike, Nomad Savage and Invaders. Conversely, the farmers were represented as victims with primes of stereotypes of the Fulani Herdsmen. The findings from the first part of the study also revealed that quasi-elite sources and nonelite sources from the farming community contributed more than other source groups. In the second study, a qualitative experiment and semi-structured interviews were used to obtain evaluations of the non-state actors in the Herders and Farmers conflict, revealing audience's perception of the non-state actors. Participants' evaluations of the non-state actors in the conflict revealed the activation of stereotypical views about the non-state actors in conflict primed by the narratives in the news report. This research contributes to a nuanced understanding of how media coverage primes audiences to perceive and evaluate the roles and motivations of non-state actors. It also illuminates the mechanisms through which media representations influence public perceptions, providing recommendations for media practitioners to foster sustainable conflict resolution efforts.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In 2013, a prominent Fulani leader in Nigeria, Ardo Madaki, was invited to the palace of the district head in Agatu, Nigeria to resolve the escalation of a misunderstanding over the death of a Fulani Herder, Sehu Abdullahi, and the loss of over 200 cattle. Ardo Madaki was allegedly murdered before the district head by the Agatu youth which 'sent the Fulani a chilling message...' (Mayah 2016, quoted Bayeri). Even though the case was reported to the police and investigated, no one was arrested for the death of either Sehu or Madaki. By February 2016, there was an attack on 5 villages in Agatu which led to the death of over 300-500 people. The attack received extensive media coverage in the Nigerian news media. The Fulani Herdsmen were tagged as the perpetrators of mass violence against the Agatu people (Mayah 2016). News of the massacre in Agatu spread over social media (Okwori 2020). The death of the Fulani men and the loss of cattle, and incidences against the Fulani Herdsmen which led to the massacre, were not reported in the news or on social media platforms. The death of Sehu and Madaki only featured in the news after the 'massacre' in Agatu. Prior to the death of villagers in Agatu in 2016, the Fulani Herdsmen were named as the fourth deadliest terror group in the world by the Global Terrorism Index in 2015 (Buchanan 2015).

These events highlight the escalating development of the Herder-Farmer conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria over the last couple of years. From 2016 to 2018, over 3,641 people have died as a result of the conflict between Herders and Farmers in Nigeria – 1,300 of these casualties lost their lives between January and June 2018. This was significantly higher than the number of casualties from the Boko Haram insurgency. Consequently, the Herders-Farmers' conflict was described as six times deadlier than the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria (ICG 2018; Aljazeera 2018). The major hot point of the conflict has been the Middle Belt region (parts of the north central and northeast) of Nigeria as well as Zamfara in the northwest of Nigeria. In contrast to previous conflict in the Middle Belt region, the violence between the Herders and Farmers has been defined as a clash over resources made

scarce as a result of climate change (Amusan et al. 2017; Ikhuoso et al. 2020) and a weak state (Chukwuma 2020).

Research into news media coverage of the conflict in the Nigerian press has shown that the Herders-Farmers' conflict has been episodically framed as a clash between autochthonous ethnic groups in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria and the nomadic pastoralists who are Fulani (Gever and Essien 2019). The episodic reportage of the conflict suggests that the Nigerian press may be contributing to the development of a fragmented representation of the conflict. Those who seek to learn about the conflict must rely on keyword and internet searches to gather fragments to gain a fuller picture of the conflict (Seip-Nuño 2018). Consequently, information, misinformation and disinformation about the Herders-Farmers' conflict may spread more quickly and easily, potentially impacting the resolution of the conflict (Tachia 2019). Furthermore, the information gleaned by interested individuals may draw connections to previous conflicts in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, defining the Herders and Farmers conflict as an ethno-religious conflict. The fragmented reportage and its consequent impact on the perception and resolution on the herder-farmer conflict highlights the significance of the news media in reporting conflict.

Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2015 p.1232) note that the definition of conflict is increasingly embedded and penetrated by the news media in such a way that to legitimise, plan, remember and even imagine conflict requires paying attention to the media and its uses. They refer to this as the 'mediatisation' of war. The legitimisation of armed conflict by the media suggests that the relationship between the media and the conflict is symbiotic. Armed conflict contains values which are appealing to the news media: surprise, bad news, magnitude and relevance (Harcup and O'Neill 2017). Those involved in conflict may need the media to amplify their struggle or their actions and the news media will report the details of the conflict to boost ratings or as a civic or social responsibility. In mediatising the conflict, the news media may influence the perception of the conflict (Hoskins and O'Loughlin 2010). Members of the public, politicians, military personnel, as well as the non-state actors involved in the conflict, rely on

the media to create, sustain or challenge the unfolding of the conflict. The mediatisation of conflict by news media ought to be investigated because perceptions are vital to conflict, impacting on its escalation and its resolution. Symbols and representations associated with conflict present in the news coverage contribute to the perception of the conflict. The news media becomes the space within which the symbols of violence associated with armed conflict are presented, shaping the perception of the conflict and the actors involved.

Furthermore, journalists tend to report news events in culturally relevant ways, utilising frames that will resonate with audiences (Tuchman 1980; Piazza 2009). News narratives also retain structures of storytelling to maintain the web of facticity. These are processes of interpreting the event which scholars argue is a representation rather than reporting the reality of events (Fairclough 1988). Owing to the significance of the news media's role in defining conflicts and shaping perceptions, this study critically assesses the media's representations of the Herders-Farmers' conflict concentrating on four newspapers and the Middle Belt region in Nigeria between 2016 and 2020. The study extends its focus to the interpretations and evaluations of the actors in the Herders and Farmers conflict by conducting interviews with 21 participants. Most studies on the news media reporting of the Herders and Farmers conflict have only considered the coverage of the Herders and Farmers conflict in a single location within the Middle Belt region of Nigeria (Gever and Essien 2019; Gever 2017). Additionally, studies that considered the herders and farmers conflict have approached it from a reportage perspective (Gever and Essien 2017). That is, they have focused on the practices of accuracy and objectivity in the news coverage of the Herders-Farmers conflict. Furthermore, others have considered the representation of actors in the conflict, through a comparative analysis of the western and Nigerian newspapers (Chiluwa and Chiluwa 2022) and in newspaper headlines (Chiluwa et al. 2022). Other studies have conducted an analysis of the Herders-Farmers' conflict concentrating on specific news content such as newspaper editorials (Ciboh 2017). No study has interrogated the representation of the non-state actors in the Nigerian news coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict as well as the potential effects of the coverage

on the perception of the audience in Nigeria. Thus, this study adds to the existing body of knowledge by not only investigating the representation of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict but showcasing the possible influences of the news media content about the conflict on audience perception of the actors in the conflict.

Non-state actors such as social groups, insurgent movements, rebel groups, terrorist organisations, militias and criminal groups have been defined as crucial actors in violent conflict in the 21st century (Kaldor 2013). Non-state actors play a prominent engaging in activities deemed reprehensible. First, non-state actors are often neglected or subsumed under other aspects of the conflict even though they play a dominant role in the conflict, usually engaging in violent acts. In her thesis on 'new wars' Kaldor (2013) highlights non-state actors as integral in conflict of the 21st century, which is in contrast to old wars fought by and between state actors. The identity of non-state actors has been described as the ideological basis for conflict. Furthermore, in media studies of conflict, the identities of the non-state actors are key in defining and naming the conflict, impacting the reportage, interpretation and resolution of the conflict (Allen and Seaton 1999). The activities of non-State actors can shape news agenda; they can actively engage with news media to disseminate their messages, ideologies or propaganda. Media coverage of the activities of non-state actors can influence public opinions, attitudes and behaviours. Due to their significance to conflict situations, it is important to interrogate the representation and the perception of non-state actors. This study considers the Fulani Herdsmen and the autochthonous farmers in the Middle Belt as the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

Since this study seeks to interrogate the representation and the perceptions of the non-state actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers conflict, the study analogises the news coverage of the Herders and Farmers conflict as a window frame with the non-state actors as elements within the frame. This approach is drawn from the seminal work of Walter Lippmann in 1922 where he suggested that the news media provides insight into public affairs, shaping perceptions and opinions. The reported actions (violent or otherwise) of the non-state actors

in the news about the Herders and Farmers conflict is an element within the window frame of the overall reportage of the conflict which can reveal the Nigerian news media influence on audience perception of the conflict. Thus, this study draws upon Priming theory which deals with the implicit influence of a part of media stimuli on the media audience (Hoewe 2020).

Priming is the unconscious activation of attitudes, beliefs, and understandings because of the presentation of information. Priming occurs through the spreading activation of associated constructs in one's knowledge store by a stimulus event (Collins and Loftus 1975). The conceptualisation of priming holds that the human mind is analogous to a computer system made up of nodes within a network. The nodes in the human mind represent the knowledge and memory developed over time through various activities and interactions (Anderson and Bower 2014). One of the mental networks of the human mind is the cognitive structure of the stereotype (Hamilton and Sherman 2014). This study adapts stereotypes as the cognitive structure of the human mind for two reasons: firstly, they have been argued to be abstract structures available to most individuals, differing from social group to social group (Tajfel 1969); secondly, the stereotype as a cognitive structure holds the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs and expectations about groups and individuals (Hamilton and Sherman 2014). The stereotype is the storage system for the perception of social groups, and they are developed upon the perceived differences between social groups, with categorisation and correlations contributing to the differentiation among ingroups and outgroups. The mental network of the stereotype of a group may be formed by a variety of sources such as first-hand experience with group members, as well as social learning from other sources such as family, friends, and the media. The representations of groups and individuals associated with these groups are formed and stored for future use (Hamilton and Sherman 2014). Since this study seeks to investigate the perception of actors (the Fulani herders and the ethnic farmers, who are of different social groups) in the conflict, the cognitive structure of the stereotype provides a suitable foundation for priming. Essential to the cognitive structure of the human mind and to priming is the knowledge available in the mind (Higgins 1996). Since the stereotype

cognitive structure of the human mind contains knowledge, beliefs and expectations about groups, there may be available knowledge about the non-state actors in the Herders' conflict which are potentially stereotypic. As priming involves the activation of beliefs, perceptions and interpretations by a stimulus, it occurs in a two-phased mental stage of accessibility and applicability. Accessibility is described as the activation potential of the stimuli (Higgins 1996), while applicability involves a link between the features of the stimuli and the features of a node in the stereotype cognitive structure (Price and Tewksbury 1997). Priming involves the activation of knowledge available in an individual's mind providing that the stimulus information has the potential to activate a node in the mental network because of its relatedness to the criticalities of nodes within the mental network. What this means is that for priming to occur the news content needs to contain features which are similar to the features in the knowledge store about who is being reported (Althaus and Kim 2006). Thus, in this research, priming theory is used for two things: firstly, to identify features of the representations of the actors in the news stories about the Herders and Farmers conflict that are related to features in the news consumers' mind; secondly, priming is used to assess the activation of knowledge in the reader's mind which share similarities to the features of the news content. The first part of this research will seek to identify the representations of the non-state actors in the news about the Herders and Farmers conflict that can prime the activation of stereotypical views about the social groups in the conflict. One of the contributors to the features of the news content is the news source. News sources contribute to the mediatisation of armed conflict because they not only confirm the news, but they contribute to the definition and the perception of the conflict. Because the first part of this research deals with the representation of the actors in the news about the Herders and Farmers conflict, it will also consider how news sources may contribute to the representation of the non-state actors in the Herders and Farmers conflict. The first part of the research feeds into the second part of the study as it provides insight into the perceptions of the non-state actors in the Herders and Farmers conflict which may be activated by the news content. Thus, the second part of this study seeks to investigate the perceptions of the actors in the Herders' conflict, primed by the news report. Studies have investigated how

news reports may prime attitudes about terrorism and religion among readers in the U.S., shedding light on the interplay between media representations, terrorism and religion (Hoewe 2012). The present study extends the body of research as it seeks to examine media representations and perceptions of the non-state actors in Herders-Farmers' conflict.

The following section of this chapter introduces the Middle Belt region as well as a rationale for the focus on this region and the actors in the Herders and Farmers Conflict. It also introduces the relationship between the Nigerian news media and conflict with actors in the Middle Belt of Nigeria.

1.1 Defining the Nigerian Middle Belt

In 2018, a report by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) stated that the violence between the farmers and herdsman had shifted to the deliberate violence against civilians and confrontations with the Nigerian government. The conflict has led to a humanitarian crisis exemplified by the displacement of over 620,000 people from both the members of the farming community and members of the herding community, with most of the attacks occurring in the Nigerian Middle Belt region (Human Rights Watch 2018).

The Middle Belt Region has been defined by geographical, climate and demographic factors. It is located in Nigeria, a country in Sub-Saharan Africa occupying West Africa. The Middle Belt Region is located in the central part of Nigeria comprising of Abuja, Benue, Plateau, Kwara, Kogi, Southern Kaduna, Nasarawa, Niger, Adamawa and Taraba State. According to Ochonu (2008), the Middle Belt is a political construct which appropriates all non-Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri people of northern Nigeria (Ochonu 2008). However, Suleiman (2019) notes that although the term Middle Belt is used to describe the central parts of Nigeria, its ontological significance is unclear as it does not correspond to a clear geographic or ethnic unit. He adds that the Middle Belt is contested space understood as a response to the Muslim

Hausa-Fulani culture which is the mainstay of hegemonic cultures and practices from northern Nigeria.

The Fulani jihad of the 18th Century led to the creation of the Sokoto Caliphate in what is now geographically and politically referred to as Northern Nigeria (Maishanu and Maishanu 1999). As the Sokoto Caliphate continued its expansion, some of the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt were subjugated and forced to make payments to the caliphate (Mason 1970; Fardon 1983; Van Beek 1988). Other ethnic groups fared better by taking advantage of the topography of the area to resist the suppression of the Sokoto Caliphate (Fwatshak 2006). Those who were unwilling or unable to make payments to the Sokoto Caliphate were raided and forced into slavery. These activities created fear and resentment of the Hausa-Fulani among the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt of Nigeria (Ochonu 2008). By the turn of the 18th Century, the British conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate birthed the Northern Protectorate and Southern Protectorate. In 1914, the British governmental protectorate successfully unified Nigeria. Through Indirect Rule, the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt were forced to live with those for whom they had developed fear and resentment (Ochonu 2014). In addition, most of the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt of Nigeria had been converted to Christianity by European missionaries (Barnes 2007). The British colonial government at that time prevented the European missionaries from proselytising in the Northern Protectorate as they assumed that it would interfere with the political structure of Indirect Rule (Salawu 2010). Emmanuel and Tar (2015) point out that the earliest conception of the 'middle belt region' came from a Christian missionary who suggested a Benue region to the British Administration, a region for non-Muslim ethnic groups who were not cultural minorities in the then Northern Protectorate. With these definitions, northern parts of Nigeria that home to non-Muslim and non-Hausa-Fulani or Kanuri populations such as southern Bauchi, southern Gombe, southern Katsina, southern Kebbi and southern Kano could also be qualified as the Middle Belt region.

Kinnan et al. (2011) points out that between 1940-1960, Britain continued to try to unify the diverse regions of Nigeria, the Igbo to the Eastern Region, Yoruba to the Western Region, and Hausa to the Northern region, enveloping ethnic minority groups. So, as Nigeria's march to independence commenced, the people of the Middle Belt feared that they would be permanently tied to the Hausa-Fulani as one political, religious, and economic bloc (Ochonu 2014). The Northern bloc was largely Muslim while most of the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt were Christians. Additionally, most of the Middle Belt had embraced Western education and were largely literate while most of the north of Nigeria was not. There was an urgent need for the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt to distinguish themselves at least politically from the Hausa-Fulani. The development of the Middle Belt identity was a response to the desire to be distinguished politically and religiously from the north of Nigeria (Ochonu 2014). The struggle for the political identity in the Middle Belt reaches back to the precolonial oppression of the caliphate, the investment of British colonisers in the administrative control of the caliphate and the abuse of colonial power by the Hausa-Fulani. The political struggles and debates in Nigeria with regards to that area are often categorised as caliphate versus Middle Belt, Muslim vs non-Muslim. The Middle Belt is thus understood as a consciousness and an ideology with a history of resistance to Islamisation and incorporation into the Hausa-Fulani religious and cultural matrix (Suleiman 2019).

Geo-politically, the Middle Belt region is comprised of parts of the North-Central zone and the North-Eastern zone. The states in the Middle Belt region, as with other states of minority ethnic groups in Nigeria, were created to allay fears of ethnic domination by the major ethnic groups (Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa) in Nigeria (Ota et al. 2020).

From the existing tripodal regional structure, created during the colonial era, the military government of Yakubu Gowon abolished the regional arrangement and introduced a twelve-state structure in 1967. The twelve states include North-Western State, North-Eastern State, Kano State, North-Central State, Benue-Plateau State and Kwara State. Barbour (1971) points out that the motives for breaking the regional structure of Nigeria into states, particularly

in the northern part of Nigeria, was to break up the Hausa Fulani domination of the Northern Region. This is particularly significant because Yakubu Gowon, whose military government spearheaded the state creation exercise in the 1967, is from Plateau State, one of the major states in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria. It can be argued that by creating a separate state – Benue-Plateau state – Gowon might have been attempting to encourage some form of Middle Belt independence from the northern region. However, Gowon's state creation of the North-Eastern state combined Adamawa, Borno, Bauchi and Sardauna, essentially marrying non-Muslim ethnic groups in Adamawa and Southern Bauchi and Sardauna to the Borno empire converted to Islam during the Fulani jihad of the 18th Century (Barbour 1971).

After a bloodless coup in 1976 by Murtala Mohammed, Gongola State was carved out from the North-Eastern State (Bashir 2002). Abuja was divided from Niger while Benue-Plateau was broken into Benue State and Plateau State (Plateau State History and People 2024). By the late '90s, Gongola State was divested to become Taraba, Adamawa and Bauchi States. Similarly, Kaduna State was carved out of from the remnants of the North-Central State (Suberu 1991), Kogi State from Kwara State and Benue State, Nasarawa from Plateau State, and Gombe from Bauchi State. Although the creation of states had been a means to alleviate fears of ethnic domination, it soon became apparent that it was a means to access more of the country's resources. To decentralise the power of the federal government in Nigeria, the late General Sani Abacha proposed the recognition of six geopolitical zones comprised of the 36 states plus the Federal Capital Territory: North Central (Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau State and Abuja); North-East (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe State); North-West (Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara State); South-East (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo State); South-South (Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers State); and South-West (Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo State). However, the sudden but timely death of Abacha in 1998 meant that the suggested changes never became constitutionalised.

Constitutionally, the Middle Belt region does not exist, and the recognition of the geopolitical zones fragments it even further. However, understanding that the Middle Belt is a consciousness as well as a response to Muslim, Hausa Fulani domination, the Middle Belt can be understood as a discursive community (Suleiman 2019). The Middle Belt is community that is bound together by the exchange of ideas of themselves in opposition to the domination of the Muslim, Hausa Fulani.

There are currently over 200 ethnic groups in Nigeria; 150 of these groups are found in the Middle Belt. Some of the ethnic groups in the conflict include the Tiv, Idoma, Berom, Ngas, Mwaghavul, Jaba, Igede, Geomai, M'bula, Bachama, Jukun, Chamba, Mupun, Kataf, Ebira, Gbagyi, Egede, Nupe, Kamuko, Igala etc. The history of the ethnic groups who are autochthonous in the Middle Belt includes myths of migration by supernatural forces from various locations on the African continent. The ethnic groups in the conflict who are farmers view themselves as indigenous to the territories that they are located (Adebanwi 2007). Indigeneity is a core aspect of the identity of the farmer as it denotes who was "here first" before someone else came "after" (Pratt 2020). The concept of indigeneity is tied to land ownership. Those who believe they own the land are willing to die for the continuation of ownership. The farmers who are indigenous to the land have physical attachments to it, identifying it as their ancestral homeland (Maiangwa 2017).

1.1.1 Fulani Herdsmen

The Fulani herdsmen are a part of an ethnic group in West Africa who refer to themselves as Fulbe and are referred to as Fulani by the Hausa in Nigeria (Adebayo 1991). They speak the Fulfulde language. The Fulani population size ranges from 25 to 40 million present in over 15 to 20 countries in Africa (Cline 2023). The Fulani are differentiated by their way of life and their economic pursuits. They are typified into two groups – the Fulani siire or gida and the Fulani na'i or Fulbe ladde. The Fulani gida are urban dwellers engaged in commerce, administration and education. They are believed to be responsible for the religious and political revolution in northern Nigeria led by Shaihu Uthman Dan Fodio in the 19th Century, who founded the

Sokoto caliphate (Cline 2023). The Sokoto caliphate unified Hausa states, parts of Borno, Nupe and Yoruba land through a system based on the precepts of Islam. The urban-dwelling Fulani also intermarried with the Hausa which led to the formation of an ethnic group referred to as the Hausa-Fulani. By 1903, the British conquest of the Sokoto caliphate led to the creation of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. The existing power structures of the caliphate were adapted to suit the protectorate administration of the British colonialists, forming the basis of indirect rule in other parts of Nigeria (Ochonu 2008). They were the administrative allies, committed to the coloniser's priorities designed to overcome any threat to uniform, effective colonial administration. With almost unchecked power, the Hausa-Fulani could take discretionary actions that generated conflicts. As a result, the relationship between the Hausa-Fulani and the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt has been fraught with anxieties over ethnic marginalisation and domination. Furthermore, the Hausa-Fulani are those who formed the politics of northern Nigeria.

The second group of the Fulani are the Fulbe *na'i* or Fulani *jeji* who are nomadic Fulani or the Fulani Herders. They practice pastoral nomadism travelling through most of West Africa to feed their cattle (Blench 1990). Their close relationship has been argued to be what differentiates them from the 'settled' Fulani group (Adebayo 1991). According to Adebayo (1991) the cattle are:

the measure of wealth, a unit of account, a treasure, a property and yet not a property...everything begins and ends with cattle (p.2).

The cattle are the Fulani *jeji*'s most prized possession. The ownership of cattle forms the core of their identity. The Fulani herder is believed to form a unique relationship with their cattle and will do anything to ensure the survival of their cattle, traversing miles and miles of dangerous terrain to feed and water them. This affection for the cattle is one believed to be formed through the Fulani traditional education where young girls and boys are exposed to a cattle-centred lifestyle. The Fulani *jeji* are distributed around parts of Nigeria and it is argued that they were not confined to the north as previously believed (Blench 1990). Furthermore, the survival of

the cattle is essential to the survival of the Fulani Herder as they must sell the cattle at some point to be able to pay for other goods and services within society. The Fulani Herder believe that national borders are relatively meaningless and that grazing grounds and routes for their cattle represent borders (Cline 2023, p.173).

The Fulani herdsmen were believed to have arrived in the far North of Nigeria in the 16th or 17th Century, confined to the edge of deserts (Adebayo 1991). However, by the 19th Century the Fulani jihad led by the Fulani revolutionist Shaihu Uthman Dan Fodio cleared a way for the southward movement of the nomadic pastoralists in Nigeria. The urban dwelling Fulani established emirates along the southern borders of the north of Nigeria. The Fulani Herders were unable to settle in the subhumid zones in Nigeria because the wet seasons allowed for the growth of biting insects harmful to the cattle. This meant that the cattle herders seasonally migrated up north for the duration of the wet season (Blench 1994). Notwithstanding, some of the nomadic pastoralists settled in the grasslands and plains of the subhumid Middle Belt. Furthermore, by the 20th Century the presence of the British colonialists provided access to medication which prevented the spread of vectors for the tsetse fly.

In the past, the Fulani Herder and the farmers in the Middle belt enjoyed a meaningful relationship. The cattle droppings were used as manure and farmers bought milk from the Fulani Herders, while farmers sold grains to the Fulani Herdsmen (Blench 2013). Additionally, there seemed to be an agreement that during the farming season, the Fulani Herder would leave farmlands and return after the harvest season (Human Rights Watch 2018). When the Fulani Herders' cattle destroyed farmer's crop, the issue was resolved by the traditional leader who required the Herder to pay for the damaged crop. However, the erosion of the powers of local traditional rulers meant that there was no one to turn to when cattle damaged crops. The farmers turned on the Herders, killing or stealing the livestock and in some cases killing the Herder themselves. Although the Fulani Herders have traditional grazing routes through Nigeria, they have not been accepted as members of the societies they travel within. Instead,

they are perceived as outsiders and a potential security threat because of their nomadic lifestyle and because of the fears of ethnic domination (Kperogi 2021). Furthermore, when the herders travel with their livestock, their livestock wander into farmland and destroy crops. This often leads to altercations between the Herder and the Farmer. The Fulani Herder often turn to the police to report the loss of cattle and livestock, however, there doesn't seem to be anything done to investigate and arrest the perpetrators. The Fulani herdsman live by a moral guideline very different to many societies and social groups. According to a representative of the Fulani Herders:

“...the Fulani herdsman have the instinct of wanting to take revenge. It is in their nature. It is inherent, and in his blood even from his traditional activities. There is a Fulani cultural activity where if you are defeated today, you will be given six months to prepare and take on the person that defeats you. When you return after six months with your own tactics and you strike the other person to death, you will be crowned a hero...rewarded for your bravery...”
(Adesuyan 2016 cited Saleh Bayeri, p.56).

For the Fulani Herdsman, there is a need to avenge an injustice, an idea that is taught to them at a young age. When cattle and life are lost and nothing is done to the perpetrators, and there is a perceived lack of justice, the Fulani Herdsman will attack those whom they believe are the perpetrators. As Nasir El-Rufai, a Fulani man and the former governor of Kaduna put it:

“Anyone, soldier or not, that kills the Fulani, takes a loan repayable one day no matter how long it takes...if a Fulani man dies in war, it is different. If a Fulani man is arrested by the authorities and convicted, it is not an issue. What the Fulani never forgets is when he is innocently targeted and killed and the authorities do nothing. He will never forget, and he will come back for revenge. This is it.” (El-Rufai, cited by Akintoku 2021).

For the Fulani Herder, violence is only an option when there is a perceived feeling of injustice against them. It is not that they are inherently violent; it is the lack of justice that leads to violence against the perpetrators.

1.2 Nigeria: The North and South Divide and the Middle Belt

Although the Herders-Farmers' conflict has been located in the north and Middle Belt of Nigeria, it is gradually spreading to the southern parts of Nigeria. In April 2016, the Fulani Herdsmen allegedly attacked and killed 46 people in Ukpabi-Nimbo, Enugu State (Igata 2016). The attack was described as a massacre carried out by 500 Fulani men against Igbo people in the south-east region of Nigeria. This led to the creation of a paramilitary group called the Eastern Security Network which is pro-separatist (Campbell 2021). Similarly, following attacks against villagers in southwest region of Nigeria, the Yoruba governors of six states created a local security network (Jeremiah 2020).

The creation of these security networks highlights how the Herders-Farmers' conflict may exacerbate some of the political and security challenges the country currently faces. Nigeria runs a federal political system divided into 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The federal system of Nigeria is characterised by a resemblance to the military system before its latest transition in 1999. As mentioned earlier, the federal government is at the centre of most activities in the country. However, the North and South dichotomy is often used in defining the political, religious, and economic differences of the country. The north is largely Muslim, with lower levels of illiteracy and higher levels of poverty, while the south of Nigeria is largely Christian, more literate and with lower levels of poverty. The Middle Belt is often subsumed within the north, ignoring the religious and ethnic differences between the north and the Middle Belt.

The north and south divide has its history in the formation of Nigeria as a country. The region which is now known as Nigeria had been amalgamated in 1914 by combining the northern protectorate (comprised of the Sokoto caliphate and the Middle Belt) with the southern protectorate (comprised of the ethnic groups in the Southern part of Nigeria)

(Princewill et al. 2020). As stated earlier, the Middle Belt attempted to forge a political and religious identity for itself, separate from the northern identity. The efforts of the Middle Belt to develop an independent identity was fostered by the religious similarities they shared with the south of Nigeria and the fears of northern domination (Barnes 2007). Thus, although the Middle Belt has often been linked to the north of Nigeria at least geographically, it shares a religious similarity to the south of Nigeria. It also shares a similarity in the fears of northern domination in Nigeria. Furthermore, there are higher levels of literacy in the Middle Belt compared to the north of Nigeria. Moreover, the diversity of the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt further distinguishes it from the north of Nigeria and the South of Nigeria. However, the Middle Belt is incorporated into the north of Nigeria when it should be understood as a political and regional entity of its own self.

The north and south dichotomy extends itself to media ownership as most newspapers in Nigeria are owned by southerners. There are newspapers owned by those from the north and the Middle Belt of Nigeria, but they do not have the same coverage as those from the south of Nigeria. The coverage of newspapers owned by those from the south of Nigeria allows them to be understood as national newspapers because they are read more broadly, whereas the coverage of newspapers from the Middle Belt and north of Nigeria are more regional. Scholars note that when it comes to reporting about issues in the north of Nigeria, the southern based national press are biased (Yusha'u 2015). They observe that when reporting divisive issues, the press is more likely to present issues in the north (usually incorporating the Middle Belt) poorly. The present study is concerned with how non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict are represented in the Nigerian media, which has been accused of biased reporting of issues in the north of Nigeria with ethnic bias.

1.3 Thesis Overview

This study investigates representation and the perception of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict through priming theory: dissecting how the non-state actors have been represented in the conflict and the potential influence of these representations on

audience perception of the non-state actors. The thesis focuses on the most affected areas in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, and it consists of 6 chapters. Chapter One is an introduction to the thesis aimed at investigating the perceptions of the actors in the Herders' conflict. It gave an overview of the Herders-Farmers' conflict, the Middle Belt, which is the focus of the study, the non-state actors in the conflict as well as the relationship between the Middle Belt, the north and south divide of Nigeria.

Chapter Two is a critical analysis of the literature relevant to the study. The chapter explores three main areas: armed violence (especially ethnic violence), priming theory, and news sources as actors in the news. It also introduces the research questions in the study.

Chapter Three discloses the details of the research methods adopted in the thesis including the qualitative content analysis of newspaper articles, the thematic analysis of qualitative experimental semi-structured interviews, and the significance of the methods used in the study.

Chapter Four explains the research findings of the first part of the study – the newspaper analysis for the primes of the actors – and how it corresponds with the research questions. The findings are presented in three sections corresponding to the first two research questions. The first two sections of the chapter present the findings of the qualitative content analysis of the primes of the actors in the Herders' conflict. The third section presents the findings of sources in the news.

Chapter Five explains the findings of the second part of the study and how it corresponds to the third research question. The second part of the study presents the findings of the thematic analysis of interviews conducted with Nigerians about their perceptions of the actors in the Herders' conflict.

Chapter Six, the conclusion of the thesis, discusses the significance of the findings in the study and its implications in reporting about armed conflict in Nigeria. It offers recommendations and discusses possible areas for future research.

Chapter Two

Ethno-Territorial Violence, Priming and the News Media

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the relevant literature for this study; it is divided into four parts. The first part considers the literature on political violence, ethnicity and violence, ethnic violence, and resource ownership and use. This section will also review the literature on the role of the news media in constructing and defining conflict as an ethnic one. In reviewing the literature review on violence, ethnicity and the media, the chapter examines the definition of violence as ethnic as well as the representation of conflict as an ethnic one. This is particularly relevant to this study because of the widely held view of the Herders-Farmers' conflict as one being fought over ethnic identities tied to the use of resources.

The second part of this chapter examines the literature on priming as the theoretical framework of this study and as an aspect of psychology and media effects. This section of the chapter will outline aspects of the theory which the study aligns with. The literature review will also examine the relationship between agenda setting and framing, arguing that priming theory is a media theory as opposed to being understood as second level agenda setting. In addition, the literature review will address the suitability of priming to this study as opposed to framing theory.

The third part of the chapter relates to the practice of journalism that can influence the mediatization of conflict. This includes the relationship between the news source and the journalist and objectivity as a norm in journalism. The literature reveals that certain sources may impact the representation of actors in conflict. It also shows that in the rigorous pursuits of fact, objectivity as a norm in journalism may be unattainable in certain conflict situations.

2.2 Violence

Several studies have attempted to theorise the context of violence in armed conflict of the 21st Century across the world (Imbusch 2003: Shaw 2009: Eisner 2009). This aligns with

the first theme of this study which explores the context for violence in the 21st Century. Violence can reinforce some kinds of power and it can also dissolve power (Shaw 2009). This is because power involves the human ability to act in agreement with one another. Power has been argued to belong to a group who are able to remain united (Arendt 2016). Violence can be used instrumentally to maintain power; it can be guided and justified, appearing where power is in jeopardy. Power, from a political perspective, has been linked to socially organised violence with war being described as the archetype of political violence (Shaw 2009). Wars are fought for political reasons, and they are distinctly characterised by violence. However, the description of certain types of violence as war is controversial (Shaw 2009). Moreover, it has proven challenging to define war and its motivations. On one hand, war has been understood as a type of competition for scarce resources through violent means. On the other hand, it is perceived as a manifestation of violence over cultural differences from a biological and psychological root. War is the use of violence as a means to an end. War is also the description of collective violence. Consequently, Allen (1999) argues that the term 'war' is a social categorisation which draws attention to situations in which collective public killing can be expected to occur (p. 18). It is a term employed to confer status to a conflict, indicating that it should be taken seriously and not dismissed as a criminal activity or as an argument. Thus, war is an emotive word which can bring to mind powerful associations (Allen 1999). Shaw (2004) notes that scholars may resort to relatively neutral terms to describe the violence associated with war as armed conflict.

As the world took a turn to a new century, the definitions of organised violence began to be conceptualised differently. For instance, Kaldor (2013a) argued that conflict in the era of globalisation be referred to as 'new wars'. She argued that these new wars are characterised by a logic that is different to the old wars. The logic of the new wars is typified by a difference in the actors, goals, methods and the forms of finance. She emphasised the political nature of the type of violence of these new wars, opining that the use of violence blurs the distinction between war and organised crime as they are usually between states and organised political

groups for private reasons (usually an identity). Additionally, the violence in low intensity conflicts tend to involve the targeting of non-combatants (Valentino 2014), the looting and the targeted destruction of property and sources of livelihood (Wood 2014), and violence is used to exert control over territories (Staniland 2012).

The definition of war in the 21st Century as new is not without its criticism. Berdal (2011) notes that the new war thesis, which centralises the level of violence targeted at civilians, ignores the number of civilian casualties from war in the 19th and the 20th Centuries. IPre-1990s, in some western warfare, civilian suffering was seen as collateral damage. However, in Eastern Europe and in the Global South, the intentional killing of civilians was referred to as an exhibition of the 'tribal hatreds' of sadists (Valentino 2014). Thus, the use of violence in these locations presupposed that the death of civilians was not political – that the violence had been freed from ideology (Enzenberger 1994 cited by Kalyvas 2001). This way, the goal of the violence in new wars was separated from ideas and connected to identity, further differentiating 'new wars' from 'old wars'. In describing the conflict of the 21st Century as new wars, the difference in the ethnic identities of those involved was often highlighted as one of the motivations for violence.

2.2.1 Violence and ethnicity

In conceptualising conflict, violence has been measured as a degree of conflict rather than as a form of conflict (Brubaker and Laitin 1998). Moreover, violence in the 21st Century has been argued to be motivated by ethnic differences. There are two main school of thoughts in the conceptualisation of ethnic identities. On one side are those who assume that ethnic identities are biological. The ethnobiological models are based on the primordialist conceptualisation of the formation of ethnic identity. In the primordial school of thought, ethnicity is a natural phenomenon with its foundation in family and kinship ties. Primordial bonds between individuals result from the fruits of birth i.e., 'blood', language, religion, territory and culture, characteristics which are easily distinguishable from other social ties (Hutchinson and Smith 1994). The concept of primordialism provides a means of explaining the potency

and persistence of ethnic identity and how those who believe that ethnicity is a natural concept can be easily manipulated and mobilised to engage in acts of violence. Primordialism focuses on the strong emotions often associated with ethnic sentiments and the efficacy of cultural symbols. The link with homeland and the myth of common ancestry is often called upon in defining ethnic identities. Ascription is not merely a matter of choice, but of tradition evoked by perceptions of common ancestry. Gil-White (1999) adds that actors who possess ethnobiological models of ethnicity will perceive their interests in respect to other kinds of group boundaries affecting behaviour. Further to this, Gurr (2000) posits that only identity has a direct impact on rebellion via mobilisation. Ethnic mobilisation is made successful by the support of most group members. If an individual's identity is built upon their ethnic identity, it can be assumed that they would want to support the group's cause. Banton (2000) posits that individuals are mobilised by an appeal to shared ethnic origin which can lead to a distinctive kind of conflict.

On the other side are those who perceive ethnicity to be constructed, having no biological basis, as a relationship between groups socially constructed to express social boundaries (Allen and Seaton 1999). In the constructivist/instrumentalist school of thought, ethnic identity is understood as a strategy where individuals manipulate their identity to advance their personal economic and political interests (Jones 1990). Ethnic identity is related to a group's sense of labelling and cultural aspects. The process of labelling is provided by the group according to processes which they regard as significant – that is, actors will make choices about their ethnic status as circumstances demand. Ethnic identities can be defined in relation to other social groups becoming a product of social processes (Allen 1999).

The ethnic identities of the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict have often been cited as the cause of the conflict because the herdsmen are Fulani while the Farmers are of various indigenous ethnic groups in the Middle Belt of Nigeria (Egbuta 2018; Chukwuma 2020). In fact, some have referred to it as a religious conflict between both groups, defining it as ethno-religious (Daniel 2023). The focus on the religious and ethnic identities of the actors

in the Herders-Farmers' conflict pertains to the role group identities (whatever they are characterised as) play in the understanding of the conflict. Furthermore, the definition of the Herders-Farmers' conflict as one over ethnic difference is probably because ethnicities are key in defining identities in Nigeria, so much so that the national identity has been overshadowed by the ethnic identity (Okolie 2003; Çancı and Odukoya 2016). Some argue that in colonial Africa, ethnic identities were conferred upon groups, defining them as native and non-native (Mamdani 1996). Consequently, political actors who sought to be free from colonial rule reverted to their ethnic group identification rather than creating a national identity (Mlambo 2013). These proponents draw a contrast between the formation of ethnic identities around nationality in Europe and Africa. They argue that nationalism in Europe had been borne from citizen's desire to establish and claim territories which reflected their oneness sharing a common language, history and culture (Bamidele 2015). In contrast, African countries were constructed by external forces who had no insight about the intricacies of the continent. Ethnic groups who may not have been fond of each other were forced to come together to form a country. Consequently, the notion of nationhood has not been feasible in many African countries. In Nigeria, ethnic identities are more salient than national identities. As Obafemi Awolowo, a Nigerian nationalist, put it in his book *Path to Nigerian Freedom*:

“Nigeria is not a nation; it is a mere geographical expression. The word Nigeria is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not. It stands to logic that if the Nigerian project was perceived as unworkable from the onset, the form of government to sustain it has no foundation to rest on and therefore, was bound to be a stillborn” (Awolowo 1947 cited by Bamidele 2015, p.10).

What this means is that even at Nigeria's independence in 1960 it was not a country, but a coming together of multiple ethnic groups for the purposes of self-determination. The notion of nationhood is obsolete as it is a country of nations rather than one country; the bonds of ethnic identity are stronger than the bonds of nationhood. Individuals are quick to revert to

ethnic identities in defining themselves. In a country like Nigeria, with 250 ethnic groups, it is more suitable to define one's identity in connection to an ethnic group than to the nation of Nigeria. For most Nigerians, the ethnic identity is not a construct but a God-given, natural aspect of their identity.

Violence against other ethnic groups can be provoked by the elites to gain and to maintain their hold on political power. Additionally, ordinary citizens may also construct ethnic boundaries resulting in violence when there is dissatisfaction with those whose membership is different (Eriksen 2010). Violence in this sense can be used to maintain control of political power, arriving where power is in jeopardy. Ethnic groups may resort to violence to retain power they assume they are about to lose. This does not mean that the violence is caused by ethnic differences. Rather, ethnic groups may resort to collective violence if the power of the ethnic group is threatened.

A simplistic understanding of collective violence as a result of ethnic differences rather than as a response to the threat of the loss of power has led to the conceptualisation of ethnic differences as the cause of new wars. Thus, ethnic violence has been defined as:

“Violence perpetuated across ethnic lines, in which at least one party is not a state (or representative of a state), and in which the ethnic difference is coded – by the perpetrators, targets influential third parties, or analysts – as having been integral rather than incidental to the violence, that is, in which the violence is coded as having been meaningfully orientated in some way to the difference in the ethnicity of the target” (Brubaker and Laitin 1998, p. 428).

The idea of violence in conflict as an ethnic one is as a result of the interpretations of the violent act carried out because of ethnic differences. The ethnic identities are not necessarily intrinsic to the violence. However, the interpretation of the differences of the ethnic identities of the groups involved is attached or perceived as relevant to the violence. In this sense, the ethnic identity is made a focal point in the analysis of the cause of the violence,

ignoring other possible routes to the cause of the violence. Ethnic conflict usually is solely about the ethnic identities of those involved. It is coded as integral to the violence, ignoring other aspects which may have led to the violence (Brubaker and Laitin 1998).

The convergence of groups around identities to perpetuate violence seems to suggest that these groups have only been forged around the characteristics of their identity for collective violence (Malešević 2010). However, solidarity among groups stems around events and processes external to war. Malešević (2010) notes that conflict arises in response to a situation affecting the group's survival and continuation. Group identities are forged beforehand but may be maintained through collective violence in response to a threat against the group. Group definition along ethnic identities are an articulation of politicised culture (Malešević 2006). The process of identifying, maintaining and acquiring an ethnic identity is an ideological statement. Berdal (2011) notes that the convictions of groups tied to their ethnic identities plays a crucial role in providing a valid reason motivating people toward violence. He highlights the significance of ideological convictions such as grievances, notions of honour and prestige to the mobilisation of ethnic groups to carry out inhumane acts of violence. The definition of new wars, at least as one solely about identity politics, fails to recognise the role of ideology in the mobilisation along the lines of ethnic identity (Kalyvas 2001; Berdal 2011).

2.2.2 Violence, ethnic identity and territory

Ethnic violence has often been connected to competition for resources. Proponents argue that it is not merely about the ethnic differences, but the perception of ethnic differences connected to ideations of access and use of the resources. In defining ethnicity, the primordialist approach notes that one of the characteristics of an ethnic group is a claim to territory and culture easily distinguishable from other social ties (Hutchinson and Smith 1994). Land use has often been defined and tied to concepts of identity; groups of individuals who perceive themselves as being of the same ethnic group may come together to make a claim on a space, defining how it may be used. Thus, a territory can be tied to an identity and ideations of how the land ought to be used. Notions of identity are connected to the space –

the ethnic identity is defined by the ownership of that space. The identity may also be connected to how that space may be used (Kaiser 2002).

Spaces may be ethnicised through homeland images, myths and symbols territorialising ethnic identities. Ideas of territory and how it ought to be used are often attached to ethnic identities. Territories assume characteristics potentially exclusive to the one who occupies them and who defines them (Raffestin 2012). Groups create territories by harnessing certain resources, giving physical substance and symbolic notion to the territory. Territoriality becomes a form of power that satisfies the material requirements of belonging (Penrose 2002). Penrose (2002) states that territoriality is:

“A measure of control over a territory, whatever form it takes, constructed as fundamental to a sense of control over one’s self and, by extrapolation, to a society’s control over itself” (p.282).

Ethnic groups may stake claim over spaces as a form of control over their identity. In defining the space as theirs, ethnic groups may construct a sense of control over the definition of their identity and the definition of the space. In defining the space as theirs, ethnic groups can exert control and determine who has access to it and who uses it. Thus, power is often tied to territoriality, as the owner of the space controls the definition of, and the relationship with, the space (Adebanwi 2007). In this sense, ethnic groups who believe that the land is theirs, particularly from a primordial perspective (ownership passed down by ancestry), may not only be defined by their ownership of the land, but they may desire to exert control over it.

Through ethno-territoriality, ethnic groups may stake claim to territories based on ethnic identities (Moore 2016). It involves making explicit claims for space by invoking ethnic identity, cultural rights and political authority. Ethno-territoriality allows for the identification and construction of certain places or territories as belonging to, or appropriate for, certain ethnic categories of people and practice (Moore 2016). The concept of identity and citizenship is often tied to land use in Nigeria and it has been argued to be pertinent in the Herders-Farmers’

Conflict (Maiangwa 2017). In Nigeria, the idea of citizenship is tied to indigeneity on an autochthonous level (Adebanwi 2009). The ethnic groups in the Middle Belt claim prior and permanent settlement to the land and are therefore the 'genuine owners' of the land. On the other hand, the Fulani Herdsmen, who are nomadic pastoralist, believe that they should have access to the land to feed their livestock. The indigenous ethnic groups who are sedentary believe that the land should be used for farming. Both the farmers and the Fulani have different perceptions for how the land ought to be used. Their ideations about land use are connected to their different ethnic identities.

The ethnic groups in the Middle Belt who are predominantly farmers define themselves as indigenous to the land, naturally originating within a space. According to Pratt (2020) indigeneity suggests that the presence of a social group in a space is tied to the recognition of their presence or the presence of their ancestors in that place prior to anyone else. The ethnic groups in the Middle Belt argue that they were in the Middle Belt before other groups and so they are the owners of the land. There is a sense of rootedness to the land prior to the invasion of others. They refer to themselves as natives indicating a strong connection to the land as something to be preserved and to be protected by every means possible, including violence (Maiangwa 2017). An identifiable ancestral home is one of the 6 features in the conceptualisation of ethnic identities described by Hutchinson and Smith (2006). For most of the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt, ethnicity is attached to land ownership passed down ancestrally. To the indigenes of the Middle Belt, their ethnic identity attaches them to the homeland because they were there first. The ethnic identity of the ethnic groups is tied to landownership and by extension land use. Because they define themselves as those who were 'here first', ownership of the land suggests that they are entitled to use the land however they deem fit. The loss of land and the entitlement to its use implies the loss of an integral aspect of their ethnic identity. Thus, the identity of the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt is tied to the definitions of land ownership and land use. Notions of land ownership is a key component of the ethnic identity of the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt of Nigeria. Additionally, defining

themselves as landowners or as indigenes is a response to the dominance of the Fulani (Ochonu 2014; Maiangwa 2017).

Conversely, the Fulani Herdsmen are nomadic pastoralists of the Fulani ethnic group in Nigeria. The Fulani ethnic group are classified according to their lifestyle – nomadic and sedentary. The Fulani Herdsmen are referred to as the Fulani *jeji* due to their nomadic lifestyle while the sedentary members of the ethnic group are referred to as Fulani *gida*. For the Fulani Herdsmen, the cattle is their most prized possession. It is believed that they have a strong bond to their cattle, cherishing them more than anything else. The ownership and the survival of the cattle forms the core of their identity. The practice of pastoralism for the Fulani has been accomplished through seasonal migration. This means that the Fulani Herder will go in search of greener pasture as the seasons change, migrating to various locations. The permutation of the Fulani as nomadic pastoralist connects their ethnic identity to the ideations of land use. The survival of the cattle is tied to nomadism which has been described as a response to landscape and environmental constraints rather than as a normal system of land use (Noyes 2000). This suggests that nomadism is not necessarily the appropriate use of land. However, for the Fulani Herder, the nomadic lifestyle is not merely a response to landscape and environmental constraints but a necessary means of survival. Thus, the perception of the Fulani Herder in regard to land use is connected to the practice of nomadic pastoralism. Land use is defined by the opportunity it provides to graze their cattle. The Fulani Herdsmen believe that the survival of their herd is only possible through nomadism and that the loss of cattle is equivalent to the loss of life. The identity of the Fulani Herdsmen is tied to nomadism because it is essential for the survival of their cattle. For the nomadic pastoralist, access to land use to feed their livestock is essential to the survival of their identity as herders. Without cattle, there is no Fulani Herdsmen. In Nigeria, grazing reserves were instituted for the Herders-Farmers' to travel safely. In an interview with the Fulani Herdsmen representative, the International Crisis Group notes that in the 1960s the Northern Nigerian regional government had set up 415 grazing reserves around the North and Middle Belt of Nigeria (ICG 2017). However, only

114 were formally documented and the change in government in certain areas has meant that appropriate measures have not been made to prevent encroachment into the demarcated spaces.

Notions of land use by actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict is further exacerbated by environmental changes. Homer-Dixon (1991) proposed that environmental changes can influence conflict, being a powerful or minor player in the melange of political, economic and physical factors. He notes that population growth, patterns of land distribution and a host of other ideational factors could lead to environmental change which can lead to conflict. He further observes that land degradation, population displacement caused by the land degradation and disrupted social relations are specific dimensions of environmental conflict.

One of the changes in the climate in northern Nigeria has been described as desertification (ICG 2017). Desertification is the encroachment of desert land from its natural limits, overwhelming farmlands and settlements (Kassas 1995). Proponents in the study of climate change and conflict argued that desertification is as a result of human misuse of the land (Helldén 1991), while others argued that desertification is a myth based on unsubstantiated claims which became a tool of global importance in the 20th Century (Thomas and Middleton 1994; Behnke and Mortimore 2016). Those who connect climate change to armed conflict note that desertification and drought leads to resource scarcity which then leads to migration, triggering the emergence of existing, latent conflicts (Homer-Dixon 2007). For instance, the north of Nigeria, which is part of the Sahara, has been facing desertification since the 1920s, losing almost one-fifth of the total land area (Olagunju 2015). Some argue that the desertification in the north of Nigeria has changed the migratory movements of the Fulani Herdsmen, intensifying the violence between them and the groups situated there (Lenshie et al. 2021; ICG 2017). Additionally, the population expansion in Nigeria has caused farming on spaces originally allocated as grazing reserves for the Herders. Population growth in rural Nigeria has seen a significant increase in the past couple of years (Brottem 2021). Environmental changes in the north of Nigeria have impacted on the migratory patterns of the

Herders, and the growing population of rural communities in the Middle Belt means that there is competition for the resource.

The ethnic groups in the Middle Belt assume that they were there first, owning the land with exclusive rights to its use. The loss of land equates to a loss of identity as indigeneity is tied to land ownership. For the Fulani Herder, there is no strong affinity to the space, as they are nomadic and only want their cattle to survive. However, they need access to these areas to feed their cattle. When the identity of those who 'own' a space/land is called into question, the identity and identification with the land may lead to violence (Saltman 2020). The violence is not necessarily about the ethnic identities of those involved but a competition for the relationship of the ethnic identities with the space. The strong affinity to land ownership and land use may connect the violence to the ethnic identities of the parties involved. Landownership often evokes a sense of belonging and a need to protect it against 'others' (Kurgat 2012). The land is a source of identity as it endows the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt with a sense of belonging to Nigeria. Similarly, it can be argued that the Herders feel entitled to the traverse through spaces previously allocated for grazing. At the beginning of this chapter, it was argued that violence is connected to power as it can reinforce and also dissolve power. Violence can be used to maintain power as it can be called upon and justified for the maintenance of power (Arendt 2016). Ethnic identities tied to landownership, rights and uses may be mobilised toward the maintenance of ownership—and by extension power. Violence may ensue to ensure the continuation of landownership, rights and use among groups potentially connecting ethnic identities to violence and territory.

2.3 News media representations of armed conflict

The previous section outlined some of the perspectives on violence and armed conflict in Africa; the current section will highlight the representations of violence in the news media and their implications upon audience perception of armed conflict.

News media produces and transmits images of violence as it unfolds, changing perceptions of meaning made about it. In their seminal work on the press in ethnic conflict

reporting, Allen and Seaton (1999) contend that conflict is defined by the news through labelling, shaping the discourse around it. In the African news media, armed conflicts—including the Herders and Farmers conflict—have been linked to ethnicity, and this is probably due to the question of identity being essentialised in colonial Africa. The African news media plays a role in history-making by constructing competing mythical pasts for ethnic or nationalist movements, participating in social processes. For instance, the Ugandan press coverage of conflict between rebels in the north of Uganda and the Ugandan government revealed the demonstration of ethnic ideology established during the imperial rule (Leopold 1999).

The attention to the ethnic identities of actors in the conflict has been referred to as the 'ethnic conflict frame'. Wahutu (2018a) contends that the African news media may sometimes employ the ethnic conflict frame in reporting about conflict in Africa. In a comparative study of the coverage of the Darfur conflict in seven African news media across four countries, Wahutu (2018a) noted that the African press mimicked the reportage of the global west when reporting conflicts in Darfur by using the ethnic conflict frame. He claimed that there is an influence of a western script on the process of knowledge production within the African news media content about conflict in Africa, highlighting the convergence of media practices. When reporting armed conflict in Africa, Western news coverage lacks coherent political analysis but concentrates on the definition of the issue as fighting between two groups (Philo 1998 cited by Allen and Seaton 1999). The definition of armed conflict in Africa as 'ancient hatred' by the global north's journalist was seen in the reportage of the conditions in Somalia, Liberia and Sierra Leone (Carruthers 2004). This is an image that has been enhanced by an interaction between literature, entertainment and news about Africa. Consequently, in news and popular culture of the west, the image of armed conflict in Africa ranges from 'ethnic hatred', warlordism, looting, tribalism, hunger and famine (Fair 1993). The idea that conflict in Africa is fought because of ethnic differences has been challenged. Scholars have argued that the identities of tribalism do not underlie the conflict in Africa (Allen and Seaton 1999). Although ethnicity has been considered as the cause of the conflict in Africa, it is not an explanation but

rather than which needs to be explained (Pieterse 1997). Scholars claim that ethnic identities often cited to be the cause of the conflict are constructed and manipulated by leaders whom journalists have access to (Mamdani 1996; Carruthers 2004). The elite leaders may contribute to the definition of the conflict as an ethnic one by journalists who are not able to investigate the likely causes of the conflict. Carruthers (2004) notes that the erosion of foreign news services in African countries meant that agency staffers and permanent foreign correspondents were thinly spread and stretched, leading news organisations to rely on 'parachute' journalists. Parachute journalists are often ignorant of the true cause of the conflict and lack the time and resources to investigate. They may also lack an understanding of the context and the local terrain of the conflict (Musa and Yusha'u 2013). Instead, parachute journalists will access elite sources that may provide versions of the event contributing to the "...stereotypes...of African tribalism, implacable enmities, unspeakable evil, maniacs with machetes..." (Carruthers 2004, p.165).

While there may be an influence on the reportage of conflict in African countries in the African news media by the global north, Wahutu (2018a) observes that there are different reasons as to why this may be so. The west's reportage of armed conflict in African countries in this manner indicates a "path-determined relationship between conflict and tribal identities" (Wahutu 2018a, p.44). By contrast, the African press reports the conflict using the ethnic conflict frame to domesticate the news and to present the conflict as a political challenge. The ethnic conflict frame in African news media is used to differentiate and highlight the different actors involved in the conflict. The ethnic conflict frame is operationalised as a filter for the audience to understand the protagonists. Wahutu (2018a) argued that the news coverage of the Darfur conflict in African news media framed the issue in a manner which demonstrated to readers the identification of the actors who should be understood as the *other* and those the readers share an affinity with. Although Chilwa and Chilwa (2022) argue that the presentation of conflict in Africa using the ethnic conflict frame is a way of appealing to the

foreign audience, Wahutu's (2018a) findings indicate the presence of the socio-cultural binary of 'us' and 'them'.

The reason why the African reporters rely on the ethnic conflict frame may be because, for the African journalist, there is a tension between the journalistic practice and the attachment to ethnic identities. Nyamnjoh (2015) refers to it as a journalistic practice that pays homage to the village. Journalists share the beliefs of the society to which they belong to and they engage in the reportage of events and processes from a culturally narrow perspective (Kempf 2002; Wolfsfeld et al 2008). Thus, the news about conflict is culturally ethnocentric. Wolfsfeld et al (2008) note that that ethnocentric view is a:

"...psycho-social construct...that designates the tendency to view the world and other populations through the perspective of one's own ethnic group, and even to reject others who are culturally different while accepting those perceived to be similar" (p.402).

When the news about conflict is produced from an ethnocentric perspective, the news producers retain a perspective of their ethnic group and those culturally similar to theirs in a positive light while rejecting those that are different. In Nigeria, journalists tend to champion ethno-regional and ethnic interests of the location and ownership of the newspaper when reporting about conflict (Salawu 2013). This may be accomplished through labelling and selective retention that reifies existing perceptions of those involved in the conflict. Ette and Joe (2019) argue that the label assigned to Boko Haram insurgents reflect geo-ethno polarities embedded in Nigerian news reportage of the Boko Haram insurgency. Citing Abubakar (2012) they observe that the label 'Boko Haram' is a media construct which has resonated because the public finds it acceptable. Through the label of 'Boko Haram', the Nigerian press defines the insurgency in ethno-political religious terms. Similarly, Salawu (2013) notes that these ethno-religious identities are repeatedly called upon in the news narrative about armed conflict in Nigeria. He argues that through selective retention, the news media may refer to negative perceptions of the opposing group in defining their actions.

Generally, the ethnocentric perspective of reporting conflict may contain a high level of dramatization that demonises the enemy and provides graphic proof of their evil (Wolfsfeld et al 2008). In an exploration of the reportage of sectarian conflict in Jos Nigeria, it was discovered that the journalistic discourse contained labels, enemy images, exaggeration and understatement, and stereotypes to demonise the 'other' (Musa and Ferguson 2013). The crisis in 2008, between the autochthonous ethnic group in Jos and the Hausa-Fulani settlers, was classed as a religious clash because the former is predominantly Christian while the latter are predominantly Muslim. The reportage of the sectarian conflict included stereotypes about the Hausa settlers as the 'bad guys, and violent persons'. A participant in the study expressed concerns that problematised Islam. The study emphasised that the regional media in the south of Nigeria tended to make generalisations about the Northerners as those who enjoy fighting. The study concluded that the use of stereotypes in the news about the conflict othered those in the conflict.

Othering is usually expressed and characterised in the news through stereotypes (Strani and Szczepaniak-Kozak 2018; Nwachukwu et al. 2021). It involves the definition of one's identity by distancing and stigmatising an(other). Othering reinforces the preferred group's identity, attributes and characteristics as normal while setting up other's group difference as a point of deviance (Weis 1995). Othering often operates in the binary distinction of 'us' versus 'them', 'we' and 'them', constituting a difference imposed on others rather than an achieved status (Udah 2018). Othering involves the description about the others as well as descriptions directed at the other (Van Dijk 2006). In the former description, the outgroup is portrayed negatively, while in the latter there is a subtle use of derogatory slurs and insults during interactions with the group. Some of the mechanisms used in othering include the language of threat, the use of negative representations, silencing their voice, as well as portraying them as a nuisance.

The news media coverage of conflict through the ethnic frame may categorise others as outsiders, intertwining social groups in the discourse on the war of terror (Mamdani 2009;

Wahutu 2018a). The discourse on the 'war on terror' presented a frame that suggested the clash between civilisations impacting on international relations and policy. Mamdani (2009, p.78) claimed that the war on terror: "provided the coordinates, the language, the images and the sentiment for interpreting" Arabs and anything which it resembled. Some of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict were argued to have migrated to Nigeria from Saudi Arabia (Adebayo 1991). More so, they have been successfully involved in jihadist movements in several West African countries (Cline 2023). As this study deals with the representation and perceptions of the non-state actors in the news about the Herder-Farmers' conflict, the representations of some of the non-state actors in the news may contain stereotypes which others them. Similarly, interpretations of the actors in the news may also reflect the stereotypic imaginings of the non-state actors in the conflict.

There have been various examinations of the representation of the Herder-Farmers' conflict in the news media. One of the first studies that examined the representation of the conflict was by Gever and Essien (2017). By examining two newspapers over 12 months using content analysis, they discovered that the conflict received episodic coverage paying little attention to the victims of the conflict. They also noted that the newspapers used language differently, describing events to protect the interest of the region of their readership. Additionally, their research included an audience assessment of the selected newspaper coverage with findings suggesting that the news media coverage of the conflict was limited. This study only focused on two newspapers – *Daily Sun* and *the Daily Trust* – and it only investigated the coverage as it affected Benue State. Abdulbaqi and Ariemu (2018) observed that the Nigerian press described the conflict with words typical of war-oriented journalism, employing words that can be divisive, stereotypic and conflict inciting. More recently, Eke (2020) observed that the representations of the conflict reflected ancient stereotypes of the non-state actors in the conflict. His findings were similar to those of Chilwa and Chilwa (2022), who conducted a comparative analysis of the representation of the Herders-Farmers' conflict in foreign and Nigerian newspapers. Through discourse analytic methods, they

observed that there was a lack of objective reporting, with western newspapers writing to appeal to their audience while the Nigerian press exploited popular religious sentiments about the conflict. The findings from these papers reveal that the Nigerian press promotes stereotypes about groups through selective reporting, ignoring the sociological, economic and political contexts.

These papers have only considered broadsheet and legacy newspapers ignoring digital born newspapers. Furthermore, while these papers have interrogated the representation of the Herders-Farmers' conflict, only one has considered audience assessment of the conflict. Gever and Essien (2017) examined audience assessment of the coverage, but they did not examine audience sense-making of the non-state actors in the conflict. The present study extends the body of research by not only investigating the construction of the of non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict in online newspapers, but also interrogating audience interpretation of the representation of the non-state actors in the news coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

2.4.1 Priming theory

So far, this chapter has discussed the concept of armed conflict (violence) and ethnicity as well as the role of the media in armed conflict. The literature review revealed that the description of armed conflict in the news media can shape the understanding and interpretation of the conflict. This study seeks to discover perception of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict among audience members, so this section introduces priming theory which the study adopts in its assessment of the representation and the perceptions of the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict in the Nigerian press.

In its earliest definition in psychology, priming was defined as:

“The temporary internal activation of response tendencies ...the mediating state between the act of will or intention and the production of an intended behaviour

which assembles the action into proper sequential order” (Lashley (1951) cited by Bargh and Chartrand 2014, p.3).

Priming is a mental process that includes the intervention between one’s will and the production of intended behaviour, which allows a mediating state of mental preparedness to produce a behaviour. This definition highlights the influence of a phenomenon on the mental process producing an effect.

Similarly, in the area of mass communication, priming has been defined as:

“The effects of content of media on people’s later behaviour or judgement related to the content that was processed” (Roskos-Ewoldsen and Roskos-Ewoldsen 2009, p.75).

Priming involves the processing of media information and the production of behaviour consistent with the media content. Simply put, media content can bring about an effect on the behaviour of the content user similar to the media content.

These definitions reveal that priming is the activation of cognitive function of mediated messages or some other context producing an effect. It is important to consider priming theory in the context of information processing to showcase the activation of cognitive function and its resultant effect. Among scholars in the information processing school of thought, memory and knowledge are conceptualised as having varying structures. The most relied upon structure of the memory and knowledge activation is the analogy between human and machine. The theories of information processing often attached to priming are the Associative Network (Anderson and Bower 2014) and the Spreading-Activation proposed by Collins and Loftus (1975). The Associative Network deals with the human mind making associations between concepts, nested within each other. It extends itself to include the Adaptive Control of Thought (ACT) (Anderson 2013). In the Associative Network, higher level cognition constitutes a unitary human system of control – what directs thought and what controls the transmission from thought to thought. In ACT, the mind is argued to consist of three memories:

working (information that can be currently accessed), declarative (is a propositional network of nodes and links) and production (is the control in response to the appearance of data [experiences/news etc]). Five processes interact with the contents of the working memory: the *encoding process* deposits the representation of the environment into working memory; the *storage process* deposits permanent records of temporary working-memory information into declarative memory; the *retrieval process* bring the records back into working memory; the *match process* selects productions to apply according to the contents of the working memory; and finally, the *execution process* creates new working memory structures through the production actions. Additionally, knowledge comes in cognitive units characterised as propositions, strings, spatial images, nodes etc. In different situations, a cognitive unit encodes a set of elements within a particular relationship. These elements define a network structure referred to as a tangled hierarchy – mended together by cognitive units joining sets of elements. The knowledge structure in the Associated Network is formed as a simple network in which all the elements are nodes and the connections among the nodes are links. Nodes can be created by the perception of objects in the environment. For instance, if a word is presented, an experience or knowledge is shared, its memory representation (if present) may be activated and, if not, it will form part of the working memory for the word, experience or shared knowledge. This action produces a structure that becomes a source of activation and the response to the appearance of information can focus the node in working memory, becoming a source of activation (Anderson 2013). What this means is that after the word has been presented and its representation is activated in memory, the action builds a cognitive structure which can become the source of activation. This also implies that knowledge about that word has been stored in the memory. It aligns with the concept of availability, which holds that knowledge needs to be available in the memory for it to be used in processing—it is important for priming to occur (Higgins 1996). The production from reading the word or learning about an issue can focus the node in working memory, becoming a source of activation. It can also furnish one's knowledge store about the details of that word. Thus, nodes can become sources of activation. They can be activated when the links connecting nodes

are active. Nodes can remain in an inactive state in the knowledge network. They can also contribute to the development of details in the knowledge store. To better understand the connections between nodes, Anderson (2013) combines the theory of Associative Network to the concept of Spreading Activation (Collins and Loftus 1975).

Drawing on Quillian's proposed Spreading-Activation theory of human semantic processing in 1962 and 1967, Collins and Loftus (1975) argue that concepts are presented as nodes in a network with properties of the concept represented as labelled relational links. A node within a network is labelled in ways that connect it to other nodes in the network. The links between the nodes have different characteristics, indicating the importance of each link to the definition of the concept. What this means is that although each node within a network may be defined differently, they will have properties that connect to other nodes within a network. The activation of a node may activate other nodes connected to the node initially activated, initiating the spread of activation of knowledge or memory about the concept represented by a node within a network. As Collins and Quillian (1975) put it, priming involves the tracing process of:

“...activation tags which are spread by tracing an expanding set of links in the network...an implication of priming is that links as well as nodes will be primed” (p.409).

In this sense, the media content can activate a particular node and those that are linked to that node may also be activated; the activation spreads, producing an effect. Spreading Activation theory provides insight on the mental processes involved in the activation of knowledge in memory in Priming Theory. It reveals how the activation of a node can spread to other nodes associated with the news content, producing an effect. Access to news media content can activate the network about that issue in the knowledge structure of the reader. Priming involves the spreading activation of nodes and links within a network, resulting in an effect: in behaviour, attitude or judgment. The effect of the prime is usually unconscious, even though there might be an awareness of the prime (Bargh 2016).

Two things are important to point out: news content will only activate information that is accessible in the knowledge store. Higgins (1996) argues that a prime will be ineffective if it is not available in knowledge. He describes accessibility as the activation potential of available knowledge. The context of the news content holds the potential to activate existing knowledge. Secondly, Althaus and Kim (2006) note that the accessibility of available knowledge is not enough for a prime to activate that knowledge. There must be perceived applicability of the attended features of the news content to the information available in memory. Applicability is the relation between the features of some stored knowledge and the attended features of the stimulus (Higgins 1996). What this means is that certain aspects of the news content must share some similarities with features of the information available in the knowledge store. With these two factors, we can then state that priming is the activation of available knowledge by the context of the news content, deemed applicable to the features of the news content. The prime would be the attended features of the news content, which are similar to the features of the knowledge store about the issue being reported in the news. The news content must contain features made salient within the news which the news reader finds applicable in order for the relevant node to be activated. These features of the news content must have the potential to activate the nodes containing the knowledge relating to the news.

2.4.2 Priming stereotypes

Stereotypes, in the sociocultural perspective, are a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people (Ashmore and Del Boca 1981). In the cognitive approach, they are a cognitive structure that contains the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs and expectations about a human group (Hamilton and Sherman 2014). What these definitions have in common is that they are beliefs about a group of people tied to their attributes and the expectations of the group. They serve a purpose as a filter, allowing individuals to filter information about social groups. They are a cognitive structure that contain information about social groups. Stereotypes are multifunctional, serving a purpose for information processing, guiding interpretations in reference to previous knowledge, complementing the continually changing

roles of group conflicts (Hilton and von Hippel 1996). Accordingly, they are a normal cognitive process forged through social interactions and strengthened by encountering stereotypic images in public media (Ramasubramanian 2007).

Stereotypes in the news media have been identified through the implicit definition of the attributes associated with a group (Dixon et al. 2003; Dixon 2006; Dixon et al. 2019). The presence of the stereotype of a social group in the news is implicit as it involves the use of nouns or adjectives that endorse and represent stereotypes about the social group (Mendelberg 2001). Mendelberg (2008) argues that messages which contain implicit stereotypes about social groups are subtle and indirect communication, omitting nouns and adjectives that can be explicitly linked to the stereotype of a group. The implicit stereotype message includes negative images of a group which appear coincidental to the main message. It involves the use of words that have associations to that group that do not appear to focus on the group. Implicit messages do not contain direct labelling of a group, as the recipients of the message are more likely reject it (Mendelberg 2001). Rather, implicit messages contain oblique narrative references to the stereotyped group which can activate images in the mind of the reader. The effect of implicit messages occurs automatically, outside the awareness of the news reader, but it is able to produce an effect on decisions and attitudes (Peffley et al. 1996; Valentino et al. 2002; Harell et al. 2012).

Implicit messages about a social group in the news content will be present in seemingly relevant nouns and adjectives which are related to the group. Subtle and indirect communication styles which omit nouns and adjectives linked to the stereotype of that group. To detect stereotypic representation in the news content, groups will be represented with negative images which appear coincidental with the main message. Following an encounter with news content which contain implicit descriptions or images about a group, the news reader may produce effects evidencing the activation of the stereotype in their minds. At this point, it is important to point out that stereotype activation does not mean stereotype use.

According to Müller and Rothermund (2014), stereotypes can be activated in three steps: an individual or action is categorised as a member or attribute of a social group; traits associated with that group are activated; and the treatment of that individual is influenced by the activated traits. Stereotype activation and stereotype use fall within steps two and three. Stereotypes have been argued to occur automatically (when the individual is unaware of the activation and it impacts on their consequent behaviour and attitude) or controlled (when the stereotype is activated, and the individual is aware of it but does not allow it to affect their consequent behaviour and attitudes) upon activation (Blair and Banaji 1996; Devine and Sharp 2009). The implicit presence of stereotypes in the news content and the cognitive mechanisms of priming outlined above presents like this: the news readers encounters news content replete with implicit descriptions of the stereotype attributes of the group; the nodes which represent the cognitive structure of the news reader's knowledge about the group will be activated in the news perceiver's mind; the activation of that node may spread to the activation of other nodes within the network; finally, the news reader will produce evaluation which may be consistent with the news content and with the stereotype of the social group i.e. interpretations which are congruent with the stereotype. As this study deals with the representation of the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict, the reportage about the conflict may contain implicit messages capable of priming the news reader.

2.4.2.1 Priming and Agenda-setting

Priming and Agenda-setting are often discussed together, with most researchers subsuming priming under agenda setting (Price and Tewksbury 1997; Weaver, 2007; Iyengar and Kinder 2010; Scheufele and Iyengar 2014; Cacciatore et al. 2016). In the domain of political news, priming has been defined as:

“calling attention to some matters while ignoring others, television news influences the standards by which governments, presidents' policies and candidates for public office are judged” (Iyengar and Kinder 2010, p.63).

This definition connects priming to other news media theories, such as framing and agenda setting theory (Cacciatore et al. 2016). It highlights how media content may be shaped to prime the standards by which issues and individuals can be judged. The basic tenet of agenda setting theory assumes that due to the attention and emphasis the press pays to an issue, the public will assume that it is important (McCombs et al. 2009). This suggests the transfer of the importance of that issue from the media to the audience (McCombs and Ghanem 2001). It implies two things: firstly, that the media is placing the message in the mind of the news reader, allowing them to develop new knowledge about that issue; and secondly, that the issue becomes perceived as the most salient event, becoming 'top of the head'. Furthermore, Scheufele (2000) argues that the news reader receives and processes information, developing memory traces which he referred to as accessibility. He argues further that in agenda setting the news media can influence the salience of certain issues. Scheufele and Iyengar (2014) conclude that by making some issues salient in people's mind through agenda setting, priming occurs. Thus, mass media shapes the attributes that people consider when making judgements about political issues or candidates. The effect of agenda setting is conceptualised through the cognitive mechanisms of the news reader, who is a 'cognitive miser'. The news reader will assume that the aspects of the issue made salient by repetition and emphasis within the news is important in making decisions about that issue (Iyengar and Kinder 2010). What this implies is that by paying attention to certain aspects of an event, the news media makes it more likely that certain interpretations, and perceptions about that issue, may arise. According to the scholars in agenda setting, the news reader who is a cognitive miser will rely on what has been presented in the news to respond to any questions about the issue.

Another way that researchers connect agenda setting to priming are the properties of news content. This is referred to as attribute or second-level agenda setting. Attribute agenda setting is the transfer of attribute salience from the mass media to the news reader's mind (McCombs and Ghanem 2001). It is also the selection and the calling to attention of the

attributes of an issue (McCombs and Reynolds 2002). The findings of Iyengar and Simon's (1993) study on the Persian Gulf Crisis revealed that participants described the issue in terms of attributes that had been made salient by the news media. This study evidenced the transfer of attributes the media had made salient to the public i.e., by calling attention to attributes in the news, the media transferred the salience of the attribute of the event to the news reader's mind, causing the news reader to think that the attributes are the most important part of the issue. Similarly, a study by Kim et al. (2012) found that the news media can increase public salience of certain attributes by making them more prominent in news coverage. They noted that issue attributes emphasised by the media functioned as important standards by which the audience evaluated the issue. The transfer of attribute salience denotes that the news reader did not perceive the attribute of the news as important but has done so because the news media called attention to it. Additionally, Kim et al. (2002) contended that the prominence of issue attributes in the news prompted issue evaluation among audience members. What these studies reveal is that when the news makes an attribute of an issue prominent, news audiences are more likely to pay more attention to the issue. However, these studies unwittingly connect priming with agenda setting theory. Their empirical findings show the transfer of attribute salience which goes against the conceptualisation of priming which assumes that news content primes because it shares some similarities to information about aspects of the news already available in the news reader's mind (Althaus and Kim 2006). What the second-level agenda setting or attribute agenda setting reveals is that the news reader has learnt what the media has emphasised as the salient attributes of the issue and not that priming has occurred. This was evidenced in a study on the effects of political messages by Lenz (2009). Participants exposed to campaign messages adopted what they assumed was their party or candidate's position about the issue.

What the conceptualisations of priming as an extension of agenda setting reveal are that through the attention paid to specific events by the news media, the news reader assumes that the event is important. The news reader also learns aspects of the event that the news

media deems important. It also reveals that the news reader is being taught what is important about the reported event. There is no mention of the knowledge that the news reader holds about the issue or aspects of the reported issue. This contrasts with the conceptualisations of priming, at least from the perspective of spread activation within a stereotype network or the cognitive structure of the mind. Althaus and Kim (2006) presuppose that for priming to occur, there needs to be available knowledge which shares similarities with aspects of the news content that make it applicable. Accessibility in the literature of psychology refers to the activation potential of available knowledge (Higgins 1996). This means that accessibility is not just the development of new information in memory but rather the potential for knowledge available in memory to be activated. Moreover, Althaus and Kim (2006) point out that accessibility is one of the two factors moderating the activation of stored knowledge. They contend that the stored knowledge and the news content need to be applicable to each other for the knowledge to be activated. That is, the stored knowledge and aspects of the news content need to have a relation for that knowledge to be activated (Higgins 1996). The present study proposes that priming occurs when news coverage about the non-state actors in the Herder-Farmers' conflict shares similarities with stereotypic knowledge about the non-state actors in the news reader's mind. The findings from the second part of the study will reveal that participant's knowledge about the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict coincides with primes of the non-state actors in the news reports.

2.4.2.2 Priming and Framing

This study intends to investigate the perception of the actors in the Herders-farmers' conflict from its representation in news content as well as the audience interpretation. Some would argue that framing is a suitable research method, as the cognitive mechanism of framing deals with applicability – the effects of the salient attributes of a message on the news reader (Price and Tewksbury 1997). Price and Tewksbury (1997) note that knowledge made accessible and available by the news content will compete in the news reader's mind. They concede that the structural elements of the message may guide the activation process. They note that the

applicability of the message – its most salient features – would make it more likely that a framing effect will take place. This means that framing, at least from a cognitive level, deals with the representation of an issue in the news report. Framing effect involves the applicability of the news content to the content of knowledge store. Contrastingly, priming operates in two stages – the accessibility of the available knowledge and its applicability to the news content (Althaus and Kim 2006). The cognitive mechanisms of framing theory only pay attention to the applicability of the news content. This means that framing would only be suitable for this research if it were solely interested in considering the representations of the actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. However, because this research seeks to investigate the *perceptions* of the actors in the news about the Herders and Farmers conflict, three things are important; firstly, the available knowledge of the non-state actors and news about the non-state actors in conflict in the news reader's mind; secondly, the presentation of the actors in the news about the conflict; and thirdly, the perception of the non-state actors after encountering news about the Herder-farmers' conflict. This way, the research gains full insight about the perceptions of the actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

2.4.2.3 Sources in the news

In news reporting, news sources may confirm the news event being reported, providing more information about the reported event. Sources may contribute to implicit messages that serve to activate knowledge about the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Because conflict of any kind usually involves multiple parties, the group that has a more compelling story may have their version of events presented in the news. Ultimately, journalists decide whose version of the news gets presented in the news. Some scholars argue that news sources determine what becomes news (Gans 2004). Gans (2004) notes that there is a relationship between the news source and the journalist which is referred to as a dance. Some argue that the news source may lead the dance in armed conflict reporting, as there tends to be an over-reliance on news sources (Lewis et al. 2012). The over-reliance on news sources is

problematic to journalism because it calls into question the independence and editorial autonomy of the press. The relationship between the journalists and the sources is also explored in a two-phased process of news discovery and news gathering (Reich 2006). In the news discovery stage, the source may lead, while in the news gathering stage, the journalists will dominate. The interaction between the journalists and sources can ultimately shape the way that the news is presented to the news reader.

Regardless of the phase of news gathering as proposed by Reich (2006), some scholars argue that the event being reported may determine whether either source or journalist will dominate the news report. For instance, in planned public events, press releases, news conferences and in leaks, the sources will dominate the relationship (Sigal 1973; Reich 2006). Additionally, for events that the journalist is not proximate to, news sources will dominate (Berkowitz and Beach 1993). The reliance and the domination of 'official' sources in these contexts news may be because of the level of authority and the perceived credibility these news source type brings to the event being reported in the news (Herman and Chomsky 1994). Berkowitz (2019) argues that official sources may also dominate the news because reporters assume that the audience members recognise official sources as the bearers of the legitimate details of the events. Earlier studies confirm the press' reliance on official sources and refer to the official sources as the 'primary definers' of the news (Hall et al. 1978). Consequently, the source analysis in this study may reveal the high presence of government and security sources in the news stories.

In addition to official sources, in reporting conflict the press will rely on high-status affiliated sources trusted to be representative of parties involved (Berkowitz and Beach 1993). Although Berkowitz and Beach (1993) refer to them as official sources, Tiffen et al. (2014) refer to them as 'civil sources'. They are high status members who act as representatives of a group, sometimes holding no titles or positions. They are sources who are not directly affiliated with the government but representative or in favour of the ordinary people. The details of reported political events were attributed to these sources across 9 countries (Tiffen et al.

2014, p.10). They can be referred to as quasi-elite sources: they are elite because of the position they hold by representing certain group interests, but they are nonelite because they are not supported by strong public relations machines (Tiffen et al. 2014). Moreover, in countries with multiple ethnicities and a fragile state, there seems to be significantly more trust in local leaders than in the federal government (Adelakun-Odewale 2017; Labaran and Ibrahim 2023). The quasi-elite sources are often representative of polarised communities, having identities that they subscribe to. Dolan (2005) notes that the inclusion of these sources in the news can fan local discontent, as journalists may ignore other key players to the periphery of the issue at hand. Consequently, the source analysis in this study will reveal the presence of quasi-elite sources providing the definition of events which can be argued to be deleterious to the resolution of the conflict.

Traditionally, in war reporting, official sources deemed to be the legitimate bearers of facts are acknowledged at the expense of ordinary citizens (Reich 2015). However, Kampf and Liebes (2013) argue that technological advances in news reporting means that ordinary citizens are now included in the news as sources. Gonen (2018) notes that these accessible digital technologies created a platform for journalists to not only identify news events, but it also allowed them to establish direct contact with remote sources. Additionally, changes in journalistic practices meant that the news sources become the news (Kampf and Liebes 2013). In the commercial media environment, the familiar elite sources are not as interesting and engaging as those who are directly impacted by the horrors of the attack being reported. The press may include new voices such as the terrorists, enemy leaders, victims, and eyewitnesses to gain the attention of the audience. When ordinary citizens such as victims, witnesses, family members and friends of the victims are included in the news, the news reader is allowed to witness the tragic effects of the conflict. The news of the event is personalised to present the suffering of the victims on both sides of the conflict (Kampf and Liebes 2013). They note that during the first Intifada, the personalisation of human loss was explored in the representation of Israelis. In the second Intifada, the suffering of the

Palestinians was included in the news coverage. The suffering of either side of the conflict are represented in the news through the statements that they provide and through the images about their suffering. Journalists may appeal to their audiences by including unexpected voices as well as suffering civilians to evoke empathy. When reporting about conflict that involves groups of varying ethnicities, journalists may include victims and eyewitnesses from among those whose culture is like theirs to personalise the news, 'providing graphic proof of the enemy's evil' (Wolfsfeld et al. 2018, p.403). Thus, the ordinary citizen (victim or eyewitness) who is a news source may perform a dual role of verifying the reported event and defining the actors involved by being the news. The news source may become an embodiment of the issue being reported (Sigal 1986). The source analysis may reveal the presence of ordinary citizens in the news stories. It may also reveal how these news sources may contribute to the primes of the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

The news analysis may reveal the presence of all three source types – the government officials and security officers, the group representatives as well as ordinary citizens. Recent studies in the relationship between sources and the press in conflict reveals that there is a significant shift from elite sources to nonelite and quasi-elite sources (Kampf and Liebes 2013; Gonen 2018). They specifically note that in crisis the press will expose the public to victims and accounts from eyewitnesses. Statements from terrorists, 'enemy leaders' may also be included in the news during moments of crisis (Kampf and Liebes 2013; Stack 2013). Because these sources are members of the community that was attacked, they may provide details about the attacks which contain implicit messages about the perpetrators. In the ethnocentric mechanism for reporting conflict, journalists may include news sources that are members of the same ethnic group (Wolfsfeld et al. 2008). Since the ethnocentric mechanism holds that the journalists will favour groups perceived to be like theirs, it also holds that news sources will come from the group that the journalists perceive favourably. The sources in the news may serve to define the actors in the conflict in ways that are culturally resonant to the audience by including descriptions and depictions about the conflict capable of priming the

audience. The news source may contribute statements that can trigger culturally appropriate interpretations of the actors in the conflict. Additionally, sources may be present in the news in ways that engender implicit stereotypes of groups involved in the conflict. This study intends to discover the representation of the actors in the conflict which are implicit stereotypes of the social groups these actors belong to. This study also aims to investigate how the sources in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict may contribute to the representation of the conflict engendering implicit stereotypes of the social groups of the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

As mentioned earlier, in conflict reporting, journalists may overly rely on news sources potentially calling to question claims of journalistic independence and the role of journalists as the fourth estate of the press (Lewis et al. 2008). It also calls to question notions of objectivity which are pertinent to the values of journalistic professionalism.

2.4.2.4 Objectivity in the news

Professionalism in journalism presupposes that a good journalist should identify and present the news correctly. To do so, the journalist must treat the event being covered objectively and with accuracy. Objectivity is a scientific method of finding the truth, excluding personal opinion from reports (Streckfuss 1990). Objectivity in the journalism profession guides the separation of facts from values, ensuring that reporters only report facts (Schudson 2001). It suggests that the journalist must be neutral when reporting an event – neutrality is attainable through the exclusion of personal opinion. However, personal opinion is required to define what is fact. Muñoz-Torres (2012) points out that it is impossible to present facts without previous concepts. That is, for journalists to define what is factual about the event, they will rely on preconceived notions of facts. He argues that there is some theoretical concept of judgement being relied on to identify what is fact. He states.

“...facts are completely meaningless if they are not connected through the subjectivity of the individual” (Muñoz-Torres 2012, p.573)

The journalist's perceptions will have a direct influence on what the news writer selects and presents as fact. Additionally, Muñoz-Torres (2012) opined that it is impossible to select facts without values. The journalistic process of selecting facts is connected to what is deemed important in a society. So, the selection, assessment and interpretation of fact is reliant on what the individual deems as important. The selection of what is factual in the news content is defined by the values the reporter possesses (from the personal and the professional). Consequently, values and facts are inseparable because the selection, assessment, interpretation, and presentation of news as fact has gone through the process sifting through the reportorial processes. News becomes a construction of reality as it takes information from one context and repackages it to fit the journalist's preferred perspective (Tuchman 1978; Shoemaker and Reese 2014). Thus, objectivity has been described as an impossible ideal in the journalistic practice.

The interpretation of objectivity in journalism as the separation of fact from personal opinion suggests the need for redefining and conceiving objectivity differently (Boudana 2010). Durham (1998) argued for the understanding of objectivity as accuracy, balance and fairness. However, Boykoff and Boykoff (2004) observe that balanced reporting may lead to biased coverage of an issue. When opposing sides of an issue are well supported by evidence, it may affect audience perception of the issue (Dixon and Clarke 2013). Boudana (2016) proposes instead that objectivity in news reporting be regarded as fairness that is free from discrimination. Fairness in news reporting should not be based on neutrality but on consistency and the justification of the position taken. The characterisation of actors and the actions taken as well as the opinions of actors given a platform should be consistent and justified. Objectivity for journalists should include the separation of facts from commentaries, cautiousness in labelling and balance between parties involved in the conflict (Boudana 2010).

Objectivity has been argued to be unattainable in conflict reporting in the African context because of patriotism and ethnic solidarity (Wolfsfeld et al. 2008). In a study of the coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency, Uwazuruike (2018) observes that although

journalists interviewed in the study pointed at objectivity as a criterion in their practice, the analysis of the coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency revealed that ethnic solidarity marred the path to fairness. The practice of journalism that pays homage to one's ethnocentric identity, potentially favouring one group over the other, may impact on how the news is reported and the sources included in the news, in turn impacting on the representation and the consequent perception of the conflict. The analysis of newspaper articles in this research shall reveal whether there is: (1) a separation of fact from commentary, (2) cautious labelling, and (3) balanced reporting of the actions of the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict in the news coverage, as well as whether there is a justification of the position taken, as suggested by Boudana (2010; 2016).

2.5 Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter reviewed the relevant literature on armed conflict (violence) and the media because of the perception of the Herders and Farmers conflict as an armed conflict. Due to the salience of ethnic identities in Nigeria and in the Nigerian news media, the context for armed violence is often defined along ethnic lines. Thus, this chapter also reviewed literature on ethnic identities in connection to the competition for resource use tied to ethnic identity. The chapter reviewed literature on African media representation of armed conflict, connecting it to the ethnocentric mechanisms which may include the reliance on cultural perspectives in reporting news. This was relevant to the study because it provided the theoretical basis on which the findings of the qualitative analysis of the newspapers in the first part of this study can be examined. The review of relevant literature included an overview of the existing body of work on the news coverage of the Herder-farmer conflict, highlighting an absence of any research that interrogates audience sense-making of the non-state actors in the conflict determined by news coverage.

The chapter furthermore reviewed literature on priming from a psychological and media perspective, arguing that priming involves an interaction between the news content and cognitive unit of the news reader. The literature review revealed that priming occurs when the

news content contains details of social groups characterised in ways that are like the content of the news reader's knowledge store. The stereotype network of the news reader's knowledge store may be activated by the presence of implicit stereotypes of social groups in the news content. Priming effect has traditionally been identified in political communication capable of eliciting cognitive and affective reactions among voters (Lee and Min 2020). It has been highlighted as the ability of the news media to affect the criteria by which political leaders are assessed and judged (Iyengar and Simon 1993). The effects of the primes have been identified among audiences through the manipulation of events in the news for the purposes of experimentation.

The pioneering work of Iyengar and Kinder (1987) demonstrated that news coverage can prime viewers to evaluate political figures based on issues highlighted in the media. By placing participants in experimental conditions, they discovered that media coverage of a topic can prime audience evaluation of the issue. Additionally, Krosnick and Kinder (1990) measured the opinions and perceptions of Ronald Reagan after the Iran-Contra policy and they discovered that media coverage of political events can prime people's thoughts and judgements. More recently, Lee and Min (2020) examined the relationship between the cognitive and affective components of the attributes of candidates highlighted by the news media in Seoul on Election Day. They discovered that the news can prime certain aspects of candidates in the mind of the audience, influencing voters' political judgement. Research in priming extends itself to the media and stereotypes. Domke et al (1999) theorised that news coverage of political issues not only influences how people think about the issue, it also activates associated ethnic stereotypes held by individuals influencing how these perceptions are applied. Their experimental study revealed that news media priming influences associations of racial cognitions and political evaluation. Similarly, Abraham and Appiah (2006), using differential pictorial illustration of ethnic groups, observed that implicit racial images led to stronger associations of certain groups with social problems. They concluded that implicit visual propositioning is a discursive form for the activation and maintenance of

racial stereotypes. While existing research has extensively investigated the effects of primes in the domain of news and politics, as well as news and crime, there is a lack of studies focusing on the priming and news about armed conflict. This thesis fills the gaps by examining news coverage to identify primes of social groups capable of activating stereotypes of these social groups among news audiences. It also examines the meaning-making of audiences activated by the primes of social groups in the new coverage, extending the body of knowledge on priming and stereotype activation.

Priming theory provides a theoretical background for the analysis of news coverage to identify the representations of actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict that can be deemed implicitly stereotypical of their social group. The literature review revealed that some news sources may contribute to the presentation of the actors in the news by their presence in the news and the statements attributed to them. Statements from news sources may also contain descriptions of events that are implicitly stereotypical of social groups. The main aim of this study is to investigate the perceptions of the actors in the news coverage about the Herders-farmers' conflict and among audience members. It accomplishes this aim in two ways. Firstly, it considers the representation of the actors in the news about the Herders-farmers conflict, and secondly, it interrogates the interpretations and the sense-making of the actors in the conflict after audiences encounter news content. Thus, the study is guided by three research questions:

1. What are the primes of the actors in the news coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict in Nigerian newspapers?
2. How do news sources contribute to the primes of the actors in press coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict in Nigerian newspapers?
3. What are the perceptions of the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict primed by the news coverage?

The study is divided into two parts: the first two research questions guide the first part of the study, while the third research question guides the second part of the study. The next chapter discusses the methodological approach to the first part of the study, the qualitative content analysis of the newspaper articles, as well as the thematic analysis of the responses in the second part of the study.

Chapter Three

Methodology

So far, the study has introduced the Herder-Farmer Conflict and reviewed relevant literature on media and armed conflict, ethnicity and ethnic violence, priming theory as well as some of the norms in journalism such as news sources and objectivity. This chapter will discuss the methods applied in this study to answer the research questions set out in the previous chapter. To disclose the appropriateness of the relevant methods for each aspect of this research, this chapter is divided into two sections. The first section of this chapter discusses the research methods applied in the first part of the study – the newspaper analysis – while the second part considers the semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis for the second part of the study.

3.1 Research aims and research methods

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the representation and the perception of the non-state actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict in the Nigerian press using priming theory. To discover the representation of the non-state actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict, the study intends to explore how the non-state actors in the Herders conflict are represented in the news coverage of the Herder-Farmer conflict. This requires the identification of the representations of the non-state actors in the news about the Herder-Farmer conflict which are implicitly stereotypical of the social groups the actors belong to. The study also intends to discover the perceptions of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict through audience interaction with news content. This involves an exploration of the evaluation of the non-state actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict by audiences before and after reading news about the Herder-Farmer conflict.

RQ1 explores the representations within the news about the Herder-Farmer conflict which can serve as primes to activate stereotypic perceptions of non-state actors. It analyses the descriptions, depictions and portrayals of the non-state actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict contained within the news produced by online newspapers. The literature review in the

previous chapter revealed that the news report can be characterised by descriptions that are implicitly stereotypical of certain groups. This study intends to identify the aspects, details and descriptions within the news text about the Herder-Farmer conflict that are implicitly stereotypical of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict. RQ2 interrogates patterns of sources present in the news, that is who they are, their presence in the news and descriptions about the actors attributed to sources in the news about the Herder-Farmer conflict. This is relevant because the review of relevant literature revealed that in reporting conflict the press relies on sources who act as primary definers of the news (Gans 2004). The first part of the study used a qualitative content analysis approach to identify primes in the news about the Herder-Farmer conflict. Qualitative content analysis was employed for the part of the study because it allows for a close reading interpretation of the textual aspects of the news to gain full insight of the news about the Herder-Farmer conflict.

RQ3 examines how audience members make sense of the non-state actors in the news about the Herder-Farmer conflict. This was accomplished through the examination of the participants statement before and after an encounter with a news report about the Herder-Farmer conflict. Participants' responses after reading the news article indicated details about the non-state actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict which have been activated by the news report. The second study utilised a qualitative experiment of pre-test survey, exposure to the news content, semi-structured interview with participants and a thematic analysis of the interviews. The interview was employed in the second study because it allowed participants to engage in meaningful discussion with the researcher, revealing thoughts and opinions about the news of the Herder-Farmer conflict and the non-state actors at the centre of it. The thematic analysis of the audience responses allowed the researcher to identify shared patterns of perceptions of the non-state actors among participants in the study. Identifying the similarities in the descriptions of actors in the news content and the descriptions of the actors in the responses of participants in the study, will evidence the activation of the primes of the non-state actors among participants in the study.

3.2.1 Content Analysis

Generally, content analysis is a research method used in describing and quantifying phenomena. It allows the researcher to test theoretical issues to enhance understanding of data (Elo and Kyngäs 2008). Content analysis has its history in journalistic debates over the quality of mass media. It has allowed researchers to make replicable and valid inferences from data to their context so as to provide knowledge, new insights and a practical guide to action (Krippendorff 1980). It has been applied to many areas to investigate other issues in text, film and pictures and in areas such as sociology, psychology, business etc. Content analysis has generally been approached quantitatively and qualitatively.

Quantitatively, it is a research technique that deals with objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Berelson 1952). Through a systematic process bereft of opinion, feelings and beliefs, the researcher is expected to analyse the dataset and make inferences about the data. The meaning contained within communication can be inferred by the number of times a word appears – the intensity of the word implies its significance. However, objectivity, which is the bedrock of quantitative content analysis, has been argued to be problematic, as it ignores aspects of hegemonic practices on the meaning-making process (Van den Bulck 2002). The researcher's perspective will most likely interfere with the selection and interpretation of the data. Van den Bulck (2002) further notes that the systematic aspect of quantitative content analysis, which includes an extensive process of data gathering via a research tool used the same way for all units of analysis, is also problematic. They conclude that the systematic approach in quantitative content analysis, which pays attention to the intensity of numbers to imply meaning or social impact, is too simplistic.

Conversely, qualitative content analysis is the empirical and methodological analysis of texts within the context of communication, through the application of content analytic rules and step by step models (Mayring 2000 p.2). Qualitative content analysis also involves the interpretation of quantitative indicators of objective and systematic description to suggest the intensity of meaning and social impact (Macnamara 2005). It offers an opportunity to

investigate and gain in-depth understanding of an issue moving beyond counting. Through qualitative content analysis the researcher can study the media text using analytical rules and procedures which are replicable. The media text is open to interpretation, and the researcher attempts to determine the likely meaning of texts beyond word count. This method relies on heavy researcher readings but done so in a scientific manner to identify and examine meanings, themes and patterns present in a particular text (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009).

Priming has been described as the activation of the available knowledge deemed applicable to the features of the news content (Althaus and Kim 2006). Thus, the first part of this study seeks to identify aspects of the news about the Herder-Farmer conflict which may share similarities with the stereotype cognitive structure of the news consumer. This involves the identification of descriptions within the news text and the context of these descriptions. As mentioned previously, qualitative content analysis involves an interpretative analysis of the patterns within the news text. Through a careful and systematic examination and interpretation of the news text, the first part of this study will identify patterns of descriptions in the news that endorse stereotypes of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict. The qualitative content analysis will allow the researcher to identify patterns in the descriptions of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict linked to the stereotypes of the social group the actors belong to. Furthermore, qualitative content analysis will allow for in-depth investigation of the text used to describe the actors in the news of the Herder-Farmer conflict.

The first part of this study also approached the data from an inductive perspective. In inductive reasoning, themes and categories emerge from the data through careful examination and comparison with previous knowledge (Hayes and Heit 2018). This means that the researcher makes inferences about the representations of non-state actors in the news reports about the Herders-Farmers conflict from existing knowledge of the stereotypes of the non-state actors. Specifically, the researcher took into careful consideration the textual elements of the data such as nouns, adjectives, figures of speech, used in the description of non-state actors in the news about the Herder-farmers' conflict that connect to the stereotypes of the non-state actors. Inductive qualitative content analysis transformed the study from mere word

count to an in-depth engagement with the news text to identify descriptions that are implicitly connected to the stereotypes of the non-state actors. Additionally, the inductive approach ensured that there was a differentiation between priming theory and other media effects theories. That is, the researcher could identify precise elements within the text that could be a potential match to what may be available in the reader's knowledge about the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. This is not something that can be revealed in the news reports through a quantitative content analysis.

Furthermore, the qualitative content analysis was also approached from an interpretative perspective which placed the discovery of primes of the actors in the Herder-farmers' conflict in the interpretation of the news text. It included the interpretation of the news text to discover how meaning about the actors in the Herders-farmers' conflict is embodied in language. It investigated the significance of the language used to describe the actions of the actors in the news about the conflict. Furthermore, it considered the integration of news elements in the news content that contribute to the definition of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict. For instance, the qualitative analysis of the news texts considered how news sources contribute to the representation of the actors in the news about the conflict priming stereotypic constructs. One of the aims of this study is to investigate the representations of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict which are stereotypical; qualitative content analysis offers an opportunity to identify patterns and themes of descriptions of the actors in the news text.

3.2.2 Operationalisation of primes - Data Collection

Miles and Huberman (1994) posit that the sampling method in qualitative research is informed by conceptual questions rather than the representativeness of the data. Sampling is guided by the need to evaluate a certain aspect of the sample to gain insight into cases necessitating a targeted sampling approach. This means that the results obtained from the analysis of the sample is not generalisable, it is instead transferable. Although the herdsman and farmer's conflict has been going on for much longer, it only received extensive coverage in 2016 when members of the herdsman community attacked the Agatu local government and killed over

300 people in 10 villages (CSW 2016). By 2018, the conflict was described as six times deadlier than the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria (ICG 2018). Consequently, the sampling period for the study began from 2016 to 2020, to cover two years after the attack in Agatu in 2016 and two years after the attack in 2018 which led to the declaration that the Herder-Farmer conflict was deadlier than the Boko Haram insurgency. The data is not representative of every action carried out by the actors in this conflict whether by herdsman or farmers, it is rather representative of the coverage the Nigerian press has given to the conflict over the course of 4 years in some of the most troubled areas. This is to observe the representation of actors in the news and how these representations may serve as primes potentially activating perceptions and interpretations of the actors in the conflict. Data for the study included news articles about the herdsman and farmers conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria which according to a report by Amnesty International (2018) are the areas with the most attacks and casualties. The areas in the Middle Belt relevant to the study include Adamawa State, Benue State, Nasarawa State, Plateau State, Southern Kaduna and Taraba State.

The hotspot for the Herders-Farmers conflict has been the Middle Belt and Zamfara (a northern state in Nigeria). The study therefore sought out newspapers owned by groups from the Middle Belt (*Leadership*), and groups from the Northern (*Daily Trust* and *Aminiya*), as this would have provided more depth to the findings of the study. The study also sought out these newspapers to gain a different perspective of the conflict, since previous studies have considered newspapers owned by southerners. However, the news reports about the Herder-farmer conflict from the *Leadership*, *Aminiya* and *Daily Trust* was sparsely available online on their website. Attempts to gather digital news reports from these organisations from online databases such as all.africa.com and Google News proved impossible. Similarly, attempts to collect print copies of the news reports directly from the news organisation proved abortive since they hadn't digitised most of the news reports at the time the data gathering was conducted. Furthermore, the COVID 19 pandemic in 2020 meant that the researcher was unable to travel to Nigeria to collect the printed copies herself. Thus, a 'Middle Belt' and a 'Northern' perspective about the conflict was missing from data collection process and this

may have implications on the findings in the study. Consequently, other newspapers available online were selected for this study as 94% of Nigerians in the urban area rely on online news (Adeyemo and Roper 2022).

The study was also interested in investigating how the conflict was reported in the local language. However, there was an insufficient amount of news articles in Hausa Language from the *Daily Trust* and *Leadership*. Furthermore, other newspapers printing in the local languages such as *Aminiya* (which publishes solely in Hausa) had not yet digitised the news about the Herders-Farmers conflict at the time of data collection. Therefore, this study opted for newspapers reporting in English language and included news items such as breaking news, special reports, investigative reports and features that discussed aspects of the conflict in the Middle Belt of Nigeria available online.

Furthermore, the study opted to select newspapers in this study according to the core function of the news media to disseminate information. News reports on the Herder-Farmer conflict from key Middle Belt locations were isolated from the following newspapers– *Vanguard Online*, *This Day*, *Premium Times* and *Daily Post Online* because of their availability online. These newspapers were also selected because they have produced a significant number of news reports about the Herder-Farmers' conflict online. With the rise of the internet, and the accessibility of information, research into online newspapers is significant. Thus, while the *Vanguard Online*, *Premium Times*, *Daily Post Online* and *This Day* may not be the most prominent newspapers in Nigeria offering a geo-ethnic perspective, their presence in the cyberspace is significant to the study because over 94% of Nigerians get their news online. Additionally, 43% of Nigerians use the *Vanguard Online*, 24% use the *Daily Post Online* while 17% visit *Premium Times* weekly (Isaac and Roper 2021). Furthermore, 82% of Nigerians trust the *Vanguard Online*, 74% trust *This Day*, and 74% trust *Premium Times*. Furthermore, *Daily Post* and *Premium Times* publish solely online, while *This Day* and *Vanguard Online* are available in digital and print copies, offering this study a unique perspective to investigate the representations of the non-state actors in the Herder-Farmers conflict.

It can be argued that online newspapers offer a 'digitised' perspective of the conflict, potentially the initial perspective of the Herders-Farmers conflict that interested readers will have access to, since most readers get their news online. Additionally, online newspapers are significant to this research not only because they are practical, accessible and convenient, but they have multimedia integration such as hyperlinks to other relevant articles. This is especially useful for collecting and gathering news reports about the Herder-Farmer's conflict which has been argued to have been reported in a fragmented manner. Although these online newspapers do not offer an ethno-geopolitical perspective of the Herders-Farmers' conflict, they offer a perspective of the news of the Herders-Farmers' conflict available in the cybersphere.

	Adamawa	Benue	Nasarawa	Southern Kaduna	Plateau	Taraba	Total
Daily Post	18	4	10	14	1	15	62
Premium Times	1	8	2	4	5	5	25
Vanguard	4	36	7	11	13	5	76
This Day	3	20	0	11	4	7	45
Total	26	68	19	40	23	32	208

Table 1 News stories extracted from four newspapers across the Middle Belt in the Herders-Farmers' Conflict

Relevant newspaper articles were collected and collated through Google Search, from Google News and the *allafrica.com* data base. Google Search is an engine that enables users to search for publicly accessible documents offered by web servers. Google News offers comprehensive, up-to-date news coverage with diverse perspectives from multiple news outlets, while the *allafrica.com* has an archive of over 2000 news stories from more than 130 African news organisations. Additionally, Google News' search function provides access to

news that is more recent and older news that has been archived by the news provider. The *allafrica.com* database only backs up news reports of African newspapers, providing an additional source for older news articles that had not been archived by the relevant news media organisations.

3.2.2.1 Identifying stereotype traits in the news

Codes and Coding categories

There are various concepts used to describe violent conflict – such as actors, causes, dynamics, triggers and scenarios (Herbert 2017). The main actors in armed conflict can include the military, leaders and commanders of non-state armed groups, social groups, criminal groups etc. This research is interested in the perceptions of specific social groups who are non-state actors in the Herders conflict for various reasons. First, non-state actors are often neglected or subsumed under other aspects of the conflict even though they play a huge role in the conflict, usually engaging in violent acts. The role that non-state actors play in violent conflict has been highlighted as the core aspect of armed conflict in the 21st Century (Kaldor 2013). Furthermore, the identities of the social groups are usually made salient in defining the conflict, impacting on how the conflict is reported and understood as well as how and when it may be resolved (Allen and Seaton 1999). Secondly, the perceptions of non-state actors in conflict is pertinent in understanding the dimensions of armed conflict. The perception of non-state actors is relevant to this study because the news industry plays a role in influencing public opinion which in turn can impact on the resolution of the conflict. If the representation of the Herder-Farmer conflict contains stereotypes of non-state actors rendering actors in a negative way, it may impact on the resolution of the conflict (Eke 2020; Ojo 2023). Therefore, this study considers the two main social groups in the conflict who are non-state actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict – the Fulani Herdsmen (FH hereafter) and the farmers (of various ethnicities) in the Middle Belt.

Fulani as Herdsmen

As described in the introduction of this thesis, the Fulani are often grouped by their lifestyle as urban-dwelling, sometimes referred to as Hausa-Fulani, and as nomadic

pastoralists, referred to as Fulani Herdsmen. Broadly speaking, the nomadic lifestyle has had negative connotations attached to it - the nomad is often perceived as the destroyer of order and progress embodying freedom and irresponsibility, challenging the order of mobility and stasis (Engebrigtsen 2017). Nomadism has been used to describe the propensity to wander and an obstacle to civilisation.

As the 14th century Arab scholar put it,

“Their existence is the negation of building, which is the basis of civilisation...it is in their nature to plunder whatever other people possess...they recognise no limit in taking the possessions of other people”

(Barfield 1993, p3 cited Ibn Khaldun).

Noyes (2000) argues further that nomadism has been conceptualised with pastoralism, an intellectual construct responding to conflicting rationalisations of sedentarism and nomadism in human society. Wandering was regarded as an unmediated response to landscape rather than as an effective system of land use. He notes that nomadic people were described as predisposed to raiding, making them dangerous to their sedentary neighbours. Additionally, the moral quality of the nomad made them dangerous to civilisation because they were believed to represent the barbaric nature which those who believed themselves civilised had freed themselves from. Consequently, nomadism became a metaphor for the animal within civilised man (Noyes 2000). The negative connotations and conceptualisations of nomadism is usually interpreted in contrast with sedentary, settled societies. It is not that the nomadic community is problematic or difficult. Rather, it is the comparison of the values and cultures of nomadic communities against the values and cultures of the sedentary communities that often leads to negativizing nomadism and those who practice it.

The definition of all herdsmen as Fulani is the first stereotype of the Fulani relevant to this study. This is because it has been assumed that all nomadic pastoralists in Nigeria are of Fulani origin, however, a report revealed that there are other ethnic groups in Nigeria who engage in nomadic pastoralism (Blench 2010). Returning to the theoretical conceptualisations of priming introduced in the previous chapter about the knowledge store, the stereotype of all

herdsmen being Fulani can be argued to be the primary node of the network for the stereotype of the Fulani. By defining all herdsmen in Nigeria as Fulani, the characteristics and assumptions of the nomadic pastoralist may apply to the actions of the FH. Thus, the codes for the qualitative content analysis were identified in the descriptions of the FH that are connected, or implicit to, the stereotype of the nomadic pastoralist as: the wrongful use of land putting civilisation at risk; wandering and restless, lacking the willpower of the civilised subject; aggressive, warlike, and predisposed to raiding; the destroyer of order and progress through wandering; and possessing a moral quality dangerous to civilisation. Consequently, the qualitative content analysis coded the representations of the FH in three groups: the FH as invader; the FH as warlike; and the FH as nomad savage.

Fulani Herdsmen as Invaders

As disclosed in the previous chapter, one of the main factors in the Herder-Farmer conflict is the different ideas about land ownership and how land ought to be used (Maiangwa 2017). The ethnic groups in the Middle Belt believe that they are indigenous to the land and that it should be used for their purposes (Maiangwa 2017), while the FH need land for their cattle to survive. Claims to indigeneity in Nigeria are understood based on prior and permanent settlement (Adebanwi 2009). The FH can be argued to be invaders in two ways: as herdsmen, they are using the land for the wrong reasons as their migratory patterns are in response to environmental constraints (Noyes 2000); secondly, they are not indigenes – they were not there ‘first’ – so they cannot use the land. Their presence in the Middle Belt may be perceived as an invasion. Furthermore, because of the nomadic lifestyle adopted by some of the Fulani and the ideations of indigeneity in Nigeria, the Fulani may be interpreted as interlopers. The lack of ties to land in Nigeria not only highlights the Fulani as non-indigenes in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, but it also implies that they are foreign – if they are not native to the land, they are extraneous. The Fulani are not indigenous to the Middle Belt because of the nomadic lifestyle, implying that they are aliens. Additionally, fears of domination and expansion of the Fulani is rife in the Middle Belt of Nigeria and in Nigerian discourse (Kperogi 2021). These fears may be translated via the news, appearing in the descriptions of the Fulani as attacking

with an intent to conquer and occupy the Middle Belt of Nigeria. Thus, the stereotype of the FH as invader was coded into descriptions of the FH as foreign/alien and as occupiers (see Figure 1). The qualitative content analysis coded descriptions of the actions of the FH as invaders in instances where they were referred to as non-indigenes, as occupiers, as well as the attributes of nomadism being problematic to farming which is the presumed appropriate use of the land. The description of the FH as invaders is a stereotype because it stems from the belief that FH are not indigenous and that they have an agenda to occupy the land. Consequently, the qualitative content analysis observed for descriptions which could be alluded to the stereotype of the FH invaders. The qualitative content analysis coded for the adjectives, figures of speech, and descriptions of the actions of the FH which alluded to them in two ways: as foreign/alien and as occupiers (see Figure 1).

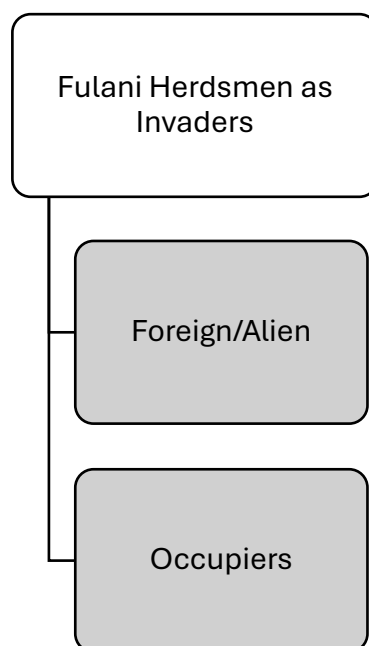


Figure 1 Stereotype of the FH with traits of the construct

Fulani Herdsmen as Nomad Savage

In addition to the fears of expansion and domination, and the belief that the FH are not indigenous to the Middle Belt, is the stereotype of the FH as an untamed social group. In addition to nomadism being perceived as an unnatural response to the use of land (Noyes 2000), nomadism has been attached to the notion of savagery, characterised as animal-like (Eke 2020). The identity of the pastoral nomad is often embedded with their flock. Therefore,

they are often perceived being the same as the animals that they tend to – volatile and unpredictable. Additionally, nomadism is seen as a threat to civilisation, the destroyer of order and progress, challenging the order of stability (Engebriksen 2017). The nomad savage is one who is intrinsically animal-like in their violence: uncontrollable, fierce, and rapacious. This idea can be traced to the perception of the nomad, whose way of life is a threat to civilisation (Noyes 2000). Thus, the trait for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage was coded for descriptions of the actions of the FH that alluded to them engaging in violent acts that are particularly vicious and alarming.

Additionally, the belief of the nomad as a threat to civilisation can be exemplified in the implicit descriptions of the FH as those who live by their own rules, different from those of the civilised sedentary group. The idea of the nomad living by their own rules may also be revealed in the descriptions of the FH as taking part in activities that are illegal or different to what groups in 'civilised' society would do. The process of state formation meant that nomadic people have been criminalised because they have no permanent place of abode (Lucassen and Willems 2003; Drogomir 2019). Proponents argue that colonisation by British rule assigned criminality to nomads, and this was exported and implemented in former colonies. With Nigeria being a former British colony, it is possible that perceptions of the nomad as criminals may be prevalent in discourse. The qualitative content analysis coded for the adjectives, figures of speech, and descriptions of the actions of the FH which alluded to them in two ways: as a savage and brutal group as well as a transgressing social group engaging in criminality (see Figure 2).

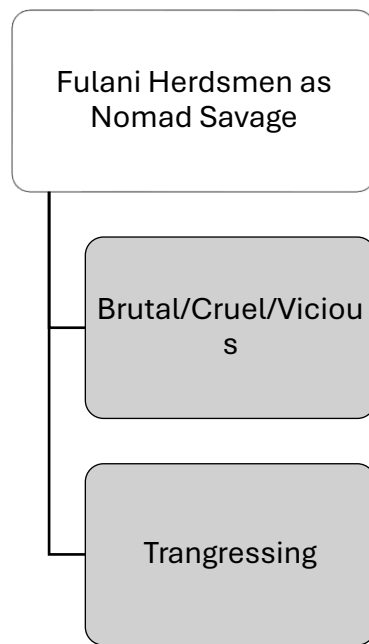


Figure 2 Traits and Stereotype of the FH as nomad savage

Fulani Herdsmen as Warlike

The nomad is often assumed to be warlike and aggressive, making them a danger to their sedentary neighbours (Noyes 2007). A study into the stereotypes of ethnic groups in Nigeria revealed that the Fulani were perceived as cattle herders and as warlike and aggressive (Salamone 1976). The responses in this study indicate the connection of the Fulani

with cattle herding. It also implies that the Fulani are often perceived as a group who are

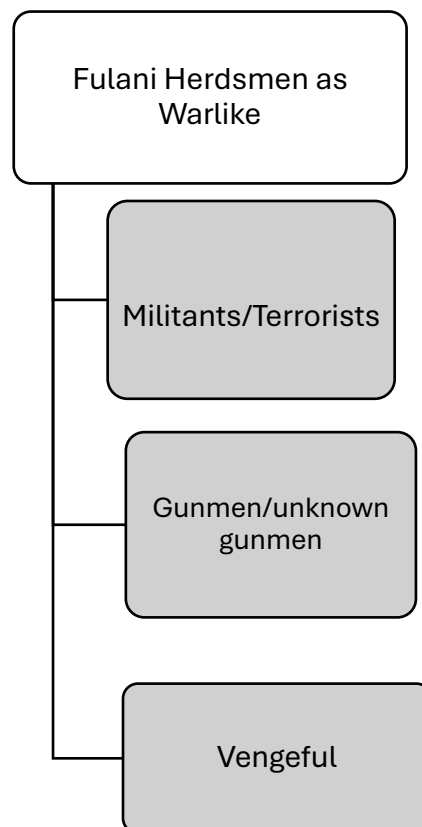


Figure 3 Traits and Stereotypes of the FH as Warlike

aggressive. Furthermore, the notion that the FH were the foot soldiers for the religious and political revolution led by Uthman Dan Fodio in the 18th Century (Adebayo 1991), as well as the fears of religious, political and cultural domination of the Hausa-Fulani, contribute to the stereotype of the FH as warlike. The stereotype of the Fulani Herdsmen as warlike connects the violence of the FH to acts of militancy and terrorism, as well as to criminality, which is inherent to their ethnic group. In this sense, the Fulani are inherently violent and their violence is political. Therefore, the news text was qualitatively content analysed and coded for adjectives, nouns, figures of speech, descriptions, and depictions of the FH which highlighted the ethnic group of the FH as inherent to the violence they perpetuate. The analysis will also code for description of their actions as symbolic, terrorising victims as though to produce a

political effect. The coding of the FH as warlike was divided into two: the FH as militants/terrorists and as gunmen (see Figure 3).

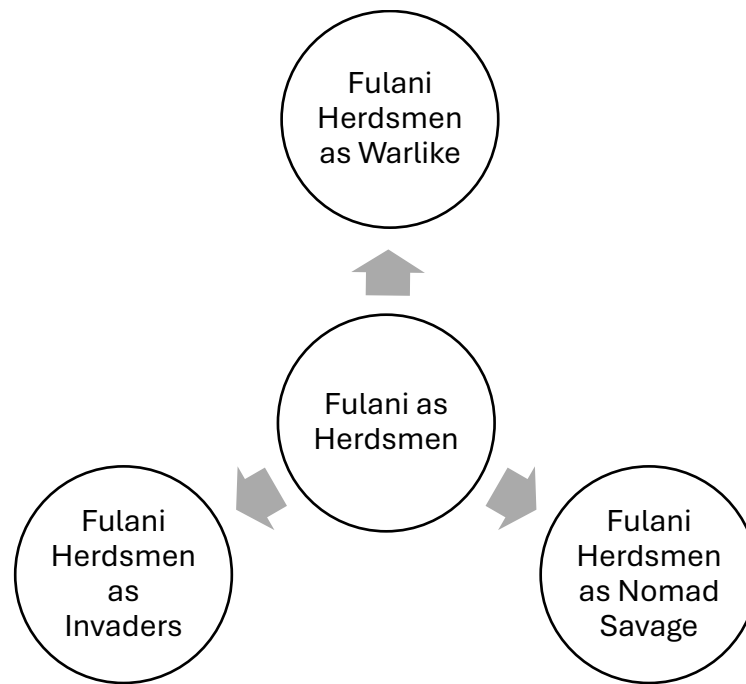


Figure 4 Stereotype network of the Fulani Herdsmen

In this study, the stereotype of the FH was argued to take root from the stereotype of the Fulani as nomadic pastoralists. This can be argued to be the initial node in the cognitive network or structure with which the other stereotypes of the FH pertinent to this study are associated (see Figure 4). The nomadic lifestyle is attached to the ethnic identity of the FH, such that they are inherently perceived as invaders whose lifestyle and land use go against the preconceived notion of the land. The unmediated response to land and the fears of Fulani domination can be argued to be indicators of the stereotype of the FH as invaders. Thus, the primes for the stereotype as invader would be descriptions within the news text which implicitly portray the FH as alien and foreign and as occupiers. Furthermore, nomads are often perceived as those who are predisposed to violence; the notion of the FH as transgressors are primes for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage. Finally, the perception of the FH as

aggressive, and hostile as well as the history of the political and religious revolution of the Fulani with the FH as foot soldiers, contributes to the stereotype of the FH as warlike. There is no hierarchy to these stereotypes. However, it can be proposed that they exist in an associated network of the stereotype of the Fulani as Herdsmen. The activation of one node may activate other nodes within the network. In the previous chapter, it was argued that priming occurs in a two-stage process: the priming stimuli will influence the accessibility of knowledge construct and the priming stimuli must be deemed applicable for the activation of the knowledge construct. Accordingly, the news report of the Herder-Farmer conflict must contain features which the news consumers deem applicable, and the news content must have the potential to activate available knowledge for the prime to activate stored knowledge. The aim of the qualitative content analysis is to discover descriptions of the FH capable of activating perceptions of the FH which are stereotypic.

The ethnic groups the Middle Belt of Nigeria as Farmers

Inhabitants of the Middle Belt are usually assumed to be Christian, an assumption which neglects Muslims or Traditional Religious worshippers (Barnes 2007). The indigenous ethnic groups in the Middle Belt are also assumed to be predominantly farmers. However, some may engage in other forms of livelihood including pastoralism (Yunusa 1999). There are over 200 different ethnic groups in the Middle Belt of Nigeria and each of them may have stereotypes attached to them. It is beyond the scope of this research to identify each ethnic group's stereotypes. However, because they have been identified as non-state actors in the conflict, it is important to consider how they have been described in the news report of the Herder-Farmer conflict.

Farmers as Indigenes

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the general notion of ethnicity—at least in Nigeria—is often tied to indigeneity. According to the 1999 Nigerian constitution, indigenes are those who were the first to settle permanently in a particular area and are considered to be traditional natives holding exclusive claims to a place through historical and homogenous culture without an alternative place to practice their culture (Adebanwi 2009). Indigeneity is linked to land

ownership, alluding to who accessed the land 'first' for their own use. It is also linked to the use of land in ways that are cognisant with their cultural practices. Parts of the Middle Belt of Nigeria have a history of violence between Hausa and Fulani Muslims, and the ethnic groups in that location, with the latter referring to themselves as indigenes and the former as 'settlers'. Ochonu (2014) argues that the grievances of the people of the Middle Belt is drawn from the memories of precolonial and colonial-era hegemonic practices of the Hausa-Fulani as imperial agents. These claims thrive in the narratives of conflicts in the Middle Belt region. Thus, the analysis of news articles in this study will seek to identify descriptions of the ethnic groups in the conflict as indigenes to the Middle Belt. The analysis will also inspect the news reports for descriptions that refer to farming as the appropriate use of the land.

News Sources in the Herders-Farmer Conflict

The qualitative content analysis also sought to isolate sources and how they defined the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict in the news. Sources play a vital role in how news is reported; they may make or shape the news (Soley 1992; Berkowitz and TerKeurst 1999). News reporting, particularly about conflicts, involves a continuous interaction between the reporter and their source(s). To answer RQ2 using the qualitative content analysis, sources in the news stories were divided into the following categories: Victims, eyewitnesses, anonymous and survivors were classified as *nonelite*; political leaders, security personnel and government officials were classified as *elite* sources; while ethnic group leaders, religious leaders and trade leaders were typified as *quasi-elite* sources. Source statements which appeared in the news article were coded for the description of the non-state actors in the conflict. The use of adjectives, nouns and figures of speech attributed to the news source were coded.

To sum up, the qualitative analysis was conducted with NVIVO in three interrelated stages, as suggested by Mayring (2000) and Macnamara (2005). Firstly, the researcher read through the relevant news article and familiarised herself with the news reports collected for the study, taking note of the narrative structure, adjectives, figures of speech and visual imagery used in the describing the actors and their actions. Secondly, the news articles were reread to observe the descriptions of the actors and their actions with adjectives, figures of

speech and visual imagery connected to the stereotype traits of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict. The stereotype traits were then coded into different categories based on the ideations of the Fulani Herdsmen as nomad savage, invaders, and as warlike. This is further subdivided as brutal/cruel/vicious, vengeful, alien/foreigners, occupiers, militant/terrorist, and gunmen. The descriptions and characterisations of the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt of Nigeria were also coded. Thirdly, in the source analysis, source type and the description of the non-state actors attributed to the sources in the news reports were coded for (see Appendix A for codebook, page 260).

Category	Sub-category	Code (prime)
Fulani Herdsmen as Invaders	Fulani Herdsmen as Alien and Foreign Fulani Herdsmen as Occupiers	Descriptions of the non-state actors in the conflict that allude to landownership, settlement, and nationality.
Fulani Herdsmen as Nomad Savage	Fulani Herdsmen as Brutal/Cruel/Vicious Fulani Herdsmen as Transgressing	Descriptions of the non-state actors and their actions that connect them to acts of extreme violence, brutality and criminality. The violence maybe connected to the nomadic lifestyle.
Fulani Herdsmen as Warlike	Fulani Herdsmen as Militant/Terrorists Fulani Herdsmen as Gunmen	Descriptions of the non-state actors and their actions that typify them as terrorists or engaging in acts of terror. The violence is often tied to their ethno-religious identity.
Farmers	Farmers as Indigenes, Farming as the appropriate use of the land.	Descriptions of the non-state actors in the conflict as farmers. Descriptions of farming as the appropriate response to land. Descriptions of violence that suggest it is in response to land use.

Table 2 Coding categories and sub-categories

3.3 Semi-structured interviews

This section will discuss the methods applied in the second part of this study to respond to the third research question. The aim of this part of the study is to identify the perceptions of the non-state state actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict observed in participants' evaluations. The second part of this study is informed by mixed method researchers who propose the integration of results from qualitative data to compare reactions to different content about the actors in the conflict. This involves a variety of output evaluations which could potentially

provide a more comprehensive impression of specific individual perception of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict.

Thus, this study made use of a qualitative experiment proposed by Robinson and Mendelson (2012). This involved the use of semi-structured interviews conducted with randomised experimental manipulations. The qualitative experiment allowed the researcher to observe the activation of primes among various participants while the semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to retrieve participants' evaluations evidencing activation of stereotype of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict. The qualitative experiment offers a way to observe mediated communicative processing and response to varied content presentations useful in the investigation of processes and behaviours in the social sciences (Robinson and Mendelson 2012; Wagoner 2015). Semi-structured interviews have been used in media audience research to understand how audiences make sense of news about conflict (Philo 2002). It also allows people participating in the study to provide personal, contextual and qualitative experiences (Creswell and Plano Clark 2017). Participants' varied responses to the content may indicate perceptions of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict potentially activated by the news content.

The semi-structured interview was selected over other qualitative methodologies such as the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) because it offers the participants a level of privacy lacking in FGD (Morgan et al. 1998; Guest et al. 2017). Sometimes, participants may not feel confident to express their views, especially if they differ from the general view within the FGD. Additionally, participants' responses may be influenced by other participants in the study. The semi-structured interview affords the participant privacy and opportunity to express themselves without fear of judgement or influence by other participants in the study. As a result, the semi-structured interview also produces more complex and rich data than the FGD (Holstein and Gubrium 1995).

The second part of this study adapted a qualitative design – semi-structured interview – within experimental conditions of three groups as proposed by Mendelson and Darling-Wolf (2009). The design involved a one-time intervention where the participants were asked to read

a news report most representative of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict. Participants' evaluations were retrieved in the semi-structured interviews. Responses were qualitatively analysed to observe their individual evaluations indicating the perceptions of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict activated after reading specific news articles. Therefore, the second part of this study was executed in three steps:

Step 1

Respondents received a pre-test survey to identify their general attitudes about the actors in the conflict and their overall familiarity with the Herder-Farmer conflict. This was a descriptive survey which offered the researcher baseline information about the participants' knowledge and ideas about the conflict and the actors involved. It also allowed for identification of participants' attitudes about the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict i.e., how the participants perceived the actors before reading news about the Herder-Farmer conflict in the study. Participants' response in the pre-test survey was indicative of the perceptions of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict available in their knowledge store.

Step 2

Respondents were randomly assigned to three different groups and then asked to read the relevant news articles allocated to the group. This part of the study made use of three news reports selected from the data in the first part of the study. The news articles presented different details about the non-state actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict.

Step 3

Semi-structured interviews were conducted which included a mix of interpretive and close ended questions. The interpretative questions allowed the interviewer to capture interviewees' interpretation and evaluation of the actors in the news articles, while the close-ended questions were used to capture the interviewees' final response about the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict (Harrits and Møller 2021). Interpretative questions also allowed the

participants to express their perceptions about the conflict and the actors in their own words, based on the news articles. Closed questions ensured that the respondents provided a final and specific response relevant to the interview.

3.3.1 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to test for the effectiveness of semi-structured interview questions and the procedure for the qualitative experiment. The pilot study was expected to allow the researcher to identify areas of the research process that could fail during implementation, as well as aspects of the process that needed improvement, as it also exposed areas of the research protocol which might not be followed because they were too complicated for the researcher (Van Teijlingen and Hundley 2001). The pilot study allowed the researcher to assess the effectiveness of the sampling frame and technique as well as the likely success of the recruitment process. The pilot study was conducted after ethics approval had been obtained from the ethics committee in Bournemouth University. To test the effectiveness of the pre-test survey and the semi-interview, the pilot study recruited 3 people to represent the 3 different interview groups. Three news articles, each representing the various actors reported in the news about the Herder-Farmer conflict, were given to the pilot participants to read; afterwards, they were interviewed. This part of the research was carried out during the COVID pandemic in 2021, so the semi-structured interview and the main study was conducted over zoom. The pilot study allowed the researcher to identify and mitigate for the technical challenge of conducting the interview over zoom. The pilot study revealed that there would be network issues during the semi-structured interview where contact would be lost with participants. It was decided that if there was a break in network connection, the meeting would be paused until the network was manageable and participants would be able to connect to the call. The pilot study also revealed some of the issues with the length of interview. The length of the interview had been planned to last for 90 minutes. However, after the pilot study it was discovered that the meeting could last for 45-90 minutes depending on each participant and

any form of interruption from poor network. These observations were taken into consideration for the execution of the main project.

3.3.2 Project Execution

The sample universe for this study are Nigerian female and male adults, aged 25 to 50 in Nigeria. The inclusion criteria for Nigerians included availability, literacy in English language, accessibility to computer or phone with good internet network. This study is not one which seeks to gather representational data, rather it seeks to examine the meaning made of actors in the news about the Herder-Farmer conflict. Therefore, the sampling technique was a stratified purposeful sampling. The provisional sample size was set to a maximum of 28 people to a minimum of 20 people. Qualitative studies of this nature usually allow the continuous recruitment of participants until saturation has been reached (Coyne 1997). Additionally, Patton (1990) argues that there are no rules for a sample size in a qualitative inquiry; the purpose of the inquiry determines the sample size. Saturation occurred after 21 participants had been recruited and interviewed.

The researcher intended to travel to Nigeria to execute the second part of the study, however, due to the COVID19 pandemic and the ensuing lockdown protocols, which lasted intermittently for over two years, the researcher resorted to recruit participants over social media and to conduct semi-structured interviews over Zoom. Social media is an increasingly popular and cost-effective method for recruiting participants in studies. However, there is a possibility of recruiting an unrepresentative sample. Nigeria is a country of diverse ethnic groups and religious affiliations; there is a possibility of recruiting ethnic group members who are more likely to be on certain social media platforms more than others. It was decided that participants for this study would be recruited through social media adverts on Facebook and Twitter (now X). Facebook was selected as it is the second largest social media platform in used Nigeria (Kemp 2021). The relevant Facebook groups where the advert for the study was place were found using keywords like, *Nigeria*, *Nigerian culture*, *Nigerian groups in Nigeria*. The advert for the project was then placed in the groups with the background to the study and

a request for interested participants to reach out to the researcher by sending a private message. The recruitment process on Twitter was different, due to the way the platform operates. The researcher identified trending tweets in the Nigerian Tweetosphere and placed adverts for the study as a tweet (comment). This is a marketing technique which has been used by social media entrepreneurs to sell their products, particularly in the Nigerian Tweetosphere. However, recruitment was quite challenging on both platforms, particularly on Twitter as a result of the Twitter ban in Nigeria between June 2021 and January 2022. On Facebook, there was a low response to the advert. When participants responded to the advert, they did not want to take part in the study. The recruitment process was facilitated by an offer of compensation to participants in the form of internet credits.

The advert for the study was placed on the relevant social media and interested participants were asked to contact the researcher by private message on relevant social media platform. 30 people responded. However, only 25 were available and they were informed about the overreaching aims and the purpose of the study but not the details. Only 21 participants moved on to the final stage. Participants who wished to go ahead with the study were sent electronic copies of the participant information sheet (PIS) and the participant consent form. A time and date were set for the meeting to take place over Zoom.

The audience study took place after data had been collected and analysed in the first study. Subsequently, the findings from the first study provided the parameters for the selection of three different news article groups (representative of the non-state actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict). Participants were randomly assigned to the different news representative article group – 7 people to each news article group. All ethical considerations were followed during the implementation of the second part of the study.

3.3.3 Thematic Analysis

The data gained from the interview was analysed using thematic analysis (TA) from an interpretive perspective. TA has been argued to provide an accessible and systematic procedure for generating codes and themes from qualitative data (Terry et al. 2017). TA offers

a flexibility which allows the researcher to focus on data in numerous ways (Braun and Clarke 2012). This research sought to identify the perceptions of the actors in the conflict from the responses of participants in the semi-structured interview. Through thematic analysis, the research can identify patterns of meaning in the responses from participants in the study. The data was approached from multiple angles to generate multiple interpretations which can provide a more complete picture as suggested by Rogers and Willig (2021).

The interpretative approach allowed the researcher to consider the participants' account of the perception of the non-state actors and their actions in the news article. Meaning is being made by the researcher from what the participant has said (Willig 2012). This was particularly important in analysing the data from the second study because participants were asked to share their thoughts about the actors in the context of the news about the conflict. Concomitantly, through the interpretative approach, the researcher gained insight into what the participants had said during the interview.

Finally, this research approaches the data from a relativist point of view. The relativist approach allows the researcher to investigate how participants construct meaning in their lives. Participants were also asked to share personal experiences (or those they have heard from family or friends) with members from the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict reported in the news. This is because the research is seeking to generate rich and detailed accounts that will enable the researcher to better understand the participants' perception of the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict present in the evaluation after the semi-structured interview. The research also intends to identify noticeable differences or shared similarities among participants' responses in the different news groups informing on the themes.

After transcribing participants' responses in the interview, this research used Braun and Clarke's version of TA that includes a six-phase analytic process:

The first phase was familiarisation with the data from the interview which can be done while the researcher is still collecting data. Familiarisation has been argued to provide the researcher an entry point into analysis because it allows the researcher to gain insight into the data (Terry et al. 2017). This phase involves reading and re-reading textual data i.e.,

transcripts of the interviews. The aim of this phase was to become familiar with the content and for the researcher to take note of aspects of the dataset that might be relevant to the research.

The first phase was followed by the generation of initial codes. This phase involved the systematic analysis of the data through coding – a process that forms the building block of analysis. Coding allows the research to capture the diversity and patterns within the data. Using NVIVO, codes were generated around the descriptions of actors by participants which were similar to the primes of the actors observed in the qualitative content analysis of the newspapers in the first part of the study. This allowed the researcher to observe what knowledge about the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict was activated by the news reports that they had read. It also allowed the research to identify participants' evaluations of the actors that were not in the news article they had read. The generation of codes in this manner was because literature on priming indicates that the evidence of the activation of perceptions is in the shared similarity of the features of the knowledge store and the features of the news content.

Afterwards, the researcher identified overarching themes from interviews in the three relevant groups – themes about the actors in the Herder-Farmer conflict unique to each group as well as those similar to other groups within the second study. Themes are argued to capture important aspects of the data in relation to the research question, representing some level of pattern in the response within the dataset (Braun and Clarke 2006). The researcher collated codes into potential themes, gathering relevant data to each theme. After identifying potential themes, the researcher refined the themes in two levels according to Braun and Clarke (2006). The first level involved reading and collating extracts for each theme and considering whether they form a coherent theme. The second level involved a consideration of the validity of individual themes in relation to the dataset. This also involves coding additional data that may have been missed in the earlier coding stage. Themes were then defined and named. They were refined and defined in this phase by conducting and writing a detailed analysis.

The report was then produced in the final phase. The themes identified within the dataset are presented in the fifth chapter of this thesis.

3.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the methods used in the data collection during the research, the methods of analysis and the process of isolating primes were discussed. Data for the first study was collected from the advanced search option of *allafrica.com* database, Google Search and Google News using the keywords 'Fulani Herdsmen' and 'Herders and Farmers conflict' on four online newspapers: *Daily Post*, *This Day*, *Vanguard* and *Premium Times*. Using this method, 208 news stories were collected and analysed. The steps in the qualitative content analysis were discussed, as well as the parameters for coding the newspaper articles and the sources present in the news. This chapter also discussed the method used in collecting the data for the audience study – the semi-structured interview and the qualitative experiment – highlighting the participant recruitment process for the interview, as well as the procedures for the qualitative experiment. Finally, this section discussed the thematic analysis method used to identify and categorise themes identified in the interviews with the participants in this study.

The next chapter presents the findings of the qualitative content analysis of the news coverage of the Herder-Farmer conflict, showcasing the primes of the actors.

Chapter Four

Findings: Primes of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict

This research set out to investigate the perception of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict in the Nigerian press coverage of the conflict. To discover the perception of the non-state actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict, this study conducted an analysis of the representation of the non-state actors in the news about the conflict. The research also analysed the role of the news sources included in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict in the representation of the non-state actors. Finally, perceptions of the non-state actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict were examined in the evaluations of participants asked to read about the news of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. The representations of the non-state actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict was isolated using qualitative content analysis (QCA). The role of sources and their contribution to the representation of the non-state actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict was identified using QCA.

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative content analysis of the characterisation of the non-state actors in the news coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. It is divided into three main sections. The first section will outline the primes of the non-state actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict, to reveal the ways that the non-state actors in the conflict were represented in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Specifically, the framework of this section includes the identification of the description of the non-state actors in the press using the nouns, adjectives, figures of speech and textual imagery connected to the stereotypes of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Additionally, it will also involve a dissection of the assignation of active agentive role and affected role to non-state actors, showing how this may contribute to the implicit stereotype of the non-state actors involved. Finally, the findings of the sources in the news, are presented and discussed, identifying how they may contribute to the construction of the implicit

stereotype characterisation of the non-state actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

Participants' evaluation of the non-state actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict will be disclosed in the next chapter.

4.1 Primes of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict in the Nigerian press

This section presents the findings of the QCA of the Herders-Farmers' conflict in four Nigerian newspapers: *Vanguard Online*, *This Day*, *Premium Times* and *Daily Post Online*. The analysis of 208 newspaper in this study revealed that the Fulani Herdsmen (FH) were reported and defined as the perpetrators while the farmers were defined as the victims. In presenting the FH as the perpetrators, the press utilised certain descriptions which could be linked to the stereotypic perception of the Fulani ethnic group.

4.1.1 Fulani Herdsmen as perpetrators

The FH were represented as the perpetrators in the conflict in a significant number of the newspapers analysed in this study. The FH were often linked with acts of bloodlust, murder and criminality. This portrayal included accounts of the attacks and counterattacks against farmers by the FH. Consequently, in the representation of the FH as the perpetrators, the farmers were represented as the victims. In certain instances, the FH were characterised as militants/terrorists and as unknown gunmen, which are primes for the stereotype of the FH as warlike. The FH were also represented as brutal/cruel/vicious and as transgressing, connected to the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage. In parts of the news coverage, the FH were presented as alien/foreign and as occupier primes of the stereotype of the FH as invaders.

When the FH were reported as the perpetrators, the farmers were consistently represented as the group to whom violence had been enacted upon. Specifically, the victimhood of the farmers was highlighted through the representation of the farmers as Indigenes and landowners, hospitable, peaceful and law-abiding as well as helpless and

displaced. In addition to the representation of the farmers as victims, there were news reports which reported them as engaging in acts of violence. However, the farmers were reported in a manner that seemed to ascribe an agentic role to the FH i.e., the farmers acted in self-defence rationalising their actions – the farmers were violent because the FH attacked them first. Thus, the FH were often ascribed an active role in the news while the farmers were reported as being acted upon or in an affected role.

The following section will begin by setting out illustrations from news reports which contain traits of the stereotype of the FH as warlike, as nomad savage, and as invaders. This will be followed by a discussion of the representation of the farmers as the victims as well as the FH as the perpetrators, and how these representations can serve as traits for the stereotype construct of the FH. Finally, the sources in the news coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict will be revealed as well as their contribution to priming stereotype traits of the non-state actors in the conflict.

4.1.1.1 Fulani Herdsmen as militants/terrorists

The analysis of the news reports in the first part of this study revealed that the news contained descriptions of the FH that connected their violence to their ethnicity. The descriptions of the attacks perpetrated by the FH in the news reports seemed to suggest that the violence was symbolic. The characterisation of the FH as militant/terrorist is a prime of the stereotype of the FH as warlike.

An article from *This Day* reported that attack on a Benue village was carried out by Fulani militia (Okoh 2018). The term *militia* has conflicting definitions by various scholars as a rebel group, a local police force, or a group of common criminals (Tapscott 2019). In the context of armed conflict, militia is often interpreted as the organisation of a group to perpetuate violence. The descriptive phrase Fulani *militia* implies that the *militia* is formed based on the ethnic identity of being Fulani. That is, the militia is formed around the ethnic identity of Fulani, implicitly linking the Fulani ethnic group to militancy. This is an ethnic identification that denotes the conflict as an ethnic one as it codes the ethnic identity of the Fulani as integral to the violence. The term militia also connects the context of the attack on

the farmers to a wider discourse of the Fulani Herdsmen as foot soldiers in an ethno-religious jihad. The presence of the Fulani ethnic group in Nigeria is connected to ethno-political religious conquest led by Usman Dan Fodio in the 18th Century, with the Fulani Herdsmen described as the foot soldiers spreading the cause to the southern parts of north of Nigeria through violence and bloodshed. Thus, describing the Fulani Herdsmen in the news as a militia is capable of activating ideas and notions of Fulani hegemonic practices through violence, a continuation of Usman Dan-Fodio's legacy. This is in contrast to how the term has been used to describe other non-state actors in armed conflict in Nigeria. For instance, the non-state actors in the 2006 Niger-Delta crisis were also described as militants in the Nigerian press. However, while the regional identity of Niger-Delta was connected to the acts of violence associated with the group, their identity was rarely ever attached to their ethnicity. In this sense, ethnic identities were not integral to the framing of the non-state actors in the group. Readers could easily see that the conflict was political and not an ethnic one. Following Tapcot's (2019) definition of a militia, it is quite obvious that the Niger-Delta militants were a political rebel group violently advocating for a cause. However, because the FH have rarely come out to declare or make demands like a terrorist group would, it is easy to assume that they are a rebel group or a group of common criminals. Furthermore, describing them as a militia highlights their violence as symbolic, connecting their ethnicity to violence, framing the conflict as an ethnic one and potentially activating notions of the continuance of Fulani violent hegemony against the people of the Middle Belt.

In various news articles, the Fulani *militia* are reported to have *laid ambush* (Tauna 2020), *launch surprise attacks* (Fulani 2018; Obi et al. 2018), *carried out fresh attacks on villages* (Tauna 2016; Olowolagba 2017), *launch premeditated attacks* (Godwin 2017), *besiege* and *sieged* communities (Duru 2016; Isine 2016; Okoh 2016), and stormed villages singing *war songs* (Okoh 2017; Duru 2018). Their actions are described using military language: *bloodiest attacks* (Duru 2016), *incessant killings* and *incessant attacks* (Lere 2016; Nanlong 2017; Oyedele 2017; Shiklam 2019; Shiklam 2020) etc. The descriptions of FH action in this manner further highlights them an armed group. The descriptions of the attacks against

the farmers in this manner connotes that these not mere communal attacks but something much worse. The FH are presented as terrorising the farming population, killing and inflicting symbolic damage upon the farmers. Although the news serves to inform the reader of the actions of the FH, these locutions portray the FH as militants/terrorists – a trait of the stereotype of the FH as warlike. It is factual that the FH have attacked a farming community. However, the characterisation of the incident as a *siege*, an *invasion*, a *launch of premeditated attacks* adds a tone of militancy to the actions of the FH. It presents the FH as a terrorist group on a mission, rendering the FH as warriors and not herdsmen. The FH are cattle herders, therefore reporting them as a *militia*, and then describing them as those who *besiege* or *lay ambushes* for the farmers, arguably prime the stereotype of the FH as warlike.

4.1.1.2 Fulani Herdsmen as unknown gunmen

The Fulani herdsmen were sometimes referred to as unknown gunmen, armed men, bandits, and gunmen in the news (see Table 3). For instance, a news article from *This Day* positions the gunmen as Fulani Herders. The headline claimed that ‘Gunmen kill 20 in fresh attack in Kaduna’; the first paragraph details how people were killed in a fresh attack by suspected FH (Shiklam 2019). Although the news attempts to be cautious in describing the gunmen as suspected FH, the news report continues to describe the actions of these gunmen in the same manner that the FH have been described in other news reports collected in this study. The description of the FH as gunmen can be argued to be a form of journalese to abbreviate or shorten the description of items within the news. However, it is a problematic description of the FH as it attaches them to gun carrying for the purposes of destruction. The characterisation of the FH as unknown gunmen, gunmen or bandits in the news report connects them to acts of criminality. In describing the FH as gunmen, the press unwittingly presents them as criminal group. The description of the FH as unknown gunmen is a prime for the stereotype of the FH as warlike because it contributes to the representation of the FH as a group who are no longer herdsmen but criminals and terrorists.

The idea of the FH as gunmen was further expressed in the description of the FH as possessing weapons. For instance, in reporting about the attacks of the FH in Benue state,

the FH were described as *well-armed* (Duru 2016; Shiklam 2016; Okogba 2017; Duru and Odama 2018; Duru 2018; Obi et al. 2018), *heavily armed* (Shiklam 2017) or having *sophisticated weapons* (Godwin 2018; Okoh et al. 2018; Okoh 2018) and *brandishing guns* (Adebisi et al. 2018), *shooting sporadically* (Duru 2016; Duru 2016; Okoh 2017; Sobowale 2020), engaging in *heavy gun battle* with officers of Benue State Police Command and with farmers (Yusuf 2018; Duru 2018). One headline described a *two-day fresh attack* on communities (Duru 2018), and *machine guns* (Ugwuanyi 2018) were included in the description ascribed to the FH. The descriptions of the FH as gunmen, connects them to banditry. It implies that the FH are no longer in possession of a shepherd's staff but dangerous weapons, removing them from the act of cattle and transferring them to the act of warfare. These descriptions highlight the FH as violent group engaged in armed violence against the farmers and in certain instances against the police. The FH are no longer perceived as herdsman but as warriors, an ethnic group that seems to enjoy the act of violence. These descriptions can be argued to be a prime for the stereotype of the FH as warlike.

934.1.1.3 Fulani Herdsmen as Vengeful

The stereotype of the warlike nature of the FH was stressed in the news through the reportage of their attacks as acts of *vengeance*. Some of the articles analysed in this study stated that the FH launched a ferocious onslaught in *a swift reprisal attack*, or *yet another attack* against their victims (Mkom 2017; Ayodele 2016; Emejo et al. 2018). Some of these news reports do not provide context for the cause of the attack (not that the attacks are justifiable), rather it suggests that FH have attacked in vengeance. These news reports provide an episodic coverage of the event which reduce the attacks of the FH to acts of retribution against the farmers. The findings of this study that reveal the episodic reportage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict tie in with Gever and Essien (2017) where it was observed that the Nigerian press reported the conflict in an episodic manner. In describing the actions of the FH as *yet another* or *a swift reprisal*, the violent actions of the FH are simplified as acts of vengeance. This is no mere journalese to remind readers that the attack being reported is sequel to previous attacks by the FH. Instead, it is a connotation of the vengeful nature of the

FH. First, it suggests that the FH live by a set of rules only known to them where they inflict punishment on those who have offended them. Second, it also indicates that FH are inherently violent connecting the Fulani ethnic group to hostility and aggression. Third, it reduces the severity of the conflict to the level of local squabbles between the farmers and the herders. The news reports fail to acknowledge the wider events which may have led to the violence perpetuated by the FH. These news reports fail to include attacks on Fulani people, the government's failure to prevent the death of Fulani people or the Fulani people's attempt to draw government attention to the losses they also suffer. By referring to the attacks as acts of retribution, the Nigerian press failed in their 'watchdog' role of holding the government accountable in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Instead, the press draws attention to the pervasiveness of FH violence in the Middle Belt as though the FH began attacking for no reason other than to kill and destroy the farmers. For readers familiar with the history of the FH presence in Nigeria – the violent incursion of the Fulani in Northern Nigeria among the Hausa – the killings may be connected to the notion of continued FH ethno-religious dominance and overthrow of ethnic groups in the Middle Belt. Thus, reporting the actions of the FH as one done in retribution is a prime for the stereotype of the FH as Warlike because it not only denotes them as a group that is prone to acts of violence, it connects their ethnic identity to the violence, giving the impression that ethnicity played an integral part in the attack, subliminally defining the conflict as an ethnic one.

Primes of the stereotype of the FH as warlike

Characterisation of the FH as militants/terrorists	Fulani Militia, laid ambush, launching surprise attacks, launching premeditated attacks, singing war songs, besieging communities etc.
Characterisation as gunmen	Gunmen suspected to be Fulani attackers, armed men suspected to be herdsmen, motorcycle riding gunmen, the state of being armed (well-armed, heavily armed, brandishing guns), description of the weapons (sophisticated weapons) etc
Characterisation as vengeful	Swift reprisal attacks, yet another attack, retaliatory attacks

Table 3 Primes of the stereotype of the FH as Warlike

In summary, the analysis revealed that the FH were sometimes represented as militants/terrorists, as gunmen/unknown gunmen and as vengeful in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict (see Table 3). This was accomplished through the descriptions of the FH in ways that connect their ethnic identity to bloodshed and violence. It was also accomplished through the descriptions of FH and their acts of violence in ways that suggest that the FH have exchanged their herding staff for dangerous weapons. This transforms the FH from mere cattle herders to dangerous gunmen. The reason for this transformation is rarely ever explored in the news, suggesting to the reader that the FH is armed to either continue the Uthman Dan-Fodio legacy or because it may be a part of their ethnic complexity to be violent. In any case, the depictions of the FH in the news reports that allude to them as ethnic militants/terrorists, gunmen and vengeful are primes for the stereotype of the FH as warlike because it presents the FH as those who are inherently violent as part of their ethnic makeup and to further their ethnic political desire of domination of the people of the Middle Belt.

4.1.1.4 Fulani Herdsmen as brutal/cruel/vicious

The FH and the violence they perpetrated were represented in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict in ways that alluded to the FH as a brutal, cruel and vicious group. This was accomplished using descriptions and providing precise and often graphic details of the actions of the FH. Ultimately, these descriptions connect the violence of the FH with their nomadic lifestyle rather than with their ethnic identity.

The analysis revealed that FH were described as *rampaging herdsmen* (Akinwale 2016; Duru 2016; Obi et al. 2018). The FH were also described as *blood thirsty herdsmen* who *have now bared their taste for blood* (Okoh 2017). First, the dramatic descriptions of the FH have been argued to be employed by the press to display the actions of the enemy's evil. That is, the news reports dramatize the violent actions of the FH to draw attention to the viciousness of their actions. Second, the descriptions of the FH as *rampaging* suggests that the FH as are moving through a place in a violent manner, harming those who live there. Additionally, it also suggests that the violence perpetuated by the FH is ongoing and continuous with no end in sight. Put together, the dramatic reportage of the FH violence against the farmers and the suggestion of their nomadic heritage may activate negative notions of nomadism. The violent actions of the FH are described as a fierce and cruel attack against the farmers, highlighting the FH as a brutal and pugnacious group because of their lifestyle. It connects nomadism to bloodshed and bloodletting, indicating that nomadism is not only the practice and lifestyle of the uncivilised but it is a metaphor for the animal within the uncivilised man (Noyes 2000). These descriptions suggests that brutality and cruelty are an aspect of nomadism; they implicitly activate the stereotype of the FH as Nomad Savage.

Dramatic examples of the FH violence expressed in the news include the depictions of the FH destroying things that represent permanence and territoriality. The FH were described as *setting structures ablaze* (Nanlong et al. 2018), with *four communities completely burnt down* (Godwin 2018), and they *razed many buildings before leaving* (Godwin 2017; Fulani 2018; Duru 2018). Sedentary communities, like the farmers in the Middle Belt, are rooted in specific places. They are an organised collective that embodies authentic and stable cultural identities. By contrast, nomadic pastoralists are constantly on the move seeking pasture for their livestock – their response to land use is unmediated and irrational. They have a moral quality that makes them dangerous to civilisation (Noyes 2000). Thus, the dramatic description of the FH destruction of farmland and properties seems to suggest the threat and the end of civilisation of the Middle Belt people. The FH are cruel because they do not only attack the farmers, but they also destroy their property, scattering them about and leaving them nowhere

to return to. These dramatic descriptions of the destruction of property and farmland is another example of the prime for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage.

The news stories analysed in this study also contained graphic descriptions of the actions of the FH which can be implicitly connected to nomadism. For instance, an article claimed that the FH *beheaded two young men in a fresh attack and took away the heads of their victims to an unknown destination* (Duru 2020). It is bad enough that the FH have viciously killed two young men, but they have also left the premises of their violence to an unknown destination with 'souvenirs'. First, the description of the act of decapitating two young people and departing with their heads to an unknown destination highlights the savageness of the act. By claiming that the FH *departed to an unknown destination* with human parts, the news article seems to suggest that this act is only possible with those who have no known place of abode, alluding to the nomadic lifestyle of the FH. The nomad is mobile, with no permanent place of residence, free to come and go as they please. The graphic description of leaving the scene of the crime to an undisclosed location with the heads of their victims highlights the carefree savagery that nomadism affords of the FH. It connects the FH to a level of savagery that is horrific and unthinkable among the 'civilised'. The attention to detail in the news story is an example of how the press present violent actions, providing graphic proof of their evil. It is also a prime for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage, since it connects their actions to nomadism. Other examples of the graphic reportage of the actions of the FH can be seen in news reports that describe the FH as *killing two members of the community earlier burnt with their motorcycles on a bridge before the village* (Duru 2018; Adebayo 2020), *attacking the elderly and disabled members of the community* (Duru 2016; Ochetenwu 2019), and *kidnapping babies and women* (Duru 2020) etc. While it is true that the FH have perpetuated these attacks, the detailed description of their actions in the news reports provides proof of the brutality of their actions against the farmers. Eke (2020) claims that negative representations of nomadism are popular in Nigerian society and in other societies. They note that the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage is replete in Nigerian discourse, and this is a stereotype which has negative implications to the resolution of the conflict. The nomad savage

is one who wanders from place to place to perpetuate evil – the *rampaging* killer who kills their innocent victim in the most vicious way possible and then departs, not unlike the (often supernatural) killers in American slasher movies. The FH become the ultimate bogeyman that is a threat to the farming community in the Middle Belt.

The qualitative analysis of the news reports about the Herders-Farmers' conflict contained dramatic and graphic details of the actions of the FH, linking these actions with nomadism. The FH, as nomads, wander around killing their victims, and also engage in the destruction of the farmer's properties. These aspects are highlighted in the news reports. The actions of the FH are represented as brutal/cruel/vicious which are traits for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage. The actions of the FH are truly reprehensible. However, the attention that the news report pays to these actions—describing them in detail—calls attention to the FH as an inhumane group. These details are portrayed as graphic and dramatic evidence of the savagery of the FH which may trigger the stereotype construct of the FH as the nomad savage.

4.1.1.5 Fulani Herdsmen as transgressing

The findings from the qualitative analysis revealed the representation of the FH as a group that was transgressing. The FH were described as violating the social norm beyond what is acceptable and lawful. The FH were revealed to be transgressing the legal status of conflict resolution, breaching trust and order, highlighting an intentional decision to act contrary to established conventions.

The FH as transgressing appeared in a news article the *Daily Post Online* published in 2017, reporting that the FH had killed 12 people in Southern Kaduna shortly after a *peace and reconciliation meeting* between the farmers and the Fulani (Godwin 2017). The implication of the report is that the FH engaged in violence even though they agreed to not do so. The article indicates that the meeting was expected to prevent further attacks from the FH. However, it does not provide precise details of how the attacks would be prevented except that a meeting between both non-state actors had taken place. The news report suggests that the civil agreements obtainable among the sedentary community is beyond the FH, because

the FH will attack and kill farmers after an event that was intended to mend the relationship between both parties. The FH are presented as hostile and deceitful, potentially going back on their word. They are unpredictable, living beyond the limit of what is legally acceptable. Thus, the FH are a group who cannot live in tranquillity with the farmers; they cannot be reasoned with, and their words cannot be trusted. The description of the FH violence as occurring after a peace and reconciliation meeting can be argued to be a prime for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage because it presents the FH as a group who cannot abide by the dictates of society. The news report seems to present the FH as those who are a threat to civilisation and the livelihood of the farmers because they attack the farmers even after they have agreed to not do so.

The nomadic lifestyle of the FH, which makes them a threat to civilisation and connects them to the nomad savage stereotype, was further explored in the description of the actions of the FH who attacked the farmers after the government had put in measures to prevent violence. Some of the news articles in this study claimed that 'attacks persist' despite efforts to prevent further attacks, such as *dusk to dawn curfew being declared by the governor* (Duru 2018; Nanlong 2018; Ukpong 2018). These news reports detail solutions proffered by the government, which should have been effective. However, the news reports claim that despite these efforts, lives have been lost. The news reports imply that FH are above the law, transgressing civil rule imposed by the relevant authorities. Their violence is an unrelenting force that the rule of law cannot contain – the rule of law is powerless before the FH. In addition, the description of the failure of government initiative to secure the farmer's lives and property seems to suggest that the FH are not compatible with the sedentary society. In reporting the FH as transgressing by violating civil agreements or security measures, the news report connects them to the idea of the nomad savage. The news reports state that the farmers had obeyed the curfew and stayed home, where they became easy targets for the FH. The news report seems to suggest that the FH are not bound by the laws which governs ordinary people or in this sense sedentary people. Nomadic people are often assumed to be non-compliant with the laws of sedentary society. The news report connects the FH to the discourse of

nomadic people as criminals. The news reports claim that the curfews were unsuccessful because the FH continue to kill. It suggests that the FH are not law-abiding, further highlighting the character of the nomad that is a threat to civilisation (Noyes 2000).

Primes for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage	
Dramatic details of FH attacks	Duration of the attack (hours and days), time of the attack (early hours of the day or late at night), location of the attack (i.e., an event such as a funeral, child naming ceremony, farm), descriptions of the FH (rampaging, bloodthirsty). Burning villages, burning farms, looting villages, attacking churches, number of communities destroyed etc.
Graphic details of FH attacks	Decapitating humans, abducting babies, kidnapping women, burning victims, hacking them to death
FH as transgressing	Period of attack (after a peace and reconciliation meeting, after measures have been put in place to prevent further attacks).

Table 4 Primes for the stereotype of the FH as Nomad Savage

To recap, the findings of the analysis revealed that the FH were represented as brutal/cruel/vicious when they were described as a group that carries out heinous acts of cruel violence against the farmers. The news reports contained dramatic and graphic details about the attacks of the FH highlighting the nomadic lifestyle of the FH in negative terms. The FH were reported to have engaged in acts that were deemed to be a threat to the sedentary society. Similarly, the findings revealed that the FH were transgressing because they reneged on agreements that had been made between them and the farmers and because they violate the norms proposed by the Nigerian authority. The study argued that the representations of the FH in this manner highlighted their unsuitability to the norms of the society, thereby becoming a threat to said society. Together, the descriptions of the FH as brutal/cruel/vicious and as transgressing are primes for the stereotype of the FH as a Nomad Savage (see Table 4).

4.1.1.6 Fulani Herdsmen as alien/foreigners

In addition to traits of the stereotype of the FH as warlike and as nomad savage, news articles about the Herders-Farmers' conflict also contained traits of the stereotype of the FH as invaders (see Table 9). The analysis of the news reports revealed that the FH were often characterised as not indigenous and potentially not citizens of Nigeria.

The FH were described as foreigners whose origin is unknown; they were often characterised as a group who are not part of the local community of farmers. For instance, an article published by the *Vanguard* in 2020, referred to the FH as *non-indigenes who had co-lived in the area for over 100 years* (Okogba 2020). The description of FH as non-indigenes who have lived in the area for 100 years suggests that the FH are not indigent to the land. The term *non-indigenes* is a prime for the stereotype of the FH as invaders because it forms part of the description of the FH as alien/foreign. It suggests that the FH are not part of the community and therefore not citizens of Nigeria. Maiangwa (2017) notes that there is a phenomenon of conflicting indigeneity among Nigerians. The farmers consider themselves owners of the land by virtue of 'being there first', while the FH believe that they have free use of the land which had once lain fallow but is now occupied due to population expansion in the Middle Belt. By referring to the FH as non-indigenes, the news reports call to question the Nigerian citizenship of the FH. Furthermore, the reference to the FH as non-indigenes in the news may cause readers to recall the history of the FH presence in Nigeria. By mentioning that the FH have lived in the area for over 100 years, the FH are represented as foreigners who have no ancestral attachment to the land. The identity and consciousness of the Middle Belt is contained in the reconstruction of who is a settler and who is an indigene to the land (Ochonu 2014; Maiangwa 2017) and it is called upon by the news report. It reifies the identity of the FH as those who are alien and foreign to the Middle Belt. It reminds the reader that the FH are not truly Nigerians, and that their presence and violence is connected to some nefarious plan of continuous ethno-religious domination. The identity of the FH as foreign to the Middle Belt is highlighted in the news report, signifying the status of the FH in Nigerian discourse. The news report seems to reify the assumption of the FH as alien and foreign in

the Middle Belt, while the farmers are defined as landowners and as citizens. The FH are non-indigene because they are foreign while the farmers are indigen because they have ancestral ties to the land. The descriptions of the FH as non-indigen is a prime for the stereotype of the FH as invader as it highlights the foreignness of the FH.

Similarly, a news article from the *Premium Times* published in 2018 described an event which led to the death of 25 people as *a clash between herdsmen and local communities*. This seems like an innocuous description of the those whom the FH had a clash with. However, it can be argued to be a prime for the stereotype of the FH as invader. The Fulani are implicitly described as non-members of the local community where the attack has occurred. The description alludes to the foreignness of the FH, potentially positioning the FH as nomads who are attacking members of the local community – the ‘true’ owners of the land. In describing the attack as a clash between the FH and the local communities, the news report points toward the FH as those who are not local but are external to the community. When those who have been attacked are referred to as the local community, it highlights the FH as foreign. As Mamdani (2012) points out: there cannot be native without the settler, so there cannot be a definition of the local community without the definition of those who are not the local community. According to the news report, the local community is comprised of the farmers who are indigenous to the land. It implies that the FH are not indigenous to the land. These descriptions are not only a revisitation of pre-colonial and colonial hegemonic practices as suggested by Ochonu (2014), they are also an essence of the identity and consciousness of the Middle Belt identity. Thus, the description of the attack by the FH as one against the local community is a prime for the stereotype of the FH as invaders.

4.1.1.7 Fulani Herdsmen as occupiers

The qualitative content analysis also observed that FH were often referred to as occupiers in the news articles analysed for this study. The FH were represented as those who attack with the intention to occupy the land. A news article from the *Premiums Times* (2016), with the subheading ‘Territorial Conquest’, noted that there appeared to be *large-scale invasion* of Agatu (Mayah 2016). The article pointed out that in the past, the FH would *attack*,

kill and disappear, however they now have an *occupation agenda*. The description of the attack as a territorial conquest, presents the attack as one done to take over Agatu. It provides a context for the attack, but the context is arguably an implicit portrayal of the FH as occupier – a potential prime for the stereotype of the FH as invaders. The news article is significant because it was one of the first investigative news reports published after the attack in Agatu in 2016 by the *Premium Times*. The description of the attack as a territorial conquest defines the violent action of the FH as militaristic action with the intent to occupy the land. It is a dramatic definition of the event, but it also highlights notions of the conflict as one over land-use, which the Herders-Farmers' conflict has been argued to be about. However, this description moves the definition of the conflict from a resource scarcity conflict to an ethnic one. The news report does this subliminally by connecting ethnic identities of the farmers in the Middle Belt to landownership. Territoriality, like citizenship, is connected to ethnic identities in Nigeria, with ethnic groups giving physical substance and symbolic notion to a territory (Moore 2016). The definition of the attack by the FH against the farmers as a 'Territorial conquest' in the news report essentialises the ethnic identities of the actors involved suggesting that ethnic identities played a factor in the cause of the attack consequently defining the Herders-Farmers' conflict as an ethnic one. Additionally, defining the attack as a territorial conquest implies that the FH have an agenda to take over the farmer's land. The violence of the FH is defined as one done to overthrow the farmers and to occupy their land. The farmers are indigenous to the land and therefore owners of the land, whereas the FH are nomadic and so they have temporary use of the land. Therefore, the description of the violent action of the FH as a *territorial conquest* can be argued to be a prime for the stereotype of the FH as invaders.

The news article from *Premium Times* goes on to state that *sacked villages* were now being occupied by FH who were *pouring in* from neighbouring areas. According to the Collins Dictionary (2023), when an army sacks a town or a city, it means that the army destroys it, taking away all the valuable things. By using the word *sacked* to describe the actions of the FH, the press report implicitly connects the FH with militaristic terminology, reifying them as

an army and not herdsmen. This connects the actions of the FH to militancy and to criminality, leaning towards the mental framework of the FH as warlike. Likewise, the term implies that the FH have destroyed and have taken the valuable things of the village. When the news report adds that the FH are *pouring* in from other areas, it implies that the FH are coming into the Middle Belt in large numbers to take over that which is owned by the farmers. A metaphorical analysis of the FH in the news media by Igwebuike (2020) revealed that the Nigeria press have metaphorically described the FH as running water that invades and cleanses its victims. In this sense, the description of the FH in the news report as *pouring* into sacked villages suggests that the FH are invading to overrun and cleanse the farmers, potentially stripping them of their most valuable possession – their land. Together, the locutions of *sacking and pouring* are capable of initiating representations of the FH as a militant, criminalised group who have attacked the farmers to steal their land and their lives. Thus, the description of the actions of the FH in this manner is a trait of the stereotype of the FH as invader.

In another news article published four years later, the FH were described as exposing the farmers *to incessant attacks and forceful occupation of their land* (This Day 2016; Okogba 2020). This news report can be argued to be engaged with the existing discourse of the FH as occupiers since it described the attacks of the FH as relentless with the intent to occupy farmer's land. It can be argued that the description of the FH action in this manner is an overt accentuation of the belief that the FH have an agenda to permanently occupy farmer's land. In this instance, the FH are not nomadic attackers. Instead, they are an armed group on a mission to take over and occupy farmer's land. The suggestion that the attack against the farmers is an agenda to occupy farmer's land is a prime for the stereotype of the FH as Invaders because it signifies that the FH do not belong to Nigeria and these attacks may be an attempt to become indigenes and citizens of Nigeria. The representation of the attacks and the suggested intent of the attack can prime the stereotype of the FH as invader because it connects the attacks of the FH to postulation of continued Fulani hegemony and persecution of the people of the Middle Belt.

Primes of the stereotype of the FH as invaders

Description of the FH	Non-indigenes, (farmers as members of) local communities, recalling of the history of the appearance of the FH in the Middle Belt region.
Description of the FH attacks	Occupation agenda, metaphorical descriptions of the FH (pouring into farmer's land), forceful occupation etc.

Table 5 Primes of the stereotype of the FH as Invaders

In sum, the qualitative content analysis revealed some examples of the representation of the FH as alien/foreigners and as occupiers, and how these representations are primes for the stereotype of the FH as invaders (see Table 5). The FH were reported in the news in ways that suggest that they are non-indigenes to the Middle Belt and to Nigeria. This is accomplished through the description of the farmers as the indigenes of the land implicitly suggesting that the FH are foreign. The description recalls the presence of the Fulani in Nigeria, highlighting them as foreigners to the area. Additionally, the FH were presented as those who are attacking the farmers with the intent to occupy the land which the farmers are indigenous to. This is significant because it highlights an issue with citizenship and indigene rights in Nigeria highlighted by Adebani (2007). Furthermore, describing the violent actions of the FH as an intent to occupy the farmer's land can be argued to be a sensationalised way of reporting about the Herders-Farmers' conflict, since it draws the attention of the reader away from the cause of the conflict.

4.1.1.8 Summary for the Primes of the Stereotypes of the FH

To conclude this section, the findings of the first part of the study revealed that the FH had primarily been reported as perpetrators in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. In reporting the FH as the perpetrators, the FH were presented as a group mobilised to carry out symbolic violence against the farmers. The actions of the FH were described using militaristic terms which transformed them from cattle herders to gunmen. Additionally, the FH were described as a vengeful group whose attacks against the farmers were because the farmers had attacked

them first. The study found that the ethnic identity of the FH was essentialised in the news reports, subliminally coding the Herders-Farmer's conflict as an ethnic one. The ethnic identity of the Fulani was attached to acts of militancy and criminality, highlighting it as a motivating factor behind the attacks. The description of the FH as militant/terrorist, gunmen and vengeful was argued to be the prime of the stereotype of the FH as warlike because the news reports covertly highlight the FH as a violent and hostile group. These descriptions also attach their ethnic identity to the acts of violence which is in contrast to parts of the news reports that highlight the FH pastoral nomadic lifestyle as integral to their violence. Through dramatic and graphic details in the news, the FH were portrayed as brutal/cruel/vicious and as transgressing. Through the dramatic descriptions of the FH violence, the pastoral nomadic lifestyle was essentialised as integral to the viciousness of the attacks. The news reports seemed to suggest that the FH were violent because of their nomadic lifestyle which is in opposition to the sedentary lifestyle of the farmers. Thus, it was argued that descriptions of the FH that essentialise and reduce the violence of the FH to their nomadic lifestyle are primes for the FH as nomad savage. The findings of the first part of the study also revealed that in reporting the FH as the perpetrators in the Herders-Farmers' conflict, the FH were highlighted as foreign and alien to the Middle Belt region. Through various locutions, the news reports called upon the history of the presence of the FH in Nigeria, implicitly highlighting their nomadic lifestyle. It is well known that some of the FH have no known place of permanent residence; they have no land attached to their ethnic group in the Middle Belt. The findings also revealed that the news reports presented the violence of the FH as the violent expression of the intent to monopolise farmer's land. In this sense, the FH have a desire to overthrow and displace farmers so that they can make a home for themselves. This desire for a place of their own is expressed in violence. The actions of the FH may be interpreted as a ploy to become citizens of Nigeria through the permanent expulsion of the farmers in the Middle Belt. This unwittingly connects the perceptions of the FH as occupiers to interpretations of FH violence as ethnocide. Territoriality is a vital to the definition of ethnic identities, with spaces being attached to ethnic groups. So, when the news reports of the Herders-Farmers' conflict suggests that the FH are

repeatedly engaged in violence to take over farmer's land, readers may assume that the FH are engaged in the continuity of ethno-religious jihad by their progenitor. Put together, the news reports description of the FH as alien and foreign and the intention of their violence as a means to occupy farmer's land are primes of the stereotype of the FH as invaders.

The next section will disclose and discuss the findings of the qualitative content analysis, considering the ways which the farmers have been represented in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict and how these depictions can implicitly prime certain stereotypes.

4.1.2 Farmers as Victims

The farmers were primarily represented as victims in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict in Nigeria. The farmers were mostly characterised as those who are helpless, suffering great loss of life and property. The farmers were also defined as those who have been abandoned by the Nigerian government and left at the mercy of the FH. The farmers were defined as the indigenes of the land, who are peaceful and law-abiding citizens. In some instances, they were represented as refugees and in other instances they were represented as fighting in self-defence.

4.1.2.1 Farmers as hospitable, peaceful, and law-abiding

In presenting the FH as perpetrators, the farmers were represented as peaceful and law-abiding citizens. The farmers were defined as warm and hospitable people, welcoming the FH to their land. The farmers were further defined as a mild, non-hostile group who are free of conflict and strife. They were also described as obeying and keeping the laws of the land as prescribed by the Nigerian government. To exemplify the farmers as hospitable, a special report news article from the *Premium Times* in 2016 stated that when the FH would come to Agatu village to graze their cattle, they would be fed and watered by the farmers:

Mrs. Onuminya said the uncertainty about her husband was killing her. She recalled with regret that when the Fulani first began to come to her village to graze, **she would sometimes give them food and water** (SPECIAL REPORT: Inside Agatu

killing field: blood on the streets, charred bodies everywhere, Premium Times
Nigeria, Emmanuel Mayah, 18 March 2016)

Mrs. Onuminya was a victim of the brutal attack of various villages in Agatu by the FH which occurred in 2016. Her husband had gone missing, presumed dead. In the news article, she states that she would sometimes give the travelling FH food and water. The 36-year-old mother of 3 was hospitable to the FH, who have been cited in other news reports to have travelled from Chad and Mali to graze their cattle. The news article inculcates the perception of the FH as foreign and alien, reminding the reader of their nomadic lifestyle. The news report also humanises the victims of the conflict by disclosing farmer's hospitality. The FH and their cattle are allowed to roam and feed, evidencing the welcoming nature of the farmers as well as the terms of the cordial relationship between the Agatu and the FH. The emphasis placed upon the farmer's hospitality implies that the farmers must be the true victims in this conflict. The news article does not merely report that an attack has occurred, it also reveals who the victims are in this attack. Mrs Omuninya's name and age are included in this news story, whereas no personal information is disclosed about the perpetrators. The farmers are presented as a hospitable group who are warm and welcoming to the Fulani Herders. Their hospitality is purportedly repaid with violent attacks from the FH.

In representing the farmers as hospitable, the news reports suggest that the FH are brutal/cruel/vicious. It is only a hostile bunch that will repay kindness with aggression. Therefore, the presentation of the hospitality of the farmers can be argued to be a prime for the stereotype of the FH as Nomad Savage (see Table 6). By representing the farmers as hospitable, the brutal nature of the FH is reinforced to the reader. When the news reports explicate that the FH have travelled from other African countries, the nomadic lifestyle of the FH (with their unknown origin) is also highlighted to the reader. The presentation of FH as nomadic pastoralist and the welcoming story of the farmers narrated by the victim, could activate ideations of the FH as a nomadic aggressive group. Furthermore, nomadism is characterised as a violent lifestyle.

The farmers were also reported to be peace-loving people. An article published by *This Day* in 2017 notes that the farmers who are part of a *peaceful community* have continued to endure *unprovoked attacks and killings* (Okoh 2017). Similarly, another article by the same newspaper published in 2018 referred to the farmers as a *peace-loving* group that has *endured enough*. In most of the news articles analysed in this study, the farmers were often referred to as a *peaceful community* and *peace-loving* (Abonu 2016; *This Day* 2016; Jeremiah 2018; Duru 2020; Odunsi 2020). The article positions the farmers as a group that is generally peaceful, but consistently attacked by the FH. The mild temperament of the farmers is highlighted in the news article and juxtaposed with the killing nature of the FH. The farmers are characterised in the news as a calm and tranquil group who are free of aggression or hostility, while the FH are 'blood thirsty'. Furthermore, the violence of the FH is portrayed as having no valid cause or justification.

The findings in the first part of the study also revealed that the news reports about the Herders-Farmers' conflict tended to report the Farmers in a way that inferred that they were a law-abiding group. Following the killings which occurred in Bokkos in 2020, an article from the *Daily Post* (Odunsi 2020) points out that the Mwaghavul people in Plateau state are known to be *peace-loving*. It also notes that a reprisal against the FH – their attackers – will mean *taking laws into their own hands*. Additionally, another article from *This Day* (2016) claimed that the farmers were respecting the laws of the land as they were trying not to *take the law into their hands*. Likewise, following an attack in Southern Kaduna, an article from the *Daily Post* (2016) suggests that the farmers *had not taken laws into their hands*. These expressions covertly characterise the farmers as law-abiding, since they did not engage in reprisal attack against the FH despite *unprovoked* attacks. The peaceful nature of the farmers is highlighted in their response to the attacks by the FH. The news reports suggests that the farmers have prioritised dialogue by reporting attacks to the police, and that they have obeyed the law by not resorting to violence. This implies that FH have been impacted by farmer's violence and they have chosen to seek justice in their own way rather than to wait for the justice of the law to run its course. However, the impact of farmer's violence on the FH is rarely ever presented to the

reader; instead, readers are made aware of the manner of FH violence, its potential intent and its impact on the farmers.

Representation of the farmers	Descriptions of the farmers	Primed stereotypes
Farmers as hospitable and peaceful	Personalisation (naming, aging the victim), showing what the victim had done for the FH, peaceful and law-abiding, described as not engaging in acts of violence	FH as nomad savage, FH as warlike
Farmers indigenes	Losing ancestral homes, fleeing homes, fleeing to neighbouring countries, uninhabited locations in the forest, placed in internally displaced camps etc, overrun by herdsmen, armed herders grazing their cattle on land which belongs to farmers etc	FH as invaders

Table 6 Representation of the Farmers and Primes for stereotypes

According to the news reports, the farmers do not resort to ‘self-help’ techniques to prevent attacks. Instead, they wait for the rule of law and its version of justice to take its course. This is unlike the FH, who engage in vengeful killings, destroying farmlands and property. In the previous section, the findings in the study revealed that the FH were represented as a group that transgressed boundaries since they reneged on peace agreements and violated rules set up to prevent them from killing farmers. The representation of the FH as transgressing was argued to be a prime for the stereotype of the FH as Nomad Savage. Descriptions of the farmers as peaceful and law abiding is a prime for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage because it suggests to the reader that the FH are a hostile and aggressive group incapable of living according to the standards of society. They resort to violence rather than reporting to the authorities like the farmers because they are incapable of abiding by the law. The farmers are peaceful and law-abiding while the FH violate and overstep moral boundaries. Thus, the representations of the farmer’s nature as peaceful and as law abiding is capable of activating

the stereotypes of the FH as Nomad savage because it suggests to the reader that this something that the FH are incapable of doing.

4.1.2.2 *Farmers as indigenes*

The news reports analysed in the first part of this study revealed that the farmers were defined as those who have full ownership of the land because they were there 'first' (see Table 10). The analysis revealed that the press reported the farmer's ownership of the land was through ancestry. The farmers were described as a large number of people sacked and displaced from their *ancestral homes* (Eribake 2016; Duru 2016). Similarly, an article from *This Day* (2020) stated that the attacks on the farmers was genocide and a plot to take over their *ancestral land* (Shiklam 2020). The farmers who are believed to have obtained the land through ancestry were thus defined as the genuine landowners. By highlighting the farmer's loss of land passed down to them by their ancestors, the farmers are presented as the original landowners in the Middle Belt region. To be explicit: the farmer's land ownership has not come about by purchase, or by forced occupation, but by ancestry. This is worth noting because in the Nigerian context, indigeneity is tied to land ownership handed down by ancestry.

To further showcase the farmers as the genuine owners of the land, the news reports analysed in the first part of this study described the farmers as *displaced*. The displacement of the farmers was highlighted in three ways. Firstly, the farmers were described as *people fleeing their homes for fear of being killed by their assailants* (Vanguard Online 2018). Secondly, the farmers' displacement was emphasised in the news reports by revealing that the farmers were fleeing to camp sites or to deeper uninhabited spaces. Thirdly, the displacement of the farmers was highlighted via the descriptions of the FH taking over the evacuated spaces (*This Day* 2018). The description of the act of fleeing, the description of the places that the farmers have fled, as well as the occupation spaces call attention to the loss of what was 'naturally' handed over to the farmers by their ancestors. These descriptions highlight the loss of that which they obtained by 'being there first' (Maiangwa 2017). It also offers a dramatic proof of the effects of the actions of the FH. It is a picture of the loss of land suffered by the farmers, but it also underscores the helplessness of the farmer.

As mentioned in the previous section, where the findings of the study revealed that the FH are presented to the news reader as non-indigene and a prime for the stereotype of the FH as invader, the overt descriptions of the farmers as indigenes reminds the reader who the true owners of the land are – the farmers – as well as highlighting the foreignness of the FH. Reporting the FH occupation of vacated spaces connotes that the FH are occupiers. In describing the victimhood of the farmers in the Middle Belt, the news reports highlights that the farmers have suffered, engaging in a historical dialogue with the hegemony of Hausa-Fulani imperial agent's domination in the Middle Belt region. The description of the farmers as indigenes the Middle Belt reminds the reader that the Fulani Herders, who are related to the Hausa-Fulani, are violently claiming farmers' land by dislocating from their ancestral possession to Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps and to the bushes. It demonstrates to the reader that the Herders-Farmers conflict is no mere communal violence over land use but something much more sinister, implying a continuation of Sokoto Caliphate ethno-religious domination in the Middle Belt. The descriptions of the farmers as indigenes who have been displaced from their ancestral home serves a vital function of underscoring the impact of the Herders-Farmers conflict on the farmers but it may also function as the prime of the stereotype of the FH as invaders since the descriptions reveal that the FH are alien foreign (non-indigene) and occupiers (displacing and inhabiting spaces left vacant as a result of their violence).

4.1.2.3 Farmer's violence as self-defence

Though represented as peaceful, hospitable and indigenes, in some instances farmers were reported as engaging in attacks against the FH. However, the farmers' violence was reported differently to that perpetrated by the FH. The news reports tended to present farmers violence in ways that suggested that their actions were justifiable. For instance, in an article from the *Daily Post* (2017), it was observed that the farmers in a community in Southern Kaduna put up *a strong resistance* when the FH *invaded* the area (Tauna 2020). *This Day* (2017) noted that the herdsmen had attacked fishermen from a farming community in Adamawa and the *community launched a reprisal* attack. And in Southern Kaduna, *This Day* (2020) reported that the Adara community embarked on *reprisals attacks* (Wuyp 2020) following the *incessant*

killings by the FH. What these articles have in common is that they attempt to justify the farmers' violence by providing some form of context, indicating that farmer's violence was in response to FH violence. The news reports about farmer's violence suggest that the farmers had to defend themselves against the violence perpetuated by the FH.

Our findings in the first part of this chapter revealed that the news reports about the Herders-Farmer's conflict textually presented the farmers as a peaceful and hospitable group, so the notion that the 'peaceful' farmers could engage in violence is unthinkable. Therefore, the only possible reason why they would engage in bloodshed is to defend themselves against the FH. This is presented in contrast to the FH aim of ethnic domination.

The news reports utilise terms that contextualise the farmer's violence, suggesting to readers that they are acts of self-defence. Self-defence is considered less pernicious because it is a *response* rather than pre-meditated. Add to this, the news reports suggest FH violence cannot be contained by the Nigerian authorities.

An article by the *Vanguard* in 2018 begins with a headline 'Herdsman Attack, reprisal claim six lives in Adamawa'. The article reported that the *Bachama militia*, comprised of Bachama youths, mobilised and launched a reprisal attack after Fulani attacked their village (Fulani 2018). Although the Bachama youth are referred to as a *militia* who have murdered Fulani in Adamawa, the news report's headline suggests that that they have only done so in response to FH attack. The implication is that FH violence is a precursor for the farmers' violence. The FH attack farmers unprovoked, but the farmers attack FH in response to continuous attacks against them. The farmers' violence can be argued to be the farmers' way of protecting themselves from the FH. Here it can be noted that the term militia does not have negative connotations as it does with the Fulani Herdsmen. This is because the news article describes members of the Bachama militia as Bachama *youth*, humanising them as a group of young men who have mobilised to put up some form of defence against the continuous attacks of the FH. In this sense, the Bachama militia is a local force defending the Bachama community, not a military terrorist group. The news report strongly implies that the Bachama ethnic group is mobilised for the *survival* and *continuation* of the ethnic group rather than the destruction of

another ethnic group. In this sense, the ethnic identity of the Bachama is integral to the violence defining their attack as an ethnic one. However, the news report is gracious to them as it humanises their violence. They are not cold-blooded killers but guardians of their community. While the term 'militia' can be deemed a problematic word when associated with the Fulani Herders, it may be a positive word when associated with other ethnic groups in the Middle Belt.

The findings in the first part of this study revealed that in reporting the news of farmers' violence, the news report manages to portray the farmers as victims in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. The news reports contextualised the farmers' violence by suggesting that the farmers attacked in self-defence i.e. their violence was a response to the FH violence. They are not an instigator of violence in the conflict, rather their actions are in opposition to FH violence. They are victims first and it is in this victimhood that they are forced to respond to the aggression of the FH. The farmers' violence fits within a moral frame, since it serves to protect and defend. Consequently, the term militia doesn't have a negative connotation when attached to the farmers because their militia are comprised of young people defending their community from the continuous attacks of the FH.

4.1.2.4 Summary for farmers as victims

In the news of the Herders-Farmers' conflict, the farmers were represented as the true victims whom violence has been enacted upon. They are described as hospitable, peaceful and law-abiding citizens who have been victimised by the FH. The hospitable nature of the farmers was exemplified through the personalisation of the victims of the attacks of the FH. In personalising the victims of FH attacks, the news report adapted a victim mode of reporting, highlighting the ruthlessness of the actions of the FH. It was argued that the personalisation of the victims of the FH attack in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict highlights the suffering of the farmers, but it can also be a prime for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage because the presence of the victim in the news is evidence of the FH violence. Additionally, the farmers were referred to as a peaceful and law-abiding people who do not easily resort to violent tactics. Highlighting the farmers as peaceful and law-abiding implicitly suggests that the FH are hostile and above the law. Furthermore, the farmers were reported as indigenes with ancestral ties to

the land. The indigeneity of the farmers was described in their displacement, fears of further attacks and the FH occupation of abandoned territories. Finally, in instances where the news reported attacks perpetrated by the farmers, the context for their attack was provided. In those news reports, the farmers were described in similar terms as the FH. However, the words had different signification when applied to the actions of the farmers because the news provided context for their actions. Consequently, certain words which applied to the FH with negative connotations have positive connotations when attached to the farmers. The actions of the farmers were justified and rationalised, implicitly defined as self-defence against the attacks of the FH.

The representation of the farmers as the victims in the conflict reveals two things. Firstly, the news report presents the FH as playing an agentic role in the conflict. The news report ascribes a higher degree of blameworthiness on the FH. Words which have a negative connotation when attached to the FH may serve a different purpose when attached to the farmers. Secondly, the descriptions of the farmers in the news report indicates a negative reflection of the FH. Metaphorically speaking, the news report serves as a mirror that reflects varying images of the non-state actors in the conflict. The news reports about the Herders-Farmers' conflict presents the farmers as primarily innocent whose violence is responsive rather than instigative.

Furthermore, descriptions of the farmers as indigenes who have lost their homes covertly defines the conflict as an ethnic one. This is because territoriality is often connected to an ethnic group's identity in Nigeria (Adebanwi 2013). The loss of one's land implies the loss of a vital aspect of one's ethnic identity. In describing the farmers as indigenes of the land, the news report not only frames the conflict as an ethnic one but defines the conflict as a 'new war'. Kaldor (2013) notes that new wars are characterised by identity politics; while FH violence is constructed around their ethnic identity, the farmers' loss is constructed around their ethnic identity. The Herders-Farmers' conflict is further classified as a new war in the reported displacement of the farmers in the conflict. Kaldor (2013) also proposed that actors in new wars will capture territories through the political means such as mass displacement.

The next section will discuss the findings of the source analysis of the news reports analysed in the first part of this study.

4.1.3 Sources as non-state actors in the news

In this section, the sources present in the news stories analysed will be displayed and their contribution to the representation of the non-state actors in the news will be discussed. Specifically, this section will disclose the different sources identified within the news stories and outline how these sources contribute to the primes of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

4.1.3.1 *Sourcing patterns*

The first part of the study discovered that there were various types of sources cited in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. They were referred to in the news report, appearing in various sections of the news, revealing the significance of their statements. The sources were classified into 3 groups according to literature on the types of sources (Gans 2004; Tiffen et al. 2014):

1. Nonelite sources
2. Quasi-elite sources
3. Elite sources

The source analysis further revealed that a typical news report could contain all three groups of sources, depending on the length of the news article. However, the findings in this study suggest that statements from non-elite sources and quasi-elite were the ones most referred to. The implications of these findings are discussed below.

4.1.3.2 *Nonelite sources*

This study classed a group of sources and referred to them as nonelite sources because of their position in society. These are ordinary citizens who are knowledgeable about the conflict and its concerns because of their proximity to the event. They include survivors, 'eyewitness', 'anonymous sources', 'residents of the affected village', who are either children or adults from any attack perpetrated by the FH or the farmers (see Table 7). This study observed that when

farmers were attacked, the nonelite sources were cited foremost. However, when FH were attacked, nonelite sources from this group were rarely included and instead a representative (quasi-elite source) spoke on their behalf.

Nonelite sources in the news	Victims, eyewitnesses, relatives, anonymous, resident from affected village.
	Statement appeared in the headline and the first few paragraphs of the news.
	Their presence in the news as victims makes them the news.
	Statement different from elite source

Table 7 Non-elite sources in the News of the Herders-Farmers conflict

Nonelite sources from the farming community tended to appear in the first few paragraphs of the news articles analysed in this study, telling the reader what had occurred in their own words and usually quoted directly. Frequently, presses published the details provided by the nonelite sources in the headlines and the first few paragraphs of the news, indicating that their version of events was acceptable or valid (rather than spurious or in doubt). The details from elite sources were included at the end of most news articles, though often these details contradicted what the nonelite sources had stated. Additionally, the statements from elite sources were not direct quotes but references to what they had shared about the event. The nonelite sources from the farming community also confirmed attacks that had occurred in their villages, providing a breakdown of events to news correspondents.

The newspaper articles analysed in the first part of this study use the inverted pyramid style of news reporting: presenting the most important aspect of the event at the beginning of the news article (Dor 2003). The presence of nonelite sources in the first few paragraphs of the news, preceding statements from other sources, indicates their importance. It also implies

that their statements are noteworthy and implying that their statement is a factual account of the attack. For instance, in a news article published by *Daily Post* (2018) following an attack in Taraba state, the headline read: '10 killed as FH attack Kaduna community'. The article begins with the statement, 'No fewer than 10 persons were on Friday night killed...' This is followed by a narration of the event by an 'eyewitness' who states that 10 people lost their lives following an attack by the FH (Nseyen 2018). The presence of the number of deaths proposed by the 'eyewitness' in the headline and the first paragraph suggests that what the nonelite source has told the journalist is accurate. Since the news headline is designed to supply the news reader with the principle information contained in the news item (Dor 2003), information that follows it is deemed accurate. Although they are ordinary citizens, their statement has been accepted as the valid version of events.

To further showcase the precedence, and by implication the *relevance* of the statements from nonelite sources in the news, statements from other sources that contradicted what the nonelite source said were included at the end of the news article. For example a news article reported in their headline 'Herdsman invade Tiv Community in Nasarawa, kill 6' (Godwin 2018). The details in the headline are further confirmed in the first few paragraphs and attributed to a survivor – a nonelite source. However, at the end of the news report an official source is cited, claiming that only 3 people lost their lives. The statement from the elite source can be argued to have been included to confirm that the event had occurred. However, the nonelite sources are foregrounded to provide precise details about the event.

Nonelite sources were also included to prime stereotypes of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers conflict. In an article from *This Day* with the headline 'Despite security Deployment, Herdsmen Killings in Benue State Continue', the first source cited in the news was an eyewitness. According to the eyewitness, the attack, which had occurred early in the morning, was perpetuated by the *Herdsmen* who had come with *sophisticated weapons*, shooting anyone in sight (Obi et al. 2018). The news headline describes the failure of a security measure to prevent further killings in Benue state. The headline implies that the measures put in place to deter further killings was not able to forestall the attacks of the FH against the

farmers. Therefore, the headline suggests that the FH are above the law, which is a prime for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage. Moving on to the main body of the article: multiple sources are cited, but the eyewitness, a man named Joseph Anawa, is the first to be cited as a news source. He provides a list of names of those who had been confirmed dead following the reported attack. He also narrates the confrontation between the FH and the combined forces of the military and the Nigerian Police Force with the FH gaining the upper hand. His narration presents the FH as a terrorist group who possess sophisticated weapons and who oppose the Nigerian authorities. Statements from news sources can present information that can prime stereotypes of the FH as both warlike and as nomad savage. The non-elite source in the news article from *This Day* described the FH as carrying out the attacks in the morning with sophisticated weapons, shooting anyone on sight. In the previous section, the findings from the first part of the study noted that the news reports presented the FH as gunmen in possession of weapons that transformed them from mere herdsman to dangerous gunmen. The eyewitness statement in this particular example provides details of the attacks that associate the FH with warring rather than with herding. Furthermore, the attacks are 'ongoing', which emphasises the continued threat. The eyewitness statement contains descriptions that can prime stereotypes of the FH as warlike. The previous section also revealed that news reports highlighted the FH as a group that are transgressing because they cannot be contained by the rules of civil society. The eyewitness narration that details FH being able to overwhelm the Nigerian Police Force and the Army connects to representations of the FH as transgressing. This is something that the news article's headline hints at when it claims that FH continue killing despite security deployment. What is notable then is that the descriptions of the FH in the news headline and descriptions of the FH from the nonelite source are in an associated network of the stereotype of the Fulani as Herdsmen connecting the node of the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage to the node of the stereotype of the FH as warlike. As discussed earlier, the activation of one node may lead to the activation of a related node. The implicit message contained within the statement of the eyewitness and the news headline highlight the actions of the FH in the conflict while also priming stereotypes of the FH.

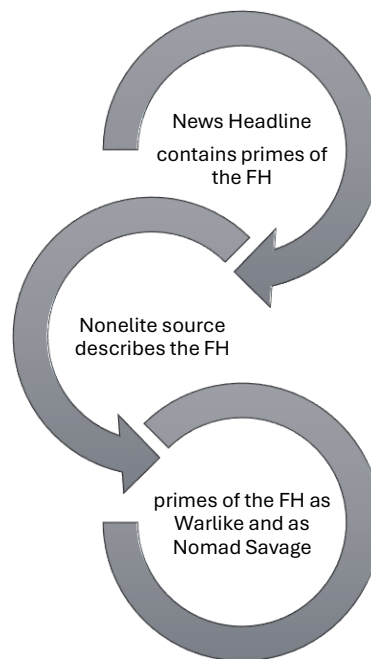


Figure 5 Covert leading by non-elite sources

Similarly, in an article which had the headline ‘Two beheaded in fresh attack on Agatu by armed Herdsmen’, the incident was confirmed by a relative to one of the victims in the attack (Bankole 2020). The headline of the news article provides graphic detail of the attack believed to have been perpetrated by the FH – the beheading of two men. The graphic description of the actions of the FH within news reports was argued to be a representation of the FH as brutal/cruel/vicious which is a trait for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage. The nonelite source, identified as an uncle of one of the deceased, claimed that the FH beheaded both men in an unprovoked attack, leaving with their heads. It is a bizarre incident reported by the press and corroborated by the nonelite source who claims that his nephew would be buried without his head. The headline and the statement from the nonelite source provide graphic proof of the savagery of the FH who not only attack a village ‘unprovoked’ (and in a ‘fresh attack’) but decapitate and steal the heads of their victims with them. Additionally, the description of the FH as ‘armed’ herdsmen was noted (in the previous section), suggesting that the FH are no ordinary herdsmen but gunmen, a trait for the stereotype of the FH as warlike. Likewise, in describing the FH as ‘besieging’ Ologba community, the attack is not the regular communal

violence between the FH and the farmers but something more sinister. Equally, describing the attack as a *fresh one*, suggests to the reader that there was a previous attack by the FH, which the reported attack follows. The portrayal of the actions of the FH represent the FH as ethnic militant/terrorists, a trait for the stereotype of the FH as warlike. The 'graphic proof' of the FH attack is a representation of the FH as brutal/cruel/vicious, which is a trait for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage. The representation of the FH in this manner is attributed to the news source, an ordinary citizen, directly quoted within the news report. The primes of the stereotypes of the FH as nomad savage and warlike appear in news article's headline and in the first few paragraphs, suggesting to the reader that this is an accurate representation of the FH in the conflict.

Contrastingly, source analysis revealed that nonelite sources from the FH were rarely cited in the news. A news article that referred to nonelite sources from the Fulani Herder's community published by the *Premium Times* in 2017 had a headline titled 'Investigation: How latest Mambilla Plateau violence unfolded; leaving deaths, destruction'. The nonelite source is an 18-year-old boy who expresses the effects of the Herders-Farmers' conflict to his life in one sentence 'It was the worst day of my life'. He does not provide details of the attack on his community, neither does he talk about the relationship between the Farmers and the Herders in community. One might argue that the nonelite source in this news story is treated differently because it is an investigative news article rather than a news article breaking the news about an attack. However, during the aftermath of the attack in Agatu, Benue state in 2016, the investigative news report contained quotations from members of the farming community (*Premium Times* titled 'SPECIAL REPORT: Inside Agatu killing field: blood on the streets, charred bodies everywhere'). Thus, it can be argued that statements from the nonelite source of Fulani Herders have been treated differently when it is included in news. It can also be argued that statements from FH nonelite sources did not perform the same function of priming stereotypes through implicit messages like the statements of nonelite sources from the farming community did.

To sum up, the nonelite sources in this study were described as ordinary citizens who were attributed in the news report about the Herders-Farmers' conflict, such as victims, survivors, eyewitnesses and relatives of the victims. The news articles in this study tended to include statements from the nonelite sources from the farming community in the news headline and in the first four to five paragraphs, underscoring the importance and relevance of the source statements to the news event. News writing norms in the inverted pyramid suggest that the most important aspect of the news appears at the start of the news report and that the headline contains the most important detail of what is being reported. It can therefore be argued that by publishing the farmers' version of events in the headline and the first couple of paragraphs of the news report, the sources from the farmers have defined the news as well as the presentation of the non-state actors. Where two or more body counts of victims are given, the number as stated by the farmers is given first, implying that the press has accepted their version of the event. The nonelite sources from the farming community can be argued to be leading the interpretation of events and the ensuing interpretations that news readers may have after reading the news article. Although statements from the nonelite sources in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict appear at the start of the news report, they covertly lead interpretations of the events reported in the news. Comparatively, victims and eyewitnesses of farmers' attacks against the FH were rarely interviewed; a representative often spoke on their behalf. The findings in the study indicate that nonelite sources defined the FH as the perpetrators, potentially priming stereotypes of the FH.

The appearance and acceptance of details about the event from nonelite sources in the news indicates a change in sourcing patterns in conflict news reporting. Scholars suggest in conflict news reporting that the press will rely on elite sources for the details of an event (Reich 2015). However, the findings of this study seem to suggest a shift in the journalistic practice sourcing in armed conflict as a result of the accessibility of digital technologies (Kampf and Liebes 2013; Kampf 2014; Gonen 2018). Journalists can get in contact with victims, eyewitness or anonymous sources in remote locations through mobile phones. Additionally,

the acceptance of nonelite sources in the news also provides a dramatic display of victims which may impact on the perception of the conflict (Kampf and Liebes 2013).

4.1.3.3 Quasi-elite sources

The qualitative analysis of news articles revealed another source: the quasi-elite source. These sources serve as an extension of the people; they stand on the line between official and unofficial sources. They are similar to elite sources because they hold a position in society which lends credibility. However, they are unaffiliated with the government, representing themselves and the communities they belong to (Miller and Kurpius 2010). These sources hold a more 'representative' status for the people because of their ties to the ethnic or religious identities of those they represent (see Table 8). Additionally, quasi-elite sources are not supported by strong public relations machines (Tiffen et al. 2014). Although they are there to raise an awareness of the challenges of the groups they represent, they are different from the politicised public relation machines associated with the government and other elite sources. Based on this definition, quasi-elite sources in this study comprised of religious leaders representing groups such as Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), and local rulers, as well as ethnic group representatives such as the Idoma Initiative, Southern Kaduna People's Union (SOKAPU), Plateau Youth Council (PYC), Irigwe Development Association (IDA), Jukun Development Association (JDA), Adara Development Association (ADA) etc as well as trade leaders such as Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeder's Association of Nigeria (MACBAN).

Quasi-elite sources in the news	Representatives of the affected groups, local leaders, religious leaders etc.
Position of statements	Statements appeared in the headline and first few paragraphs of the article Statements from farming QE combined with nonelite sources from farming community
FH quasi-elite source	Statements from QE sources from the FH portrayed differently Provides details, information and background to the attack reported in the news.

Table 8 Quasi-elite sources in the news of the Herders-Farmers Conflict

Sources in this group served as a mouthpiece for the interests of the group they represented, raising awareness and drawing attention to the attacks that had occurred. They would often confirm the occurrence of an attack and proffer possible reasons for the occurrence of the attacks. As an example, an article by *Vanguard* (2020) reported that a traditional ruler in Benue State acknowledged an attack had occurred in his community. He is specially quoted as stating that the FH came in a reprisal attack on his subjects. Similarly, in an article published by the *Vanguard* (Wuyo 2020), the president of the Adara Development Association (ADA) confirmed that 17 people had been killed in a village in Kaduna. In the *Daily Post* (Odunsi 2017), the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeder's Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) reported the loss of lives and cattle in attacks in Taraba state. In addition to confirming attacks against their groups, quasi-elite sources would also call on the government and other influential groups to intervene in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. For instance, an article published by *This Day* (Okoh and Okobi 2016) reported that the Jukun Development Association (JDA) *urged* the state governor to make the necessary efforts to prevent further attacks against their people. Similarly, the MACBAN in an article in the *Daily Post* (Odunsi 2017) appealed to the Nigerian federal government and relief agencies to intervene. Correspondingly, in an article published by the *Vanguard* (Hassan-Wuyo 2020), the president of the Adara Development Association lamented

over the attack in southern Kaduna and he called on the authorities to deal with the perpetrators.

Just as it was observed with the nonelite source's statement appearing in the news article's headline and the first few paragraphs, statements attributed to quasi-elite sources were often presented at strategic points within the news article. For instance, the headline of an article from the *Vanguard* (2020) stated that '315 killed by *armed* herdsmen in my domain, *Benue monarch* cries out as *marauders* invade more communities, kill 2 women, three others, injure scores' (Duru 2020). The headline contains graphic and dramatic descriptions perpetrated by the FH since they are believed to have killed 315 people and invaded more communities. Furthermore, the headline refers to the FH as marauders – a group who roam around looking for things to steal. The FH are represented as brutal/cruel/vicious, a trait of the stereotype of the FH as Nomad Savage. The quasi-elite source in the headline also refers to the FH as 'armed herdsmen', transforming the FH from cattle herders to gunmen. Moving on to the main body of news article, the quasi-elite source reveals that the attacks were a *follow up* to a perceived offence by the farmers against the FH. According to the quasi-official elite source, a Fulani Herder had led his cattle into a farm, when he was warned off by some farmers; he attacked them with a machete, and was consequently arrested and detained. However, his *fellow herders* thought he had been killed and so they went on a *reprisal* killing. The quasi-elite source's narration of events that led to the death of farmers highlights the lawless nature of the FH who, due to a perceived offence, rush to kill the farmers. The narration suggests that the FH are transgressors who not only attack at the slightest thought of an offence against them, but mete out their own justice which is in stark contrast with the farmers who had the Fulani Herder arrested by the police. The narration presents the Farmers as law-abiding and the FH as transgressing, a trait for the stereotype of the FH as Nomad Savage. Just as it was noted in the news story's headline, the phrase 'armed herdsmen' appeared in the main body of the article, an implicit indicators of the FH tendency to engage in violent acts of criminality, priming the stereotype of the FH as Warlike.

The function of the quasi-elite source in the news is typified in the following ways: the source is defined by his 'representativeness' of the people being attacked in his role of confirming the attacks; he establishes the veracity of the attacks by the FH which have led to the death of 315 people; and he is attributed with statements that contain descriptions of the FH which may prime the stereotype of the FH among readers. The quasi-official source speaks as a representative of his community, who is knowledgeable of the attacks that have occurred in his community. Because of his position as a leader in his community, he seems to be a credible and reliable source (Miller and Kurpius 2010). His statement appears in the headline and the main body of the news article, verifying his descriptions of the FH. In this sense, the quasi-elite source is a news shaper, providing information and background concerning the attack reported in the news (Soley 1992). He is not directly impacted by the attack being reported but he represents those who have been attacked and so his statements and the primes they contain are capable of strengthening the reader's interpretation of the non-state actors in diverse ways.

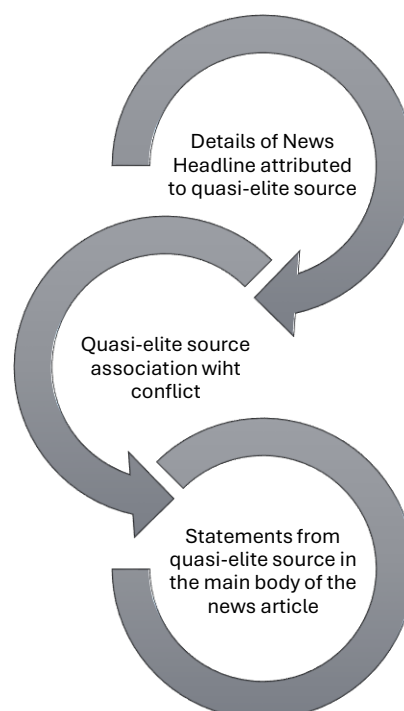


Figure 6 Overt leading by Quasi-elite sources in the news of the Herders-Farmers' conflict

The quasi-elite source can be argued to be leading audience interpretation of news event by the virtue of his position in society and his knowledge of the event (Figure 6). His presence in the news and the statements he has made about the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict may activate stereotypic interpretations of the non-state actors. Since the statement in the headline is attributed to the quasi-elite source, it can be argued that he is *overtly* leading interpretations of the news. This is in contrast to non-elite sources who lead interpretations of events in a discreet manner because statements in the news article's headline are not attributed to them.

Additionally, in defining the non-state actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict, this study discovered that the press would sometimes include statements from non-elite and quasi-elite sources in the news article in an integrated manner. In some instances, the nonelite sources served to confirm the attack while the quasi-elite source provided statements which supported what the nonelite source had said. After an attack in Benue and Plateau state in January 2018, *This Day* published an article with the headline, 'Again, Herdsmen sack Benue Community, Kill four in Plateau' (Okoh and Adinoyi 2018). The news article was divided into two parts: the first part describes an attack in Benue state, while the second part describes an attack in Plateau state. The leading paragraph states that the suspected herdsmen went on a *rampage*, attacking Tse-Torkula in Benue state for the *umpteenth* time. In the third paragraph, an eyewitness claims that the herdsmen stormed the village early in the morning, burning houses. In the sixth paragraph, the local leader of the Tiv people claimed that the FH had killed 73 people, including children, pregnant women, and old men because some Tiv people had allegedly killed 73 cattle. The headline and the leading paragraph suggest to the reader that an attack has occurred before, but this is only mentioned in passing, reinforcing the 'everydayness' of FH violence. The first few paragraphs of the news story set the tone for interpreting the non-state actors in the conflict. It states that 'again' the herdsmen had gone on a 'rampage', killing vulnerable members of the farming community, leaving scores injured and several others walking a long distance away from their homes. The

FH are explicitly represented as both brutal/cruel/vicious and as transgressing which are primes for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage. The detail of the FH killing 73 people for the 73 cattle lost is particularly significant because it presents the FH as vengeful. The level of vengeance is portrayed as inhumane because they have attacked humans in retaliation for the loss of animals. Representations of the FH as vengeful has been argued to be a prime for the stereotype of FH as Warlike. The traits for the stereotype of the FH is highlighted in the headline, which states that the attacks occurred in two separate places. While this may seem like a journalistic technique, to remind readers that an attack has occurred before, the way the attack is described presents the FH as a ruthless group constantly attacking the farmers. Had the news article presented some information about the previous attack in the lead paragraph, it would have presented a more conflict-sensitive report of the event. However, the expression that an attack had happened for the 'umpteenth time' suggests a content bias in the reportage (Boudana 2016). Moving on to statements from the nonelite source in this particular article, they claimed that the FH stormed Tse-Torkula village early in the morning, burning homes and chasing them away. Contained within the nonelite source statement are dramatic characterisations of the FH as brutal/cruel/vicious for disrupting the normalcy of routine. Burning homes and causing the farmers to flee primes for the stereotype of the FH as Nomad Savage. Likewise, the fleeing farmers highlights the loss of the farmers' symbol of indigeneity, a prime for the stereotype of the FH as Invader. The primes of the Nomad Savage are also contained within the dramatic narrations from a quasi-elite source, who claims that the victims of the recent attacks were children, pregnant women, and old men.

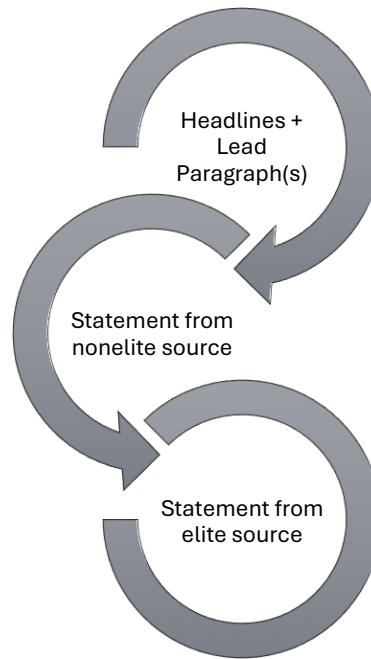


Figure 7 Process of covert integrated leading of interpretation to prime stereotypes of non-state Actors in the News Coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

Put together, the headline and the lead paragraph(s), as well as the statements from the nonelite and quasi elite sources, covertly provide an integrated leading interpretation for the FH. What this means is that the descriptions of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict are provided by these news sources in a manner that integrates statements from both source types to invisibly guide the reader's interpretation of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers conflict (see Figure 7). Moreover, the integrated interpretations of the nonstate actors contained in the statements of these sources activate the associated network of interconnected stereotype nodes.

Similarly, in an article published by *Daily Post*, the headline reported 'Herdsman killings: Tiv leader reacts as Nasarawa victims recount ordeal' (Odunsi 2018). The details in the headline have been attributed to the quasi-elite source and nonelite source from the farming community. Both the quasi-elite source and the nonelite source are reacting to attacks. The headline suggests that this is a continuation of prior reporting of the killings perpetuated by the FH, while the lead paragraph states that the Tiv settlements are still under attack, once more implying that the FH are continuously attacking the farmers. The sense of continuous attacks from the FH is a trait for the stereotype of the FH as Warlike. Later in the article, the quasi-elite

source refers to the FH as *marauders*, potentially highlighting the FH as brutal/cruel/vicious, a prime for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage. The quasi-elite source also claims that only three villages belonging to Tiv people in Nasarawa have been spared from the violence of the Fulani Herder. The notion that the FH have attacked most Tiv villages in Nasarawa state is a trait of the stereotype of the FH as Warlike because it suggests that they are engaging in some form of symbolic violence against Tiv people. Further on in the article, non-elite sources referred to as victims – one of whom could not escape the machete cuts from the FH because of his disability – described their encounters. Here, the press employed a high level of dramatisation, offering descriptions of the victims of the attack, personalising them by providing names, as well as details of their living conditions, to increase the emotional impact of the news. In so doing, the FH are highlighted as brutal/cruel/vicious, a trait for the stereotype of the FH as Nomad Savage. Combined with the reminder of the FH engaging in ‘continuous’ killings in the news article’s headline, the FH are presented as hostile, a notion supported by the reported reactions of the quasi-elite and nonelite source in the headline. Additionally, statements from these sources contain primes for the stereotypes of the FH as nomad savage and warlike, thus it can be argued that the sources are overtly leading interpretations of the FH in an integrated manner. Their statements coincide with one another, guiding reader’s interpretations of the FH in ways that are stereotypic (see Figure 8).

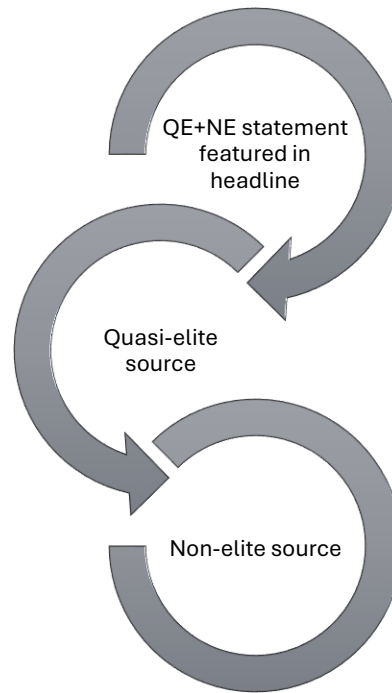


Figure 8 Quasi-elite source and non-elite source overt integrated leading interpretation of primes of non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

Moving on to the Fulani Herders: when the quasi-elite source representing the FH were referred to in the news, they were calling attention to the loss those they represent had suffered. Through press releases, the quasi-elite sources from the FH provided background information on the attacks the FH suffered. Source analysis revealed that the statements from the quasi-elite source representing the FH were treated differently compared to statements from the quasi-elite source representing the farming community. Firstly, news articles quoted what FH representatives had to say about their loss using locutions that presented the FH in a problematic way. For instance, following the death of Fulani people in Taraba state, a press release from the Fulani association was reported in the *Daily Post* with the headline 'MACBAN blows hot over killing of Fulani Herders, cattle in Taraba.' By stating that MACBAN (Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeder's Association of Nigeria) blows hot over their loss, the news report falls short of stating that MACBAN is blowing hot air. This could mean two things. First, blowing hot air is an idiomatic expression used to imply that a person is not sincere (Cambridge Dictionary 2022). The news report's headline may have shortened the expression to 'blows hot', a rhetorical device referred to as anapodoton which is the shortening of an expression without fully

expressing it. In referring to the MACBAN as blowing hot, it suggests that the details in the press release are untrue and should therefore not be believed. The news report presents their statement as one which is not to be believed or to be taken seriously. The experience of the FH as victims is portrayed as an exaggeration, relegating the FH to the role of the sole perpetrators in the conflict. Secondly, the headline could also imply that they are angry. According to a linguistic study on anger in American English (Nigerian English is heavily influenced by both British and American English), anger is often expressed metaphorically as heat (Lakoff and Kövecses 1987). By describing the group representative of the FH, MACBAN, as 'blowing hot', the news report implies that they are angry. This is probably true; however, the word choice is problematic within the context of representations of the FH as hostile and aggressive. Since MACBAN represents the Fulani cattle breeders, these descriptions may potentially prime the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage. The headline seems to intentionally leave room for multiple interpretations, none of which are relevant to what is actually being reported: aka, the death of Fulani Headers in Taraba. Furthermore, it presents the quasi-elite source of the FH as the news itself (Sigal 1986). Reporting MACBAN as blowing hot makes MACBAN the subject of the news rather than the Fulani Herders. The news reports leads the reader to interpret the FH (even when they are outlining the impact of the conflict on them) in problematic ways.

To recap, the source analysis revealed that various group representatives were reported as sources confirming attacks on their ethnic or religious group. This study classified them as quasi-elite sources because they serve as an extension of the people. They also hold positions of power and privilege in their respective communities, straddling the line between elite and non-elite. They served as mouthpieces for their, community calling attention to the effects of attacks on their people, appealing to the government to offer permanent solutions to the Herders-Farmers' conflict. The idea of Nigeria as nations within a nation (Bamidele 2015) holds true here. Each ethnic group in the Middle Belt affected by the conflict has a representative who draws attention to the suffering of those they represent. Quasi-elite sources can be argued to be the news shapers because they are not often impacted by the conflict.

However, they can provide background information for the attacks (Soley 1992). They are positioned as legitimate and trustworthy members of the community that they belong to.

Quasi-elite sources from the farmers guided interpretations of the FH in the following ways: quasi-elite sources could overtly guide interpretations of the FH when their statements were quoted in the headline of the news report; quasi-elite sources provided statements in conjunction with non-elite sources in an integrated manner to covertly guide interpretations of the FH, since their statements appeared in the main body of the news report.

The analysis of the news reports revealed the selected news reports tended to include quasi-elite sources from the farming community more than from the FH community. It was noted that when the quasi-elite sources from the FH community were included in the news, they were reported in problematic ways. The words used to describe their expressions could lead interpretations that may prime stereotypic perceptions of the FH.

4.1.3.4 Elite sources

The third category of sources identified in the qualitative analysis were elite sources. The classification of government, politicians and security agencies as official sources is in line with research that suggests that the press often include official sources whom the audience might perceive as legitimate because of their status and privilege in society (Berkowitz et al. 1993; Berkowitz 2019). Elite sources included Nigerian government officials such as governors, senators, politicians, government representatives and other government officials. It also included members of security agencies such as the police, soldiers, and civilian joint task forces (see Table 9). The security personnel were sometimes referred to in news reports to confirm events such as attacks against the farmers or the FH as well as to confirm the number of casualties.

Elite sources in the news about the Herders- Farmers' conflict **Police personnel, government officials, politicians, governors, senators etc**

	Confirming the incident, providing contradicting details from other source types in the news.
	Details provided at the end of the news report, except for when Fulani are attacked then they are presented in the headline and first few paragraphs.

Table 9 Elite sources in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

Government officials and security personnel, such as police or soldiers, were often cited, confirming attacks and the number of deaths, survivors and the impact of the attacks. However, the analysis revealed that there were differences in the details provided by the elite sources and other sources in the news. Furthermore, statements from the elite sources usually appeared at the end of the news articles (with exception to details from the FH quasi-elite source). The number of deaths in the news headline and lead paragraph often supplied by nonelite and quasi-elite sources from the farming community were in contrast to those reported by the elite sources. For instance, a news article from *Daily Post Online* claimed that 10 people had been killed following an attack in two villages in Taraba state (Godwin 2017). However, the police spokesman said that only 6 people were killed. Another news report about an attack in Adamawa claimed that 15 people had been killed in four communities; the source for the number of casualties had come from the 'locals' (Godwin 2018). However, the elite source confirmed that only 12 people had died. The format of the inverted pyramid suggest that the most important aspect of news will be placed at the top while the least important detail will appear at the end of the news article. The appearance of details from nonelite and quasi-elite source before elite sources in the news suggests that the details provided by the former is more relevant than that provided by the latter. It also implies a preference for the details provided by the nonelite and quasi-elite sources from the farming community over those provided by the elite sources. Although the elite sources are included to confirm the occurrence of an event, the background and information about the attack is often furnished by the nonelite

and quasi-elite source from the farming community. Their presence at the end of the article suggests that they are not being perceived as the legitimate informer of the details of attacks against the farmers. It may suggest to the reader that the details provided prior to those attributed to the elite source are the accurate facts of the events.

Statements from the elite sources also often negated statements from the quasi-elite source of the FH. However, while statements from elite sources that negated details from the sources in the farming community appeared at the end of the news report, statements from elite sources which negated statements from the FH representative appeared at the beginning of the news report. For instance, in the article published by *Vanguard* (2018), the headline read that 'At least 10 die in Taraba farmer-herder clashes -police'. However, the FH representative claimed that they had lost 19 people in the attack, which was believed to have been perpetuated by the Bachama *militia*. The headline defines the number of deaths as at least 10 people and cites the police as the source of this information. The authenticity of this information is established in the reader's mind by placing the information in the headline and the first paragraph of the news report. It could even be argued that the statement from the elite source set the tone for how the article, and the event it reports, might be understood. The statement from the elite source negates what the FH quasi-elite source has to say. In presenting differing figures from both sources, while foregrounding those proposed by the elite source, the article implies that the details from the quasi-elite source of the FH are not trustworthy and that the elite statement should be accepted, as it is more accurate.

The difference between the treatment of statements from the sources of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict is in the role that the elite sources play. Statements from farming community sources are included in the headline; statements from elite sources are positioned at the end of the story, foregrounding the validity of the details from sources in the farming community. Conversely, statements from sources for attacks against the FH are hidden in the body of the news with elite sources defining the details in the headline of the news report. Although the quasi-elite source for the attack on the FH is cited in the article, the acceptance of the numbers of death from the elite source renders the information from the FH quasi-elite

source unreliable. The inclusion of the statement from the elite source in the headline suggests that the details provided by the elite source is accurate. The positioning of the statement from the elite source, and its negation of the details provided by the FH, is an example of how the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict may contribute to the perception of the FH as the sole perpetrators of the conflict. The FH are perceived as the aggressors in the conflict; therefore, their loss is often downplayed in the news. News about attacks against the FH are rarely reported in the news. When an elite source negates the details of an attack against them, it diminishes their suffering in the conflict. It also suggests that the elite sources can provide authoritative statements about the conflict, fulfilling their role as official sources when they are included in the news reports about attacks against the FH. However, their role as authoritative and legitimate bearers of the fact is often contested when reporting about attacks against the farmers.

Furthermore, analysis revealed that the elite sources mostly confirmed details of an attack, rarely ever providing background information. For instance, an article published by *Premium Times* included a headline which read, 'Six villagers missing after suspected herders attack Benue' (Adebayo 2020). The first paragraph noted that 6 people had gone missing following an attack on a community in Benue. The news report includes the names of the missing persons, detailing how they were killed by the FH. The number of the deceased is defined by nonelite sources. The nonelite sources claim that the FH attacked them with guns and machetes and burnt the other victims on a bridge in front of the village. The statement from the nonelite source defines the FH as a vicious group, burning their victims with their property. Afterwards, an elite source, the police spokesperson, confirms the attack but states that only three people had died. The news article includes two different source types with different details about the attack. However, the nonelite source leads the interpretation of the non-state actors in the news being reported; they furnish the reader with detailed information about what unfolded and how they managed to escape. The elite source confirms that there was an attack and that is where their contribution ends. They do not provide any background information about how the attack occurred; they only state the number of victims in the attack. Both the

elite and nonelite source share a similar role in the news report. However, the nonelite source provides background information, serving as an eyewitness to the event. It can be argued that the positioning of the nonelite statements in the headline and first few passages suggests that the details they provide are to be considered more accurate. Placement indicates whose version of the event is 'true' and 'believable', influencing how the news is understood and by extension how the non-state actors in the conflict may be perceived. It also suggests that the nonelite and quasi-elite source from the farming community play the role of providing a fuller picture of events, which is different from the role of the elite source who merely confirms the event.

4.1.3.5 Summary of the sources in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict

To summarise, the analysis of sources in the news disclosed the three classifications of sources as proposed in the literature review. The analysis also observed the different functions of the news sources in constructing the representations of the non-state actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict (see Table 10).

The quasi-elite sources, who are usually the ethnic or religious representatives of the non-state actors in the conflict, were often cited as confirming the occurrence of an attack as well as the number of victims. These sources also called on the authorities to act to prevent the killings of those whom they represented. They worked hand-in-hand with nonelite sources, such as victims, family members and eyewitnesses, in providing detailed information about the attacks. Nonelite sources from the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt were often included in the news with their statements appearing in the headline and the first few paragraphs in the news reports.

Contrastingly, the analysis revealed that the nonelite sources from the FH were rarely referred to in the news articles analysed for this study. The news stories would instead include statements from the representatives of the FH, providing background information about the attacks on the communities they represent. Furthermore, the quasi-elite sources representing the FH were often presented in a negative manner, potentially instilling readers with negative interpretations and perceptions of the FH. The quasi-elite source for the FH often attempted to

provide background information about the conflict from the perspective of the FH. However, their statements only served to contribute to the primes of the stereotype of their social group.

Source function within the news	Nonelite sources (farmers)	Quasi-elite sources (farmers)	Nonelite sources (Fulani Herders)	Quasi-elite sources (Fulani Herders)	Elite sources
Defining the non-state actors in the news	+	+			
Confirming an incident	+	+		+	+
Position with the news (headline and first few paragraphs).	+	+			
Position within the news report (middle)	+	+		+	
Position within the news (final paragraph)	+	+		+	+

Table 10 Sources identified in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

The analysis of sources in this study revealed that although government, politicians and security personal were significantly cited in the news, they played an unusual role. The elite sources confirmed the attacks and deaths of farmers in the news story, often providing contradicting figures from what the news article initially presented in the headline or from other news sources. When confirming attacks against the farmers, elite sources were often at the very end of the news story. They confirmed the reported attacks and provided details of the casualties. Their role in the news did not extend beyond the confirmation of an attack. Nonelite

and quasi-elite sources from the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt often provided the background and information to the attack being reported. Thus, the nonelite and quasi-elite sources from the farming community served to define the non-state actors in the news, leading interpretations in various ways. Although traditionally elite sources in positions of authority are featured most prominently in news reports, legitimising the reportage, the news reports analysed in this study tended to present statements from non-traditional sources first, shaping the characterisation of non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Furthermore, the statements attributed to nonelite and quasi-elite sources from the farming community contained representations of the non-state actors which could prime stereotypes. By placing the information provided from nonelite and quasi-elite sources in the farming community at the beginning of news reports, while placing details from the elite sources at the very end of the news report, the press implies that the former source group is a legitimate authority on the event, providing factual details of the event as well as interpretations of the non-state actors involved. The role of defining and characterising the non-state actors in the conflict is relegated to the non-traditional sources from the farming community in the news. The role of non-traditional sources in conflict news reporting suggests a new way of understanding how news sources may contribute to the storytelling process.

The attribution of details about the Herders-Farmers' conflict to sources from the farming community seems to suggest that the news favours the farmers, which is in contradiction to the professional norms of objectivity in journalism. It suggests a lack of fairness and balance in the coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Consequently, the consistent inclusion of sources only from the farming community in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict may contribute to the promotion of a negative perception of the FH. Additionally, the presentation of the FH quasi-elite source in the news may also contribute to the negative perception of the FH. The limited presence of nonelite sources from the FH means that the experiences of the FH as victims are significantly absent from the reportage of

the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Moreover, the absence of nonelite sources from the FH contributes to the construction of the FH as the true perpetrators in the conflict.

Furthermore, by providing details from the quasi-elite sources from the farming community, the news reports contribute to the definition of the conflict as an ethnic one, particularly because most of the quasi-elite sources representing the farming community tend to be leaders affiliated with the ethnic groups of those affected by the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

4.2 Conclusion: Findings for the newspaper analysis

This section of the research set out to discover primes in the news about the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. It also sought to investigate how the news sources may contribute to the primes of the non-state actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

The qualitative content analysis of 208 newspaper articles from 4 Nigerian newspapers revealed that primes were primarily operationalised through the descriptions of the FH as perpetrators and the farmers as victims. The primes of the stereotypes of the FH were revealed to be through the portrayal of the FH as militants/terrorists, brutal/cruel/vicious, transgressing (vengeful and above the law), alien/foreign and occupiers. The actions of the FH were attached to acts of terrorism and extreme violence against the farmers. The description of the violence of the FH, and the graphic details of their attacks, transformed the FH from nomadic pastoralists to a horde of men killing innocent villagers in remote locations. The coverage of the FH violence presented them as a militant/terrorist group and as gunmen, which are primes for the stereotype of the FH as warlike. It was argued that the description of the FH in this manner attached their ethnic identity to acts of violence. This is in contrast to the descriptions of the acts of violence accredited to the nomadic lifestyle of the FH. The depiction of the FH as brutal/cruel/vicious and as transgressing were argued to be primes for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage because they presented the FH in ways that connected their actions to a level of savagery which can only be associated with the uncivilised (Noyes 2000). Furthermore, the FH were described as foreigners who were not indigenous to the Middle Belt

of Nigeria and Nigeria as a whole. Their actions were attributed to an agenda to occupy farmer's land. The implicit characterisation of the FH as foreign/alien and as occupiers was argued to be a prime for the stereotype of the FH as invaders. The farmers were reported as victims whose hospitable and peaceful nature was pitted against the hostile and aggressive nature of the FH. The violence of the FH led to the loss of that which is essential to the identity of the farmers. The representation of the farmers as losing their ancestral home to the attacks of the FH presents the FH as a destroyer to that which is pertinent to the identity of the farmers. The loss of homeland for the farmers is akin to the loss of identity denoting the threatening nature of FH violence.

Comparatively, when the violence of the farmers was reported in the news, there were attempts to rationalise it, potentially contributing to the negative perceptions of the FH as those who enjoy killing. It could cause readers to perceive the FH as the main culprits in the conflict, encouraging self-help justice, impacting on the resolution and de-escalation of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. The description of the FH as violent and the rationalised description of farmer's violence connects the FH to the discourse of terrorism. The violent actions of the FH, often defined as 'reprisals', criminalises their actions to be understood as deeply transgressive (Lazar and Lazar 2004). The reports of violent assault against the farmers by the FH indicates the moral quality associated with nomadism, which is a threat to order and progress in the civil society. The FH are implicitly represented as evil personified in the description of their cruelty against the farmers, who are peaceful and hospitable. The transgressing of peace agreements, and the description of the farmers as 'peace loving', presents the FH as intrinsically lacking in respectable values associated with civilisation. The representations of the FH and the farmers as victims highlights the binary structure of the language used in defining the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. The reportage of the FH violence is not only a prime for the stereotype of the FH but it 'others' the FH, showcasing their identity and their lifestyle in a negative manner. It highlights the potential weakness of the Fulani and the nomadic lifestyle. Their violence is brutal, bloody and destructive. It is not justifiable. The violence of the FH

reported in the news is attributed to their nomadic lifestyle, presenting it as a threat not just to one ethnic group but to all society.

The representation of the FH as 'other' in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict may be as a result of the sourcing patterns observed within the news sample. The qualitative analysis of the news reports of the Herders-Farmers' conflict shows a bias for sources from the farming community, and this might be because of the difficulties journalists may encounter with accessing the FH (Seib 2002). A significant finding, however, was the attention given to nonelite sources in the news, albeit from the farming community. They were a major source group in the news. Family members of victims from the farming community were attributed in the news, creating a sense of extended community (Frosh and Wolfsfeld 2007). This study discovered that the press tended to include most statements from the nonelite and quasi-elite source from the farming community in the headline and first few paragraphs of most of the news articles which reported an attack by the FH. The nonelite and quasi-elite source potentially defined and characterised the non-state actors in the news about the conflict because of the positioning of their statements in the news. They also provided background information about the attacks that they had suffered, contributing to the primes of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

Conversely, nonelite sources from the FH rarely featured in the news. Instead, attacks against them were referenced and attributed to quasi-elite sources representing them. Some have argued that the absence of sound bites from the FH is because the FH live a nomadic lifestyle and are not easily accessible. The farmers live in remote locations and are also not easily reachable. However, journalists can communicate with them over the phone. The near absence of nonelite sources from the FH means that personalised perspectives from the Fulani Herdsmen are missing in the news about the conflict, potentially impacting on the knowledge and understanding of the conflict. It also suggests that the journalists may be biased against the FH, with a preference to present the farmers as the only victims in the conflict. Overall, statements from the quasi-elite sources of the FH tended to be contradicted by elite sources. Additionally, statements from the quasi-elite source from the FH were included in problematic

ways that could contribute to the negative perceptions of the FH. Expert voices were also missing in the news, and this meant that the news reports contained descriptions of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict which could prime stereotypic imaginations in the knowledge store of the news consumer.

The next chapter will consider perceptions of the non-state actors activated through media coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict in qualitative semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis of their responses.

Chapter Five

Findings: Perception and activation of the Primes

The second part of this study set out to investigate the perception of non-state actors among news consumers in Nigeria. This part of the study sought to discover perceptions and interpretations of the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict through a qualitative experiment and semi-structured interview. As priming theory deals with the activation of knowledge—ideas and beliefs as a result of mediated content—this study presented 21 participants with news content about the Herders-Farmers' conflict to observe the evaluations that would reveal activated knowledge about the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

In the first part of this study, the qualitative content analysis of newspaper articles, it was observed that the press reported the actors in Herders-Farmers' conflict in a dichotomous manner: farmers as victims, FH as perpetrators. The FH were represented as militants/terrorists and above the law, brutal/cruel/vicious and vengeful. These representations were argued to prime the stereotype construct of the FH as warlike and the FH as nomad savage respectively. Additionally, the FH were represented as foreign/alien and occupiers, primes of the stereotype of the FH as invaders. On the other hand, the farmers were reported as victims, primarily represented as peaceful and law-abiding, argued to further prime the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage. Additionally, the farmers were represented as indigenes and landowners which were argued to be primes of the FH as invaders. The qualitative content analysis of newspaper articles also revealed that the farmers were sometimes reported as perpetrators. However, their actions were reported as self-defence. The findings in the first part of the study informed some of the processes in the second part of this study.

The second part of this research intended to investigate the activation of the perceptions of non-state actors based on the representations of these actors within the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Therefore, the second part of the study was conducted in three steps: a pre-test survey, random assignment of participants to different news groups

and a semi-structured interview with the participants. The pre-test survey was a descriptive survey to discover baseline information of participants' knowledge and ideas about the actors in the conflict. The pre-test survey allowed for the identification of the details of the Herders-Farmers' conflict and the actors (both state and non-state) available in the participants' knowledge store or memory. Afterwards, this study adapted conditions associated with experimental research by inviting participants to read the news and to respond to questions in a semi-structured individual interview. Situational cues representative of (1) the FH as the perpetrator, (2) the farmers as the perpetrators and (3) unknown gunmen as the perpetrators in the conflict were created by selecting and editing newspaper articles most representative of the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. The 21 participants recruited for this study were randomly assigned to the three different groups: a group of 7 were individually tasked to read an article which represented the 'FH as perpetrators'; another group of 7 were individually assigned to read a news article which presented the 'farmers as perpetrators'; the last group of 7 were designated to read the news article which presented 'Unknown gunmen as perpetrators'. Participants were assigned to read different news articles so that the researcher would observe the different perceptions of the actors in the conflict. Priming theory holds that the activation of perceptions is revealed in the shared similarities between the aspects of the evaluation and the news content. Therefore, participants were assigned to read different news articles for the researcher to observe what evaluations matched the news articles they were asked to read. Assigning participants to read different news articles would reveal the activation of stereotype perceptions about the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict identified in the qualitative content analysis in the first part of this study. After reading the news articles, participants were individually interviewed, and their responses were thematically analysed to observe the different meanings and interpretations attached to actors in the conflict.

Descriptions of actors identified in the first part of this study were isolated from the evaluations of the different groups to form themes of the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. This chapter presents the findings from the thematic analysis by drawing connections

between participants' evaluations and the characterisation of the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict observed in the qualitative content analysis. This chapter has been divided into three sections: the display of participants' responses from the descriptive survey, an analysis of participants evaluations from each group, and the similarities between each group's response.

5.1 Baseline (Available) knowledge of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict

The pre-test survey was digitally distributed to participants who had volunteered to participate in the study. Each participant was sent a link to the questionnaire just before they were asked to read the news article and they were allowed to 10 minutes to respond to the questions in the pre-test survey (see Appendix B for the survey instrument, p 268). The age range of participants who opted to participate in this study was from 20-50 years old. 88.5% stated that they were familiar with the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. In the pre-test survey, participants revealed that their knowledge of the conflict had come from different sources such as social media (45.5%), traditional media (Television/radio 18.2%, newspapers 9.1), victims of the conflict (from the farming community) as well as personal experience of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Most participants in the study believed that the cause of Herders-Farmers' conflict ranged from ethnic differences, differences in religion, politics, and a competition for resources. Most participants also believed that the main actors in the conflict were the failures of the Nigerian elite and government, followed by the Fulani Herdsmen and the farmers. Most participants believed that the FH were involved in senseless killing, religious extremism, nomadism, vengeful and a sense of entitlement to the land owned by the farmers. On the other hand, they believed that the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt were farmers, peaceful and hospitable. 69.2% claimed to have had a personal experience with the actors in the conflict, while 23.1% hadn't. Most participants claimed that they or those they knew had experienced terrible situations with the FH. They described these experiences as sad, insulting, religious extremism, etc. while their experiences with the farmers was mostly positive. Most claimed

that their perceptions of the FH had changed as a result of these personal experiences or the experiences of others with most expressing fear and concern for their safety.

The pre-test survey revealed that most of the participants had a negative perception about the FH and a positive outlook about the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt. The Fulani were described as cattle herders, violent and arrogant, vengeful and unforgiving, warriors, nomadic, involved in senseless killing and fighting due to religious beliefs, landless, religious extremist, having an intent to dominate other ethnic groups, as a group to be feared, and perpetrators of the destruction of farmland and properties. The ethnic groups in the Middle Belt were described as farmers, great dancers, peaceful, blessed with resources, and hospitable. The pre-test survey reveals that the available knowledge about the Fulani Herders was largely negative while that of the Farmers was favourable. For most participants in the study, perceptions of the non-state actors had come from personal experience and shared narratives from victims of the Herders-Farmer's conflict, with the news media supplementing their knowledge of the conflict.

The next section will reveal the participants' evaluations of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers conflict gleaned from the semi-structured interviews.

5.2 The Fulani Herdsmen as Perpetrators.

This section presents the themes derived from the analysis of the 7 (participants 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16 and 19) semi-structured interviews conducted with participants who had read the news article where the herdsmen were presented as the perpetrators. In this news report, the FH carried out an attack in Benue state killing 15 people. The article presented the FH as the perpetrators, characterising them as 'armed', 'killer herdsmen,' 'shooting sporadically' etc, while the farmers were represented as 'fleeing' in 'mass movement'. Participants identified three actors in the news article: the Fulani herdsmen, the indigenous farmers and the government officials. Participants defined the FH as the perpetrators of the conflict, agreeing with the general findings from the qualitative content analysis in the first part of this study. Participant's responses suggest that the FH are usually the obvious perpetrators because they

are the ones 'known to do this thing', the thing being attacking and killing farmers as reported in the article. Specifically, 2 themes were observed for the perceptions of the FH and 2 themes for the farmers. The thematic analysis of participants' response revealed that the FH were referred to as:

1. Killers
2. Superhuman

Participants who read the news article of the 'FH as the perpetrators' also referred to the farmers as:

1. Landowners
2. Powerless

5.2.1 Fulani Herdsmen as Killers

Participants observed that the characterisation of the FH in the news article made them out to be killers. Participants noted that the FH were often portrayed as a group who engage in mass killings in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. They noted that the FH are often presented as the aggressors, accused of killing farmers. Some participants in this group also claimed that it is in the nature of the FH to kill. They argued that the FH are selfish and that they pretend to be herdsmen but intrinsically they are killers. Figure 9 shows keywords from the evaluations of the actors by participants in the groups assigned to read the news report about the FH as perpetrators.

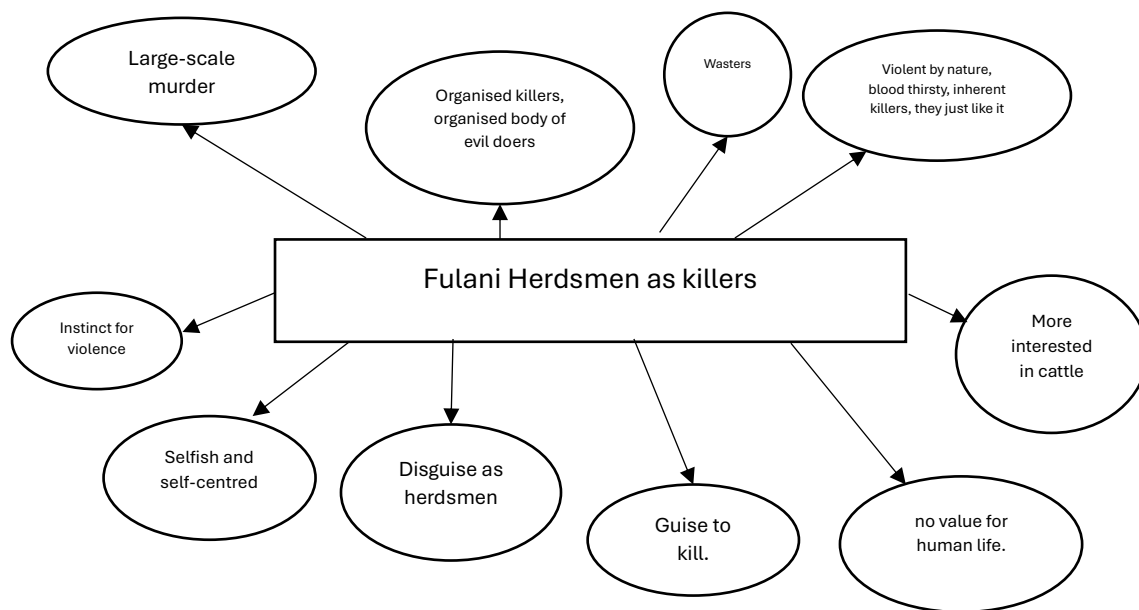


Figure 9 Evaluations of the FH as Killers

According to some of the participants in this group, the FH were generally portrayed as the aggressor, initiating violence against the farmers, often leading to loss of life and property. P1 claimed that the news report ascribed the role of FH acting upon the farmers. A participant stated,

The Fulani Herdsmen are **featured predominantly** as the aggressors, or herdsmen as aggressors and the farmers as victims (P1).

The participant's response seems to suggest that it is the newspaper article that has presented the FH as aggressors. They also referred to the FH as perpetrators of 'large-scale murder', highlighting the role of the FH in the conflict as those who engage in some form of symbolic violence. For this participant, the FH have typically killed the farmers over a period of time for no obvious reason. This connects the FH to notions of targeted killing akin to genocide. The idea of FH as killers was also expressed by another participant who described the FH as those who find immense pleasure in killing. Participant 19 said,

they (the FH) derive joy in what they do... I think that **it has to be the blood thirstiness** of the Fulani, Fulani herdsmen, no matter what state they find themselves in be it Kaduna, be it Lagos be it Abuja. **I think they have that instinct to just, instinct for violence, they have a license for violence, they just like it** (P19).

P19 described the FH as a group with a strong desire for killing, arguing that it is the nature of the FH to kill. The participant connects the FH to excessive violence, noting that wherever they are found, they must kill. Moreover, the participant believes that the FH have an innate drive to engage in harmful behaviour towards others. The participant's comment about the FH seems to suggest that they believe the FH to have a nature for violent and aggressive behaviour biologically and psychologically. It connotes that killing is inherent to the nature of the FH.

Descriptions of the inherent killer nature extend of the FH extends itself in the participant's argument that,

The herdsmen are an organised body of evil doers; they attack everyday people so that is what I feel about them (P16).

For this participant, the FH are unified for the sole purpose of killing. 'Herdsmen' has taken a new meaning; it is transformed from the act of cattle herding to people killing.

Correspondingly, other participants in the group argued that the FH are killers who use the cover of pastoral nomadism to kill their victims. That is, the FH, under pretence of cattle herding, engage in criminal activities. P7 stated that,

The Fulanis of course, **they disguise as herdsmen**, but we all know that it's the Fulanis because way back we known them as transhuman or nomads but they have gone beyond that...they are the people carrying out this heinous criminality (P7).

They refer to cattle herding as something that the FH once did but now no longer practice. To this reader, the FH have swapped their herding staff for guns, killing people. The FH are no longer truly herdsman, but killers who disguise themselves to kill their victims. In describing pastoral nomadism as a guise for criminality, the participant seems to suggest that the FH have exchanged their herding staves for guns.

Contrastingly, while some participants in the group believed that the FH are inherent killers, other participants argued that FH were killers because they wanted their cattle to survive. For this participant, killing came with the territory of pastoral nomadism. It is not that the FH are pretending to be Herders in order to kill, or that they seem to enjoy killing, but it is in desire to see their cattle survive. As P13 puts it,

They (the FH) are actually violent, they know that at some point they would have to fight their way to ensure that these cows have something to eat.
(P13).

The FH desire to see their cattle survive, which results in the maiming of anyone who seems to be a threat to the survival of their cattle and therefore stands in the way of that desire.

P7 said,

Human life means nothing to them, once you are on their way, they eliminate you...(P7).

P7's comment indicates that the FH have a strong drive to see their cattle alive and this drive motivates the killing of those in their way. This has led participants who believe that the FH are killing for their cattle to claim that they have no value for human life:

I think of them as killers like they don't value people that don't have regard for people's life. **They don't value people's life.** They are just kind of selfish people that are just after their own. **They regard those cows more than the fellow humans.** Because if you can kill to sustain the life of a cow, it means

that you regard that cow more than a human life. So I see them as people who have no regard for humanity (P13).

Participants who draw a connection between FH killing and the need for their cattle to survive highlight the connection between nomadism and that which is deemed barbaric. The nomad is engaged in extrajudicial killing to ensure the survival of their cattle, a concept unthinkable to the 'civilised' person but rational to the herder whose cattle is his life. To the herder, the loss of cattle is akin to the loss of life (Adebayo 1991), so interference with the survival of cattle is akin to interference of the survival of the Fulani Herdsman. To out-groups, the murder of human life for cattle is inhumane and unjustifiable, highlighting the FH pastoral nomadism in a negative light. To the participants in this group, who think that the FH kill for the survival of their cattle, the FH present a moral quality that is unsavoury. Their interpretation of the news text reveals perceptions of the FH violence as tied to the nomadic lifestyle of the FH.

Notions of the FH as killers was evident in the responses of participants who had read about the FH as perpetrators. Some participants believed that the FH were organised killers, whose nature allowed them to freely engage in mass killings. Other participants argued that the FH were pretending to be herdsman when in fact they had now been transformed into gunmen. Other participants in this group attached FH violence to pastoral nomadism, highlighting the inhumane nature of the lifestyle. Whether it is in their nature, or it is for the survival of their cattle, the idea of the FH as killers was stated as common knowledge. As P16 claimed,

They (FH) just want to kill, **we have seen** it over the years and because they want to kill...(P16).

P13 goes as far as to state that,

even without the news, when you mention Fulani herdsmen, what quickly comes to mind unconsciously like sort of an implicit bias is those killers (P13).

The FH have actually become *synonymous* with killing. Furthermore, P13 seemed to believe that an alternate presentation of the FH (other than being violent and aggressive) would be untrue. They said,

I will continue to think that they are violent. I will feel that someone is trying to deny the obvious if the herdsmen were presented differently in a news article.

Similarly, another participant in this group stated that the characterisation of the FH as perpetrator has 'reinforced the fear in me that these people are supposed to be feared' (P4).

5.2.2 Fulani Herdsmen as Superhuman

Participants noted that the newspaper article that reported the 'FH as perpetrators' presented the FH as superhuman. Primarily, participants stated that the news report placed emphasis on the FH ignoring the farmers. Secondly, participants added that the FH were described as a special group of people with supernatural abilities as well as superior arms, which they use to evade capture. Thirdly, participants said that the presentation of the Nigerian forces and government's continuous failed attempts at capturing of the FH, and preventing the deaths of the members of the farming community, caused them to view the FH as impossible to capture. Finally, the lack of reported prosecution of the FH in the press adds to the perception of the FH as invincible group (see Figure 10).

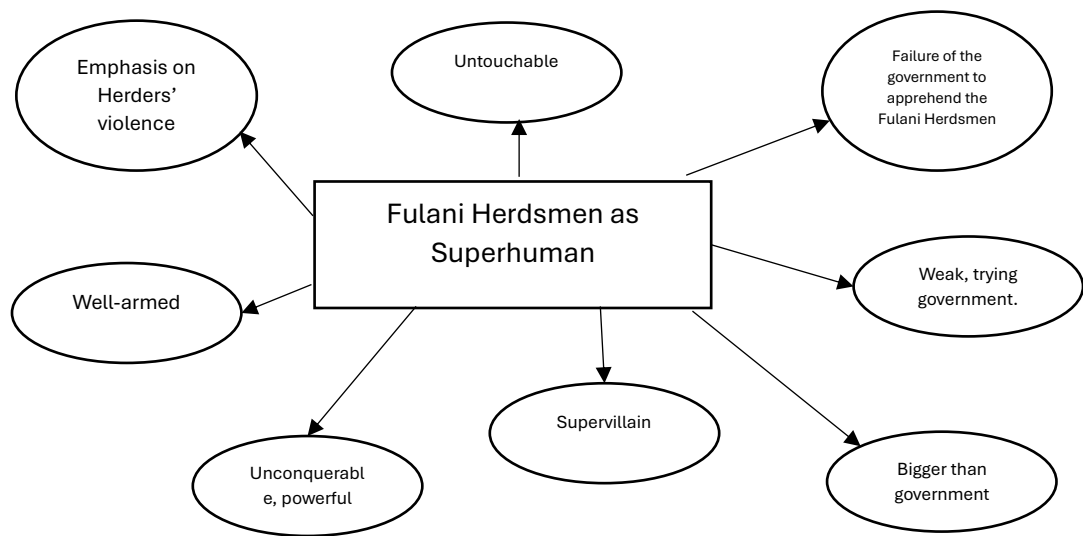


Figure 10 Evaluations of the FH as Superhuman

According to participants, the press presented information about the Fulani herdsmen, characterising them as a group of people that have special abilities and superpowers which allowed them to evade capture after perpetuating acts of violence. Participants also noted that the FH were characterised as a special group of people who are skilled beyond the expertise of the Nigerian forces. A participant stated,

I think there was a lot of emphasis that made me think that these herdsmen are superhuman or cape wearing people because they took more time in describing their journey in how they are able to go from one state to another state, travelling through the bushes, shooting sporadically in different marketplaces and literally made them the main characters...(P4).

According to P4, the emphasis placed on the actions of the FH, as well as the effort utilised in describing their movement in the news reports, made them assume that the FH were the most important actors in the news. This is not just because of the actions of the FH, but the choice

of the news report to describe and emphasise their actions, thereby producing an image of the FH as a powerful group. The participants claimed that because the article emphasised the perpetrators rather than the victims, the FH were seemingly characterised as an 'untouchable group' (P10). They said,

For the herdsmen I think that they are portrayed as an untouchable group they have been given a lot of power in this article. I think they are being portrayed as a god-complex kind of group as if they cannot be touched, untouchables (P10).

Participants in this group contended that the portrayal of the FH in the article made them think of the FH as a group of people having a 'god-like complex'. It can be argued that for this participant, the news reportage activates the idea of the FH as an all-powerful group that cannot be touched.

Similarly, the thematic analysis revealed that the description of the FH as *well-armed* connotes that they are more trained and more equipped than the Nigerian army or police. P4 stated,

This mention of well-armed men, it seems like it does two things for the herdsmen. This article started off saying they were suspected herdsmen, went on to call them herdsmen and also describe them as well armed...So when you describe the villain as well armed, what goes on in my head is that this person is really powerful and more competent than the police (P4).

They claimed that the news article description of the FH as 'well armed' added to participants' interpretation of the FH as an invincible group. The reader believed that the FH possess weapons that made them more powerful than the Nigerian police. It implies that the police are helpless to curtail the attacks of the FH, and it also showcases the FH as a powerful group of people. P4 said that they had consistently come across news reports where the police had said

they were ill-equipped to handle the FH. The reports of the FH being well-armed in the news report for this study coincides with what they had been reading about the FH. The news reports made them perceive the FH as an organised military group able to evade capture by the Nigerian police force. Thus, the FH are not only positioned as superhuman, able to evade capture, but also more powerful than the police. P10 said,

For the herdsmen, the part where they say the well-armed men, that really stood out to me because I am saying that these are just FH how are they well-armed...I know that herdsmen move around with like hunting guns to protect their livestock. So that well-armed men stood out, it really stood out to me for them (P10).

P10 seems to think that the press describing the FH as well armed seemed to move them from the level of mere cattle herders to something indescribable. Participant 10 claims that she was aware of the FH carrying 'hunting guns'. However, the press report of them being well armed presents them as more than cattle herders to a group that can 'clear out an entire village'. Subsequently, P16 noted that the press presents them as a people that cannot be stopped. They said,

they (the news report) make it look like this people are very powerful they cannot be conquered they cannot be stopped (P16).

In addition to presenting an image of the FH as being powerful through description, emphasis and word choice, participants noted that the presentation of the failed attempts of the police to prosecute the FH buttresses how powerful the FH are. P4 stated,

These players are understood as a supervillain for the herdsmen and incompetent, the government is a trying government that is weak but is trying government [sic].

P4 expressed that press reporting seemed to present the government and the police as attempting to help the victims of the attacks. However, the presentation of government's failed

attempts to secure the farmers only seemed to emphasise the notion of the invincibility of the FH. This is exemplified by the lack of any arrests or capture of any of the perpetrators in the attack reported in the article. They observed that the government's inability to capture them indicated the prowess of the FH at not only killing but also outwitting the government. P4 also said,

And then you (the news report) also make it look like the government is trying and these guys are really good because I think that's what happened when you (the news report) tell me how good these people are and how they have moved from one place to other place pulling destruction off and then you (the news report) just tell me the effects of their destruction without actually telling me what has been done.

P4 and P16 agreed that the presentation of the Nigerian government's failure to capture the herdsmen and to prevent further death caused them to think that the FH possessed superior skills beyond the possession of sophisticated arms to something only available supernaturally. The reported inability of the government to protect the people contributes to participants' ideation of the FH as mythical creatures. P4 stated that they perceived the Nigerian government as weak and ineffectual in preventing more deaths. The news report seemed to evoke perceptions of the FH as unstoppable; as a result, participants seemed to perceive them as a group who are not human. They concluded that,

...at the end of the article, I felt that we are fighting this invisible force that is even bigger than our government (P4).

They argued that the FH had been reported as a group that could not be held to account for their actions by the Nigerian authority. The presence of the FH in the article seems to strengthen the idea of the FH as a powerful group who can evade arrest. The FH were presented as a group who carry out acts of violence and are never persecuted. Agreeing with this statement, P4 said,

Like I said there is villain who seems invincible who seems like he is well equipped to move through states and cause havoc without being caught (P4).

By referring to the FH as villains, the participant implies that the FH are indeed the perpetrators in the conflict. However, their statements seem to imply that their perception of the FH as villain is not merely as result of their role in the conflict but because of the presentation in the news report.

In addition to reporting the ineptitude of the FH, participants noted that mythologisation of the FH has reinforced their fear of the FH. P4 said,

I think it also reinforced the fear in me that these people are supposed to be feared. Because over the years, listening to different reports, there is a fear in my heart that these people can do many things.

To summarise, the participants observed that the news report which they read for this study seemed to focus almost entirely on the actions of the FH, indicating that they are the most relevant actor in the news about the conflict. Additionally, the emphasis on the actions of FH caused participants to perceive the FH as exceptional and highly skilled with a 'supernatural' ability to evade capture. They also noted that the press described the FH using certain words that caused them to perceive the FH as being more than cattle herders. These words also seemed to position the FH as being more capable than the government. Consequently, the FH are a group that are more powerful than the government and the police. Likewise, the lack of the presentation of the police or government prosecuting the FH strengthened the idea of the FH being potentially undefeatable. Through emphasis, word choice, and a presentation of the other actors in the conflict, the FH are perceived as superhuman. Participants' perception of the FH as superhuman, particularly when they describe them as those who are 'untouchable', can be argued to be proof of the activation of the stereotype of the FH as the nomad savage. Participants describe the FH as supervillains,

with a god-like complex, and as those who seem to get away with large scale murder, alluding that the FH are above the law – a prime of the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage. Participants' interpretation of the FH as above the law is quite different to that observed in the qualitative analysis. In the first part of this study, the qualitative analysis revealed that the press would contextualise the attacks of the FH as happening despite the attempts of the government to prevent them. For the participants in this group, the activation of the stereotype of the nomad savage, evidenced as the description of the FH as above the law, is presented in the idea of the might of the FH as a group that cannot be confined by the laws of the land. The FH are potentially aligned with the idea of the untamed social group that is a threat to civilisation (Noyes 2000; Engebrigtsen 2017). Participants rightly point out that the perception of the FH in this manner is because of the reportage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. However, it can still be argued that the news report has activated the stereotype of the FH as savage nomad in readers' minds, evidenced in the description of the FH as superhuman.

5.2.3 Farmers as indigenes

Participants who read the news article which portrayed the 'FH as perpetrators' defined the farmers as victims in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. In defining the farmers as victims, participants highlighted the farmers as landowners and as helpless. The analysis revealed that in describing the experiences of the farmers, participants highlighted them as owners of the land. Specifically, in describing the experience of the farmers, participants emphasised the ownership of the land as something passed down ancestrally which had to be abandoned because of the killings. For instance, P1 said,

It shows this sense of helplessness, of people having to abandon their ancestral homes over attacks that are repeatedly carried over them (P1).

In stating that the farmers have had to abandon their ancestral home, P1 highlights the farmers' physical attachment to the land. Ownership is something that occurs ancestrally and not by purchase. Indigeneity in Nigeria has been argued to be tied to citizens' ancestral connection with land ownership (Adebanwi 2007). It also implies that land ownership is tied

to indigeneity which is tied to ethnic identities. Participants' noted farmers' helplessness is exemplified by the loss of land, and not just any land, but that which has been handed down by their forefathers. The farmers are therefore defined as the indigenes of the land – their right to the land is founded on a physical attachment to an identifiable ancestral home. The FH are not the owners because they are nomads who have seemingly travelled from other countries as highlighted by participants in the previous section. Furthermore, in defining the farmers as the landowners, the participants position the farmers as victims in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. This is particularly interesting because participants who read the article of the 'Farmers as perpetrators' still assumed that the farmers were victims. As P1 puts it, the farmers have had to leave their ancestral homes because of the incessant attacks carried out against them. Additionally, in highlighting the landownership of the farmers as ancestral, the victimhood of the farmers is also captured. P13 said,

Then people running away from their community, **your own land, where you belong, where you feel you should call your home** sort of and you are made to leave that place and run away from it for safety because someone feels they are entitled to your own land (P13).

Like P1, P13 believes that the farmers have had to leave their land to survive the attacks of the FH. The definition of the farmers as victims in the conflict is tied to the loss of the land. The participant notes that it is their land, where the farmers belong and where they should call home. The farmers' land should be a space where they can feel safe but the attacks from the FH disrupt this feeling of safety, the farmers cannot call the space home, highlighting the duality of their helplessness and their loss. Similarly, P16 held the same idea of the farmers being the rightful owners of the land. P16 also said,

I mean they are in their houses, they are on their property...they were just helpless because at least they were in their houses and they didn't go anywhere. They were not on a battlefield and so that is all I think of the farmers (P16).

P16 comments on the farmers being at home, on their own property, concurs with P12's opinion about the farmers as the owners of the land. In stating that the farmers did not go anywhere, P14 appears to imply that the farmers' ownership of the land is what makes them targets of the attacks by the FH. They claim that the farmers were in their houses and that they did not go anywhere. Thus, participants suggest that the FH came into the space owned by the farmers, an area the farmers are native to, and turned it into a battlefield where the innocent farmers are violently murdered. In defining the farmers as landowners based on ancestral identities, participants touch on perceptions of land ownership in Nigeria.

Participants claimed that the 'people have to abandon their ancestral homes'. They believe that the land belongs to the farmers, but they are forced to leave because the FH have made it unsafe. The land which is owned by the farmers is no longer a safe haven but a battlefield because the FH feel entitled to the land. The land which has become a contested space was originally an ancestral home that the farmers must now leave in order to survive. In the findings of the content analysis of newspaper articles in the first part of this study, indigeneity was tied to land ownership in the news to exemplify the victimhood of the farmers. It was also argued to imply that the FH are foreign and alien in the news article, and therefore a trait of the stereotype of the FH as invaders. In describing the farmers as landowners, participants' responses reflect the findings about the FH as alien/foreign. While it is true that the farmers or ethnic groups may be indigenous to the land, participants describe the indigeneity of the farmers in the context of the displacement caused by the FH. The FH are interpreted as those whose violent actions displace the farmers from their home, not only defining them as foreign but also revealing evidence of the activation of the stereotype of the FH as invader.

5.2.4 Farmers as powerless (but not weak)

In addition to perceiving the farmers as landowners, participants who had read the news article which represented the 'FH as perpetrators' also identified the farmers as powerless and helpless. Participants in this group perceived the farmers as an ordinary group who had been

attacked by the FH, disenfranchised by the news report and the inability of the government to protect them. According to participants, the farmers were presented as helpless, innocent people going about their daily lives, disrupted by the FH. Participants in this group observed that the news article presented the farmers as regular people who are simply trying to survive. P16 said,

The farmers were painted as helpless. They were painted as normal people that go about their businesses and they just happen to be victims of an uncultured **band of people** (P16).

According to P16 the farmers were presented by the press as people going about their daily lives who suddenly became victims of the attacks of the FH, whom they refer to as an 'uncultured band'. The farmers are seemingly innocent people who are attacked for no reason, implying that the FH are a troublesome group who disrupt the normalcy of the farmers. To this reader, the farmers are the victims whom violence is enacted upon. Not only has the participant identified who the perpetrator and the victim are, they have used specific words to indicate their thoughts about these actors. The FH are a group who are not merely disruptive in their violent action but in their way of living.

Participants refer to FH in a manner that highlights the differences between them and the farmers, potentially signifying their role of perpetrator and the farmers' role as victims in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Participants also highlight the sinister nature of the FH and the helpless nature of the farmers. On the other hand, the farmers are victims whose normalcy has been disrupted by the violent actions of the FH. The normalcy of living is disrupted by the violence of the FH.

Similarly, participants also noted that the farmers were powerless because of the way they were characterised in the news.

On the other hand the farmers look like very calm peaceful people that cannot do anything to save themselves. **They are portrayed as helpless** victims that cannot really do anything to save themselves (P10).

According to P10, the farmers are portrayed as a peaceful people who are helpless to save themselves. In the article, the farmers were described as a vulnerable group who do not have the might or the ability to protect themselves from the mindless attacks of the FH. But participants indicated that although the farmers are victims to the attacks of the FH, they are not as powerless as the press presented them. To emphasise that the image of farmer's helplessness is one portrayed by the news report, participants argued that they struggled to make sense of the press representation of the farmers as powerless, which was different from their initial perceptions. As P4 put it,

I have a problem with how the people were presented as weak and unable to do anything except run and how they don't do anything except fleeing and running and dying in the quest to flee (P4).

They added that they were not pleased with the presentation of the farmers lacking strength and ability to withstand the attacks of the Fulani herdsmen. This is related to a statement from P10,

I am aware that there is quite some truth in this article when it says they were attacked, they are refugees, but I've never been able to connect that to what I know about Tiv people. **Tiv people are warriors, Tiv people are people that will not let you come into their land and let you take over their land...** (P10)

They believe that the farmers are warriors who protect what is rightfully theirs. This statement ties with ideas of the farmers as the owners of the land. It is a strong claim which highlights the reader's perception of the farmer's ownership of the land, a territory worth fighting for. It also offers an insight into the reasons why the farmers engage in violence. The participant implies that they are an otherwise peaceful people, but because of the actions of the FH, they

have had to resort to violence. In a way, the participants—like the press, as revealed in the findings of the newspaper analysis—attempted to rationalise farmer’s violence. P4 and P10 seemed to hold the perception that the farmers are a strong people who will do anything to defend their land and so they struggled to connect their initial perceptions of the farmers to what they read in the news article. This may be because they share the same ethnic affiliation with the victims in the news reports which represents the ‘FH as perpetrators’. To them, there is an inconsistency between what they have known about the ethnic group and what they have read about them in the news article. The participants’ thoughts about the inconsistent perceptions and representations of the farmers as helpless victims ties in with inconsistent ideations of the FH as organised killers. P10 tended to agree with the negative representation of the FH as killers. However, they argued that it is the press and the government’s inability to act that has rendered farmers helpless and powerless, lacking agency. She said,

I think that there is something that they can do for themselves. I am saying this knowing that they have actually taken it upon themselves after not getting the kind of support they want from the government (P10).

P10 believes that the farmers are not powerless, as portrayed in the press, and that there is something that they can do to help themselves since the government has failed them. P10 therefore infers that the farmers are ‘powerless’ because of press representation and a lack of support from the Nigerian government in securing and protecting them. In conjunction, P14 had this to say,

the article just made it look like they were actually helpless which if they were in a working system of government, they shouldn’t be afraid of their surroundings [sic].

P14 believes that the farmers are powerless because the article presented them that way but also because the government has failed to protect them. Thus, P1 stated,

For me, if I view them more as victims, I've taken away that spirit of resilience from them. I prefer to see them more as survivors as people who have overcome tough situations. If you see the conflict dynamics in Plateau state, you will realise that people no longer run from attacks: they try to find their local solution. So, for me it's a form of taking back that sense of life, wanting it for yourself despite knowing what will happens, the odds and all.

To recap, P1 like P4 and P10 refused to accept the press presentation of the farmers as powerless and helpless victims. They intentionally referred to the victims reported in the news report as survivors who adapted to their situation, seeking solutions to combat a problem that the Nigerian government seems to be incapable of addressing. Most of the participants in this group believed the government has failed the farmers, as they have not made stringent attempts to protect the farmers. The farmers have been 'abandoned to their fate'. It is in the context of a search for a 'local solution' that the farmer may become a perpetrator. Additionally, participants refused to perceive the farmers as victims. Instead, they argued they are survivors who will 'remain to fight' the FH. This ideation coincides with the findings from the content analysis of newspaper articles in the first part of this study which indicate that farmers' violence was in response to FH violence. Violence in this sense is initiated by the FH, absolving the farmers of guilt, because they have only engaged in violence due to the actions of the FH.

5.2.5 Summary of evaluations from Group 1

Participants in the group who had read the article which presented the 'FH as perpetrators' offered a series of responses which allowed the themes of the actors in the conflict to be discovered. The responses from participants were coded into the FH as Killers and Superhuman while the farmers were interpreted as Landowners and as Powerless. In their interpretations of the FH, participants described the FH as the aggressors, killing farmers. Some participants claimed that it is in the nature of the FH to kill, noting that pastoral nomadism was a guise to carry out mass murder. Other participants noted that the FH kill because they are selfish and only want to see their cattle survive at the expense of the farmers' existence.

Participants also described the FH as superhuman because of the emphasis placed on the FH in the news. Participants added that the news report presented an image of the FH as a special group of people with supernatural abilities as well as superior arms, which they use to evade capture. Participants also said that the presentation of the Nigerian forces and the government's failed attempts at capturing the FH, or preventing the deaths of the members of the farming community caused them to view the FH as undefeatable. Conversely, the participants in this group perceived the farmers as victims who own the land; their victimhood was essentialised in the loss they suffered as a result of FH violence. Participants perceived the farmers as powerless people because of the press representation and the failure of the government.

The responses from participants reveal the potential activation of the stereotypes of the FH in an associated network of the stereotypes of the Fulani as Herdsmen. The representation of the FH in the news as perpetrators primarily activated stereotypes of the FH as warlike and as nomad savage. Participants' evaluation of the FH as killers coincides with the findings from the qualitative analysis which argued that the representation of FH violence may serve as a prime for the stereotype of the FH as warlike. Participant responses indicate that the FH are coordinated for the purpose of killing, coinciding with findings in the first part of the study which claimed that the FH were militant/terrorists because the news reports presented the FH as engaging in violence producing fear. Similarly, participants' interpretation of the FH disguising themselves as pastoral nomads for the sole purpose of killing suggests a transformation from herding to criminality; this was observed in the first part of the study where news reports suggested that FH were no longer herdsmen but gunmen. Conversely, participants' description of the FH as killers for the survival of their cattle can be connected to the findings of the first strand of this study that argued that the FH were portrayed in the news as those whose lifestyle is different and a threat to civilisation – a prime for the stereotype of the FH as Nomad Savage. Likewise, the perception of the FH as superhuman connects to the findings in the first part of this study which observed that the FH were represented in news

reports transgressing and as above the law. The representation of the FH as transgressing was argued to be a prime for the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage. The evaluations of the participants in this group reveal perceptions which are borderline stereotypic of the FH and problematic to the resolution of the conflict. Although the participants' evaluation of the farmers is not stereotypic, the evaluations of the farmers as landowners and as powerless reveal the potential effect of presenting the FH as the sole perpetrators in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Participants observe that the farmers are losing their land, a part of their identity as an ethnic group in Nigeria – land ownership as per ethnicity is passed down ancestrally. Participants' responses imply that the FH violence reported in the news is not only a threat to life but loss of land and a sense of identity. In this vein, participants noted that they don't think the farmers are as powerless as portrayed in the news report.

The findings in the second strand of the study provide new insights into audience understanding of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Firstly, the evaluations of the participants in this group reveals that participants deem the FH to be inherent killers. While participants refer to the farmer's loss of land, they do not refer to the actions of the FH as resulting from scarce resources, which has been argued to be the leading cause of the conflict. Rather, their responses indicate a perception of the FH as killers, maiming their victims for no apparent reason other than sheer cruelty. Perceptions of the FH as inherent killers suggests the dehumanisation of the FH which can lead to the justification and legitimisation of retaliatory violent acts by farmers, further transforming the dynamics of the conflict. Secondly, the participants' responses which alluded to the inability of the Nigerian Police Force to prevent further killings by the FH highlighted the nature of the government's intervention in the conflict. The Nigerian government have been accused of failing to put measures in place that would prevent the escalation of the conflict. The government failure may also contribute to the dynamics of the conflict with non-state actors willing to take up arms to defend themselves. Thirdly, while the ideations of the FH as killers and as superhumans indicate that audience members believe that the FH are culpable for the offence reported in the news, their reasons

differ in the sense that most participants hold that the FH are superhuman because of the news reports about them and the reported inability of the government to prevent them from carrying out attacks against the farmers. The killings perpetrated by the FH were described as something that comes naturally to them, while supernatural ability is afforded to them by the press and the failure of the government. This is insightful because it reveals that the participants do not think that the FH are extraordinary or fearsome, rather that the news reports, as well as government systemic failure, engender this belief.

The next section offers the findings of the thematic analysis of the responses from the participants who read the news article that reported the 'Farmers as perpetrators'.

5.3 Farmers as perpetrators

Participants in these group were asked to read the news article which reported the 'Farmers as the perpetrators' in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. In this article, the farmers are represented as the aggressors attacking and killing Fulani people. The FH were the victims in this conflict and the news did not contain any explicit primes of the stereotypes of the FH. After reading the article, participants 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17 and 20 were then interviewed individually. Participants' responses were analysed, and the perceptions of the farmers were categorised into 2 themes; likewise the perceptions of the FH were coded into 2 themes. The perceptions of the farmers following the interviews were coded as follows:

1. Farmers as peaceful
2. Farmers as indigenes

Consequently, the perceptions of the FH were coded as follows:

1. FH as non-victims
2. FH as nomads

5.3.1 Farmers as peaceful people

Some participants in the group assigned to the news article of the 'Farmers as perpetrators' referred to the farmers as innocent and peaceful (see Figure 17). Firstly, the participants in this group noted that the farmers are harmless and non-violent. They claimed that the farmers are simply carrying on with life when they are attacked by the FH. Secondly, participants observed that the farming communities are generally amiable and will rarely resort to non-diplomatic resolutions to conflict. They added that it is not in character for the farmers to be attackers. However, they would attack in retaliation if forced to. They claimed that the FH are aware that the farmers would wait for the government to save them and so the FH keep assaulting them and killing them. They noted that the farming community is renowned for their hospitality and friendliness, which their attackers are taking advantage of. However, other participants in this group highlighted that they were ignorant of the farmer's role in the conflict, and they argued that the farmers were equally as violent as the FH.

Certain participants in this group argued that the farmers are generally harmless, not engaging in violence. P11 said,

They are more of like the innocent people and it's more like the FH are the ones attacking and doing most of the killing (P11).

The farmers were referred to as the innocent people while the FH were referred to as the ones doing most of the killing and attacking farming communities. They believed that the farmers were incapable of causing harm or being a problem. They argued that the farmers would either flee or remain in their villages but would not engage in armed violence against the Fulani herdsmen. This opinion indicates that the participant considered the presentation of the farmers in the article that presented the 'Farmers as perpetrators' as untrue. The participants relied on their knowledge of the farmers, which was different to what they read in the article. P14 also claimed that the farmers are largely welcoming to the FH. They said,

First of all they are hospitable, which is something that the middle-belt region has, they are very hospitable and they are welcoming [sic] (P14).

This participant refers to the general idea of the Middle Belt as being hospitable and welcoming as an attempt to reject the acts of violence associated with the farmers in the news article. To this reader, hospitality is a vital part of the Middle Belt identity and by extension the farmers' identity. Therefore, it seems unlikely that they would engage in violent behaviour. They further note that the FH are aware that the farmers are peaceful people. Participants said,

They (Fulani Herdsmen) feel that these farmers or these people are just like peaceful people (P11).

Participants noted that the everyone, including the FH, is aware of the peaceful nature of the farming community. The peaceful nature of the farmers is exemplified in the fact that the FH are aware of their docility. The responses from P11 indicate an attempt to reject the presentation of the farmers as perpetrators in the news, as it is not congruent with their perception of the farmers. The participant refers to the FH knowledge of the farmers to potentially reiterate that the presentation of the farmers as the perpetrators in the news report was false.

To come to terms with the farmers' violence, the participants contended that FH violence is what has led the farmers to become violent. Participants noted that the FH were usually the aggressors and that the farmers only acted in violence to defend themselves. P11 said,

From what I have read the farmers are not the ones attacking they are only retaliating; they didn't start the fight. **It is just mostly retaliation saying that enough is enough** (P11).

Their wording implies that the farmers are usually peaceful, but the FH violence has led them to be violent. Participants argued that the violence ascribed to the farmers in the news article was because the farmers were simply defending themselves. The farmers did not initiate

conflict, but have acted to protect themselves and their land from the Fulani Herdsmen. The acts of violence perpetrated by the farmers were performed to protect the farmers and their land and are therefore justifiable. This implies that participants think that the farmers are peaceful so far as they are not attacked by the FH. The violence of the farmers reported in the news article is in response to the disturbance of their peaceful nature. P2 stated,

and the government they don't care about the people of the community so they are taking decisions into their own hands and so they are seeing how they can protect themselves (P2).

According to the participant, generally peaceful farmers would resort to acts of violence because they have been neglected by the government. P2 continued,

Because the farmers themselves don't feel secure from the federal government and they feel that there is a need to protect their products and their resources (P2).

They believe that the farmers have lost the sense of feeling secure in their homes and therefore they turn to violence. It can be inferred from the participants' response that the FH have engaged in violence in order to make themselves feel more secure in their homes.

In contrast, a participant who had read the same article which presented the 'Farmers as perpetrators', argued that the farmers were as guilty of violence as much as the FH. They argued that the farmers were not the victims in the conflict, as they had previously believed. The participant blamed their ignorance of the farmers' role in the Herders'-Farmers' conflict on the press, claiming that the press had not been presenting the farmers as perpetrators in the news about the conflict.

As for the farmers the media has not been telling us about their own input in the whole violence, they just present them to us as victims. I think that they are not victims...(P8).

Participants stated that the press had only presented the farmers as victims, rarely showcasing any other role they may have played in the conflict. For P8, the farmers and the FH were both perpetrators. She concluded that the farmers were not the only victims as she had previously believed. She states that,

The Fulani people are equally victims too. You can't just raid a particular settlement and try to avoid calling them victims, they are equally victims too. So I just feel that Fulani people are actually victims in the whole conflict (P8).

5.3.2 Farmers as indigenes/landowners

Participants referred to the farmers as owners of the land and by extension indigenes and native to the land. They connected the farmer's violence to land ownership, echoing permutations of ethnic territoriality that encourage violence to maintain identity. In defining the FH as the landowners, participants legitimised their use of the land and the actions they take to secure continuous use of this land (see Figure 11). They would use certain descriptions such as, 'the owners of the land, their own land (P2)', 'their space' (P14), etc. In clear terms, one participant said,

The Mambila are indigenous group, **they are the owners of the land**...the Mambila **were trying to protect what was their own**. The Fulani was trying to get something, they were looking for something. Because he said they came to his house and killed his family so **that means that they were in their own area** (P2).

By describing the farmers as the owners of the land, the participants suggest that the farmers are the legal possessors of the contested space. The participant's definition of the farmers as the owners of the land trying to protect what is theirs, implies that any action taken to maintain landownership is justifiable. The participant's response seems to suggest that continuous landownership reifies violence and *vice versa* denoting that violence is intrinsically linked to landownership. To the participant referenced above, the Fulani are trying to take the farmers'

land and so the farmers' actions are justified. The participant is engaging in the discourse of territoriality i.e. the dimensions of space are harnessed to align the farmers' violence to the land, such that the use of violence to maintain ownership is justified. The land is the space of struggle which the farmers are deemed legitimate owners of, establishing the processes of discursive territoriality (Adebanwi 2007). To the participant, the FH are trying to take what rightfully belongs to the farmers and in order to prevent this loss, they kill the FH. The notion of landownership and violence is continued when the participant notes,

It's their land and you cannot call them perpetrators, perpetrators are those who come to take the land [sic] (P2).

According to P2, the owners of the land cannot be referred to as perpetrators because they are protecting what has been passed down to them from their parents and their parent's parents to their parents. The participant seems to suggest that a perpetrator is one who comes to take land not one who defends their land. What is interesting is that the participant unwittingly defines the Herders-Farmers' conflict as a land-use conflict. However, this definition of the conflict as a competition for land is incongruous with the terms academic scholarship has proffered. That is, when scholars claim that the Herders-Farmers' conflict is because of land use, they suggest that it is because the land is scarce, leading to tension and conflict. The participant's definition of the conflict, however, suggests that the conflict may be about who owns the land and who gets to use the land however they please. Land ownership in the Middle Belt region is usually associated with one's ethnic identity – one's ethnic group being in the area first. So, when the participant states that the farmers cannot be perpetrators because they are the owners of the land, they are further engaging in the discourse of territoriality attaching that space to the ethnic identity of the farmers, inadvertently defining the Herders-Farmers' conflict as an ethnic one as well as land-based. The use of violence to protect landownership suggests that ethnic identities are central to the conflict between the farmers and the FH.

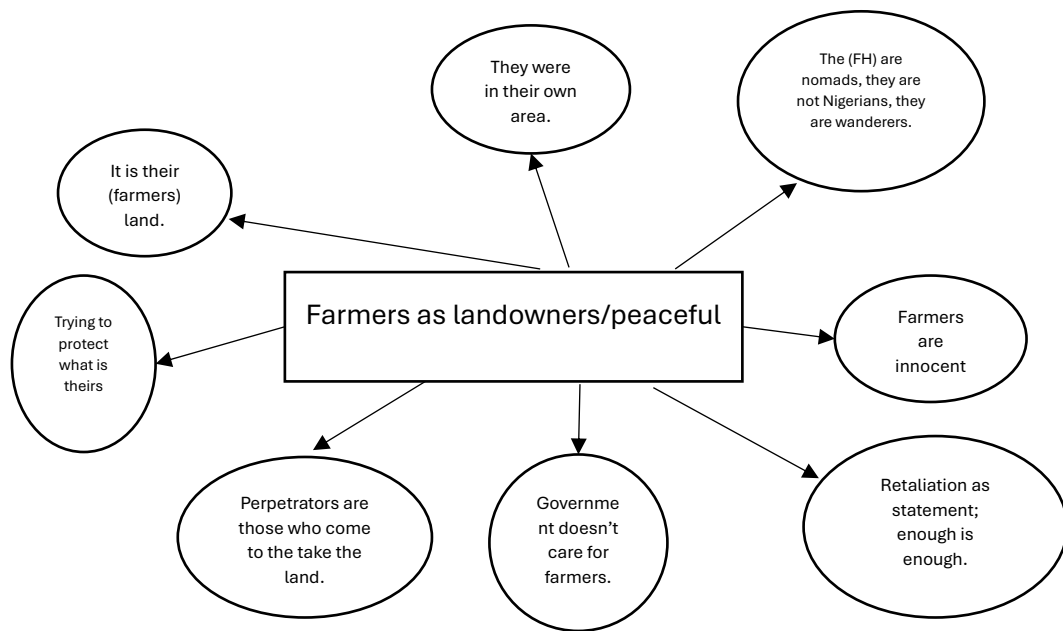


Figure 11 Evaluations of the farmers in the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

Overall, most participants who had been asked to read the news article of the 'Farmers as perpetrators' rejected the description of the farmers as being the perpetrators of violence in the Herders-Farmers violence, arguing that the Farmers were peaceful and hospitable. They claimed that the welcoming and hospitable nature of the farmers was well-known and exploited by the Fulani Herders, who have continued to attack and kill them. Participants in this group also noted that the government had neglected the farmers. Therefore, the violence attributed to them in the news report was a response to the continuous attacks of the FH and neglect of the government.

Additionally, most participants in the group asked to read the news report about the FH as perpetrators referred to the farmers as the owners of the land, defining the conflict as one being fought over land ownership. Participants in this group pointed out that the FH had attacked the farmers to permanently take over the land. This is interesting because the news article did not contain details of previous attacks perpetuated by the FH. However, most participants not only assumed that the FH had attacked the farmers previously, but they also assumed that the farmer's violence was in response to the FH attack. They also held that the

violence perpetuated by the farmers against the FH was to protect and secure continuous land use, defining the farmers as indigenous.

Most of the participants in this group indicated a rejection of the farmers as perpetrators. These opinions also suggest an attempt to rationalise the violent actions of the farmers as reported in the news. Although one participant in this group believed that the FH were also victims, the responses from the other participants in this group is problematic to the resolution of the Herders'-Farmers' conflict.

5.3.3 Fulani Herdsmen as nonvictims

In addition to struggling with the idea of the farmers as the perpetrators, most participants in the group that had read the article which presented the 'Farmers as perpetrators' struggled to associate the idea of 'victim' with the Fulani Herdsmen (see Figure 12 for keywords). Participants who had read the article that portrayed the 'Farmers as perpetrators' noted that the newspaper article attempted to represent the FH as victims, questioning the authenticity of the news report. They claimed that their knowledge of the FH in the conflict was that the FH would initiate an altercation with the farmers by attacking them. They noted that when the farmers retaliated, the FH would then take up the role of victim. Thus, the FH were not genuinely victims as the news report attempted to present them; rather, some respondents assumed it was an attempt by the press to cause readers to view the FH as victims.

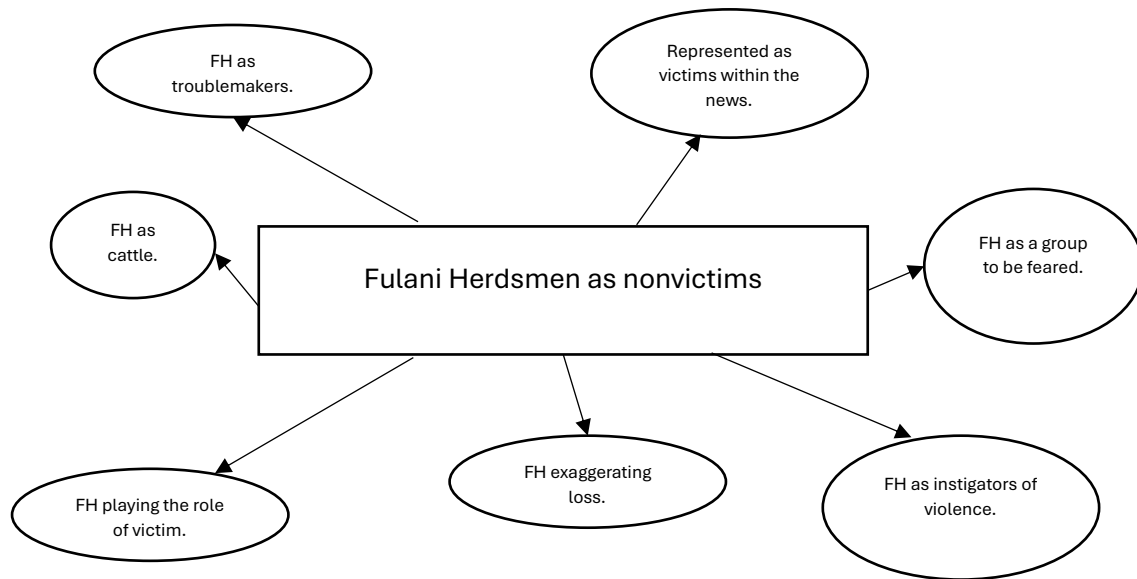


Figure 12 Evaluations of FH as non-victims

P11 believed that that the news report was written in a way that represented the FH as victims.

This news report was written in a manner that tried to make it seem as though the herdsmen were the victims (P11).

They observed that the representation within the news article attempted to present the FH as those who had been harmed by the farmers. To this reader, the FH could not be victims because this did not reflect the reality of the conflict. Rather, it was seen as an attempt by the news report to present the FH as victims. This perception was also supported by P17. They claimed that the news report mentioned the FH were the victims, but it was only a representation, implying that the FH are not truly victims.

The way it is yeah, the victim was actually mentioned that is the Fulani people are the victims, **so they were represented as the victims** (P17).

Participants seem to be responding to the framing of the Herders-Farmers' conflict; they do not think of the conflict as one being between two parties but rather the application of violence over the farmers by the FH. Consequently, even though the farmers have engaged in violence, as

reported in the news article, they are the true victims in the conflict. To some of the participants in this group, the news report is constructing a version of the reality of the Herders-Farmers' conflict they do not agree with.

The notion of the constructed reality of the FH as non-victims was restated when participants claimed that the FH play the role of victim in the Herders-Farmers' Conflict. For instance, P11 said,

And from this article you can see that **they love playing the victim** in these situations (an attack) they come and kill people, people retaliate and then **they now form that they are the victim** and they are being killed as well (P11).

The participant's response seems to suggest that the FH are assuming the role of victim because they are the ones who usually attack first and when the farmers respond in kind, the FH are portrayed as the victims in the media. According to this participant, the instigator of violence can never be a victim but will always be a perpetrator even when they are attacked by the initial victims. The FH who are known to be the instigators in the Herders-Farmers' conflict can never be the victims, rather they will be assuming the role of victim to make people see that they are also suffering. In this sense, the FH are performing a symbolic function to present the farmers as perpetrators, but they are not truly victims in the grand picture of the conflict.

To add to the ideations of the FH as nonvictims, participants contended that the representation of the FH as victims was untrue because they are liars who are exaggerating the losses they have suffered from the attack as reported in the news article that they were asked to read. Participants argued that the group representative for the FH provided figures that they could not accept as the truth, causing them to question the authenticity of presentation of the FH as victims. Specifically, participants noted that the number of casualties presented by the FH had to be an exaggeration. According to P2,

The analysis that was given after is what stood out to me. Because the Fulani group said that 20,000 cows were stolen. That is a very large amount of cows, where would the Mambila people go and keep 20,000 cows that they will not be able to find them? [sic] (P2).

According to P2, the allegation of the FH losing 20,000 cattle through theft was an overstatement. The exaggerated numbers expressed in the news report seemed to cause participants to question the validity of the FH as victims. P11 expressed similar sentiments, they said,

But then the Miyetti Allah people were saying about how many thousand cows were killed they called a lot of high numbers for the people that were killed or went missing. I think they exaggerated it, I don't know by how much but I think it's exaggerated (P11).

Similarly, P8 (the only participant who had acknowledged their ignorance of the extent of the farmers' involvement in the conflict) also noted that the FH may have been exaggerating the magnitude of their loss. They said,

I don't know I have not been up north before so I don't know the numbers at which they rear cattle but 20,000 is quite much probably it was an exaggeration at that point. Maybe 351 people did not actually lose their lives, maybe there was another exaggeration at that point (P11).

Since the FH had allegedly exaggerated the magnitude of their loss, participants struggled to accept the severity of the attacks perpetrated by the farmers, questioning the victimhood of the FH as reported in the news article. Participants claimed that if the group representative could lie about the cattle, then they could lie about the number of deaths suffered. Participants therefore called into question the authenticity of the events as reported within the article, as well as the statements attributed to the FH representative, with P2 outright referring to them

as 'liars'. Participants also called into question the victimhood of the FH. Participants failed to see that the details provided by the FH was an account of the loss they had suffered *in the entire conflict* with the farmers. Although the news report began with an isolated attack against the FH, the details the quasi-elite source provided was a full picture of how the FH had suffered in the conflict in Mambilla. However, because participants assumed that the FH are the perpetrators, they questioned the authenticity of the FH loss in the news article. By referring to the loss of the FH as a lie and an exaggeration, the participants in this group called to question the victimhood of the FH.

In addition to calling to question the victimhood of the FH by challenging the details of their loss within the news article, some participants referred to their personal experience with the FH to decry the victimhood of the FH. Here a general perception of the FH comes into play in the interpretation of the news article. P17 said,

I think this article is saying they are the victims, but in reality, those people are troublesome – the FH (P17).

According to P17, the article attempts to portray the FH as the victims in the conflict, but in reality, the FH are the known initiators of violence. The participant refers to them as 'troublesome', adding that,

I am actually afraid of them anytime I come across them. If my car is passing and I see cow, oh God, I am like God please let this cow go to one corner let the car pass first. I'm not even worried about the car, I am worried about my life [sic].

This statement moves the perception of the FH beyond the news article to general perception of the FH. The participant seems to perceive all cattle herders as Fulani, and associating the Fulani to cattle herding. The participant speaks of the cattle as something to be afraid of because it represents death. their comments suggest that cattle is now synonymous with the FH. It may have been a Freudian slip to refer to the FH as cattle, however, in expressing fear

of the presence of the cattle after reading the news article, the participant's response suggests a deep-seated fear of the FH that removes them from notions of victim to notions of the perpetrators of violence in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. To this participant, although the newspaper article reported the FH as victims, they are a troublesome people that should be feared.

5.3.4 Fulani Herdsmen as nomad

In addition to questioning the victimhood of the FH, participants who read the article which presented the 'Farmers as perpetrators' referred to the nomadic lifestyle of the FH. Participants seemed to connect the FH with nomadism to disclose their perceptions of the FH as occupiers (see Figure 13). The FH were primarily identified as foreigners, not indigenous to Nigeria. The FH were also referred to as those who travel around aimlessly, rendering the lifestyle of the nomadic pastoralist as one which is not relevant. Participants assumed that the origin of the FH was nomadic. Therefore, the FH are not entitled to use the land for their purpose.

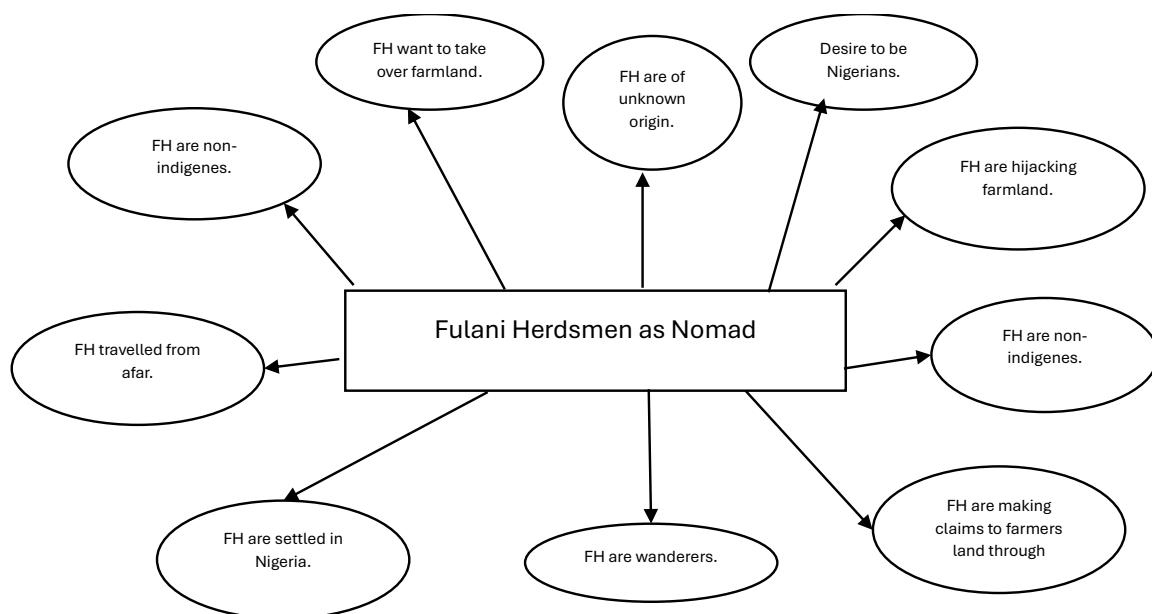


Figure 13 Evaluations of the FH as Nomad

P11 claimed that the FH are not native to Nigeria. They pointed out that the FH are alien and therefore not citizens of Nigeria. The FH move around with their cattle to find land for their cattle to graze. P11 said,

And this thing is that this Fulani people to be honest they are **not even indigenes of Nigeria**. They come from wherever they come from, I cannot remember where they migrated from and came into Nigeria and then they settled (P11).

Participants refer to FH's nomadic lifestyle to highlight that they are not indigenous to Nigeria. According to the participants, the origin of the FH is unknown, but their destination is Nigeria, where they have come to settle. Specifically, P20 attempts to draw out the history of the FH in Nigeria, claiming that they have travelled through various countries.

...like they are nomads, so they wander from different location to the other. They don't stay in one place, they move form different areas and most of them are from Chad, Niger. In fact, all the way from, I think even from North African states. Like they are just wonderous [sic] (P20).

This implies that because the FH are nomadic, they are not indigenous. Therefore, they lack claims to the land. In referring to the nomadic lifestyle of the FH, the participant refers to the construct of identities tied to hegemonic practices prevalent in pre-colonial and colonial eras (Ochonu 2014). These hegemonic practices have informed the definition of who is 'settler' and who is 'indigenous'. It has also informed stereotypic perceptions of the non-state actors in the conflict, which is restated in participants' description of the FH as non-indigenes because they are nomads. To P20 and P11, the FH are not indigenous to Nigeria: the FH are travellers with no known origin. These participants have connected the nomadic lifestyle of the FH to mindless, aimless wandering. Participants' statements seem to imply that nomadic pastoralism is not beneficial to anyone except the FH because nomadism is a pretence for occupation.

Additionally, some participants seem to believe that pastoral nomadism is a valuable practice for the FH because as they travel, they can take over landownership. Nomadic pastoralism was also connected to notions of land grabbing and fears of occupation. They argued that attempts to amicably resolve the issue often led to attacks from the FH. Similarly, P13 stated,

They have this nomadic lifestyle where they just keep moving and anywhere they move to they just claim land there and nobody is saying anything about it. They just take their cattle to graze wherever they like and do whatever they like and if you talk it's a problem and fight will start (P11).

Participants also added that the FH tend to remain wherever they migrate to within Nigeria. Participants claimed that because the FH are nomadic in nature, they sometimes settle temporarily in Nigeria, causing other Nigerians who are not aware of their nomadic lifestyle to assume that they are Nigerians. They argue that the FH are not Nigerians but nomadic. They said,

Most of the time, they tend to pitch their tent in Nigeria, so most people think that Fulani are part of Nigeria. But in the real sense they are not part of Nigerians, they are just wanderers (P20).

In this statement participants call to question the citizenship of the FH and they also suggest that by travelling into Nigeria, the FH may take over farmer's land. To add to the notion of the FH nomadism as a form of land grabbing, P20 adds,

And then they also tend to dominate, like they want to create rivalry among the farmers in the local community by hijacking their farmland. Taking over their cattle, cows and livestock and also killing them (P20).

P20 believed that the FH tend to overcome communities where they take their cattle to graze. They argue that there is an intention of the FH to foment unhealthy competition between

themselves and the farmers. Their statement echo the beliefs that the FH have an agenda to dominate the Middle Belt of Nigeria. She adds,

The FH is all about taking over farmlands and taking over their cow and in fact I think they want to be part of Nigeria, they want to be called a tribe in Nigeria (P20).

P20 connects nomadism to land grabbing when she states that the FH are intending to take over farmlands, having an intense desire to be Nigerians. Like most participants in this group, she believes that the FH are not Nigerian citizens. She draws on their nomadic lifestyle to showcase their purported land grabbing intent and desire to be perceived as Nigerians.

Participants believe that the nomadism is a lifestyle which showcases the desperation of the FH to nurture their cattle at the expense of farmer's existence. They present nomadism as a tool used by the FH to seize and takeover farmers' land for the survival of their cattle. P20 claimed,

On the part of the Fulani herdsmen, those ones just want to hijack communities. They also want to take over Nigeria little by little... They just want to hijack communities and kill anybody that comes to attack them or wants to repress them. So that is their mission. And also farmlands, because they really cherish their cattle (P20).

P20 declared that through the nomadic lifestyle of the FH, the true intent of the FH to dominate the land is possible. The domination of the land by the FH is because they have more regard for their cattle than they do human life.

5.3.5 Summary of evaluations from Group 2

To recap, this section displayed the themes identified through the analysis of the interviews with participants that had read the article which presented the 'Farmers as the perpetrators' in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. The farmers and the FH were identified as non-state actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. The farmers were recognised as owners of the

land, peaceful but violent because of the violence of the FH and the neglect of the government. Some of the participants legitimised the farmer's violence noting that it was for self-preservation suggesting that the FH violence was for brutality. The farmers were noted to be indigenous to the land and as such their violence was an attempt to protect and preserve themselves. Participants' perceptions of the Farmer's violence indicate an attempt to absolve the farmers of violence in the Herders-Farmers' conflict, positioning the FH as the only violent group. The belief of the FH as the major perpetrators in the conflict was further indicated in participant's observation that the FH were not victims but that the news media were reconstructing an image of the FH as guilty. The participants believed that the FH were troublemakers who disturb the peaceful existence of the farmers. They also believed that the FH were presented as the victims because the details in the news report did not match with their knowledge of the conflict vis a vis who is victim and who is perpetrator. Participants also explained that the FH were nomadic, potentially prone to violence as a result of the lifestyle. The FH were reportedly not Nigerian citizens because they had no ancestral connection to Nigeria and their attacks were an attempt to take over farmer's land.

Participants' response to farmer's violence in the news report suggested an abject recognition of the FH as the instigators of violence in the Herders-Farmers' conflict, with farmers' violence only in response to it. Thus, participants struggled to perceive the FH as the victims in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. For one, they relied on their experiential knowledge of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. They also relied on their knowledge of the conflict rather than what they assumed to be a reimagining of the Herders-Farmer's conflict by the news media. This way, the FH are not victims who are experiencing suffering in the Herders-Farmers' conflict, rather they are politically constructed as such by the news media. Participants' responses reveal moral judgement identifying whose victimhood is legitimate and illegitimate. They also grant the farmers' victimhood in the Herders-Farmers' conflict, a level of superiority, seeing them innocent in the same context where their victimhood has been defined. From participants' responses, it can be inferred that

the violence frequently visited upon the farmers by the FH becomes a currency for the moral economy where farmers' suffering is more recognised than FH suffering, with the claims of FH victimhood being disregarded and ignored.

The farmers' violence was also legitimised in the participant's acknowledgement of the farmers as the indigenes of the space where the conflict is unfolding. This is important because the Herders-Farmers conflict has largely been defined as resource-based conflict. However, participants' responses seem to suggest that this may not be the case. Their responses indicate a suggestion that farmers are violent to defend continuous ownership of land linked to their ethnic identity. Violence in defence of ethnic territory suggests that participants may consider the conflict to be an ethnic conflict. They do not overtly define the conflict in this manner, but this is implied when they claim that the farmers are violent to defend what is theirs.

Finally, participants' responses contained traits of the stereotypes of the FH observed in the first part of the study. For instance, when participants claimed that the FH were incessantly attacking the farmers, they were exposing perceptions that connect with the stereotype of the FH as Warlike. Similarly, when participants in this group maintained that the nomadic lifestyle of the FH prevented them from being indigenes, as well as those who capture farmers' land, their responses connected with the descriptions of the FH as alien and as occupier, primes for the stereotype of the FH as Invader. However, it must be noted that these stereotypes were not primed by the news report since the news report did not contain primes for the relevant stereotypes. Instead, participants relied on their personal knowledge of the conflict to make sense of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

5.4 Unknown Gunmen as perpetrators

The second part of this study adopted a qualitative experimental approach, presenting three different news articles to the participants: one presented the Fulani Herders as perpetrators; another presented the Farmers as perpetrators; and the other represented the unknown gunmen as perpetrators. The previous sections in this chapter have considered the opinions expressed by participants who read the first two news articles. This section will display the

findings of the thematic analysis of participants who had read the news about the perpetrators as unknown gunmen to capture perceptions of the non-state actors in the conflict.

Seven participants (3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18 and 21) were randomly assigned to read a newspaper article where the perpetrators were referred to as unknown gunmen. In the news report, the attacks had occurred in various villages and the killers were described as gunmen. Afterwards, participants were individually interviewed, their responses were transcribed and thematically analysed for perceptions of the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Participants primarily referred to the unknown gunmen as Fulani Herders. According to participants, the description 'unknown gunmen' was a pseudonym for Fulani Herdsmen. They conceded that the unknown gunmen (who are the Fulani Herders) are vicious killers and that the farmers who were the victims were highlighted as utterly helpless.

5.4.1 'Unknown Gunmen' as the Fulani Herdsmen

Participants observed that the attackers in the Herders-Farmers conflict were not unknown gunmen but the Fulani Herdsmen (see Figure 14). Participants claimed that their knowledge of the conflict made them aware of the identity of the perpetrators in the conflict. Unknown gunmen were FH because of their personal knowledge of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. They also claimed that members of the farming community in other attackers had identified their attackers as Fulani Herdsmen. However, weak investigative journalistic skills, as well as an inadequate police work, led to the description of the attackers in the Herders-Farmers' conflict—at least in the news media—as Unknown Gunmen.

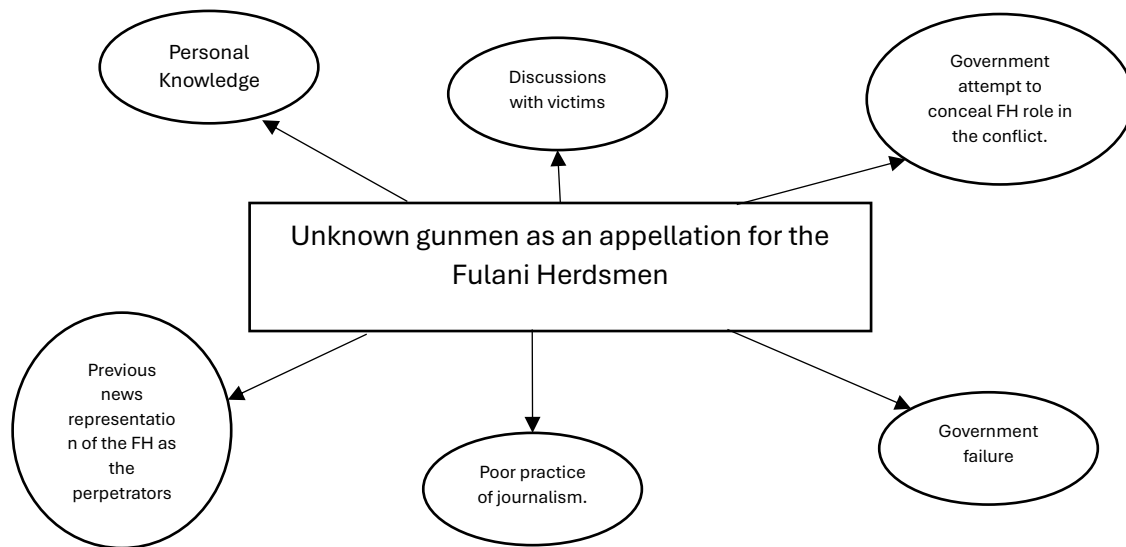


Figure 14 Evaluations of the Unknown Gunmen

When asked why they thought that the attackers were Fulani Herdsmen, a participant said,

I will call it my personal knowledge from what I personally know which is largely common knowledge also (P12).

It is not clear whether the participants' knowledge store about the Herders-Farmers' conflict was furnished from other news reports about the conflict or from personal experience in the conflict. However, the participant seems to think that other people share the same idea that the Unknown Gunmen are Fulani Herders. Contrastingly, notions of the attackers being Fulani Herders were echoed by other participants who shared that the Fulani Herders were the attackers in the conflict because of what they had heard and what they had read in previous news reports about the conflict. P15 said,

I think that they are because from reports that I have heard...articles I read then said that these were herdsmen attacks. And so I believe that there gunmen are the herdsmen (P15) [sic].

In addition to that, some participants claimed that the victims of attacks, some of whom he knew personally, would often identify their attackers as FH. They noted that although the victims had said that their attackers were FH, the news media stated that the perpetrators were unknown gunmen. The participant recalls an attack which had taken place in Minna where the victims claimed they were attacked by the FH. However, news reports stated that the attackers were Unknown Gunmen. They said,

People were so clear on who came and who perpetuated the act. But when I saw it reported on tv, all I can hear was gunmen. The attack in Minna was Fulani people, the people I spoke to personally referred to them...you know the basic features of a Fulani person. I could get the perception that it was Fulani people they were talking about. But in the reports on the media and everywhere else that I saw it, it was just gunmen (P6).

Some participants seemed to believe that the attackers were Fulani Herdsmen and not an unknown group. They noted that even though the article described the attackers as unknown gunmen, they were Fulani herders who were armed.

I just feel that apart from the fact that they are using gunmen when they are not gunmen but are actually Fulani Herdsmen. And that they are not unknown neither are they gunmen (P3).

In the first part of the study, it was argued that the news reports would sometimes describe the FH as unknown gunmen – a form of journalese – but was rather problematic. The participant's response suggests a refusal to interpret the use of the term 'unknown gunmen' as a form of journalese. Instead, they perceived it as an attempt to conceal the identity of the Fulani Herders, the participant said,

Because I think it's just what the media is trying to use like to protect them (P3).

Participants believe that the attackers in the news report they were asked to read were Fulani Herdsmen and not unknown gunmen, but because the news media did not adequately

investigate the attacks, and tended to rely on the Nigerian government as a news source, they would describe the attackers as unknown gunmen. They said,

The style is about calling the police for comments as opposed to asking questions that will prompt specific answers (P12).

They claimed that the news media was not asking the right questions that would lead to a deeper understanding of the conflict – that the reliance on press releases from government officials meant that when the Fulani Herdsmen attacked the farmers, they were referred to as unknown gunmen rather than as Fulani Herders.

Participants also observed that the attackers being reported as unknown gunmen was because the Nigerian Police Force were not putting in effort to discover the true identity of the perpetrators.

I don't think these people are unknown because if the policemen should carry out their due investigation, their identities will be revealed. The article should have been with the appropriate tag it should carry. If the policemen do their job, they will know who the true culprits are (P6) [sic].

The participant suggested that if the Nigerian Police carried out a thorough investigation on the attacks, the perpetrators would be identified as the Fulani Herders. But due to their apathy in handling the Herders-Farmers' conflict, the attackers were described as unknown gunmen, and this is fed into the information that the news media receives and presents to the world.

Some of the participants in the group concluded that when the news media refers to attackers in the Herders-Farmers' conflict as unknown gunmen, they render the attackers invisible, adding an air of mystery to them, suggesting that they cannot be defeated. A participant said that when the news media describes them as

...unknown persons so it gives them this air of invisibility, these are the unknown gunmen or yet to be identified gunmen...(P12).

5.4.2 Unknown gunmen as vicious killers

In addition to arguing that the attackers were not unknown gunmen but Fulani Herders, participants who were directed to read the news reported describing the 'Unknown gunmen as the perpetrators' expressed that the gunmen were vicious killers. Some participants observed that the unknown gunmen are vicious killers because of the nature of their attacks. Other participants were vicious because they operated unchallenged by the Nigerian government.

Participants in the group who read the news article about the 'Unknown gunmen as perpetrators' observed that the gunmen were cruel because there was no obvious reason for the attack within the news report. They said,

it was that **the gunmen stood out as people that love to kill for no reason at all. It's as if they just entered unprovoked and kill people** (P15).

From the participants' response, it can be inferred that the news article is missing crucial information that would have allowed the reader to get a fuller picture of the attacks. This meant that the unknown gunmen, whom they have interpreted as the Fulani Herders, were indeed a vicious people. Notions of the viciousness of the unknown gunmen in the article were repeated by participants, who commented on the aftermath of the attacks. They said,

...they are vicious is because of the carnage that they leave behind, the destruction that they leave behind. The sorrow, tears and the blood that they leave behind (P12).

Participants in this group argued that the attackers were vicious because they often went unchallenged. They alluded that the Nigerian government were incompetent and unable to handle the attacks of the Fulani Herders and so they continued to attack their victims. P12 said,

The image that stood out to me, I think the viciousness of the attacker as brutal vicious and barbaric elements who can operate unchallenged and then the incompetence of the government...and then you have a government who is asleep to its responsibilities and has failed the citizens that they exist to protect...(P12).

From P12's evaluation of the attackers in the news report, it can be inferred that they believe that the tensions in the Herders-Farmers conflict continue to escalate because the Nigerian government seem unable to handle the FH. On one hand, it highlights the FH as a powerful group who are not mere herdsman. And on the other hand, it suggests that the Nigerian government are incapable of managing the Herders-Farmers' conflict from a diplomatic perspective and may have to utilise violent means to curb their actions. The participant further argued that the Fulani Herders were vicious because they seemed better equipped for battle. The participant said,

Because it is not an even fight, somebody is spoiling for a fist fight and the other person is coming with gun or a knife, it's not going to be an even fight. I think that they are vicious only because they have not met their match... (P12).

The participant seems to suggest that there is a conflict between the farmers and the Fulani Herders. However the Fulani Herders seem better equipped than the farmers thereby coming off as vicious killers. For this participant, the FH are only vicious because the farmers are neither capable nor in position to oppose them. His response seems to suggest that the farmers are what they are, farmers, whereas the Fulani Herders are more than herders.

To recap, participants who had read the news report that described the attackers as unknown gunmen claimed that the attackers were 'known,' and they were Fulani Herders. They argued that the attackers were the FH because of their personal knowledge of the conflict, having experienced it firsthand and communicated with survivors of the conflict, as well as reading about it in the news. Some of the participants in this group also claimed that the Fulani

Herdsmen were vicious because the news reports lacked sufficient information about the reported attack and because they often left the farmers in terrible states. They stated that the notion of the attackers in the Herders-Farmers conflict as unknown gunmen was perpetuated by the press, who relied solely on elite sources for details about the news. Participants observed that elite sources such as the police did not properly investigate the attacks and were quick to describe the perpetrators as unknown gunmen. They noted that the description of the attackers as unknown gunmen engendered notions of the militaristic expertise of the FH over the Nigerian government. Participants believed that the FH were vicious because they seemed to perpetuate violence without any form of challenge from the farmers or the Nigerian government.

The responses indicate that participants seem to think that the FH are no longer herdsmen but armed men. This is significant because in the first part of this study – the qualitative analysis of newspaper articles – it was argued that the presentation of the FH as ‘gunmen’ may cause readers to relocate the FH from herding to gun-toting, indicating the activation of the stereotype of the FH as warlike. Moreover, it implies that the Herders-Farmers’ conflict is not communal violence due to competition for land use, but something more sinister. Consequently, participants’ suggestions that the FH are vicious because they haven’t met their match indicates a perception of the FH as being capable to engage in warfare. That is, the FH are not herdsmen but a militarised group that the farmers must evolve to overcome. It also suggests that the Nigerian government must take extreme measures to put an end to the actions of the Fulani Herders. It is not surprising, therefore, that participants suggest that the Farmers resort to violence to curb the actions of the FH, as we shall see in the next session.

5.4.3 The farmers as disenfranchised victims

After reading the news report which presented the unknown gunmen as the perpetrators, participants’ responses suggested that by reporting the attackers as unknown gunmen the farmer’s victimhood was eliminated. Participants claimed that the news article did not

adequately capture the loss experienced by the farmers, highlighting the manner in which the press and the Nigerian government has handled the victims in the Herders-Farmers conflict.

Participants noted that the news article stood out from other news articles that did not adequately report the experiences of the farmers following the attacks attributed to the unknown gunmen, as these news articles tended to focus more on the perpetrators than on the victims of the attacks. P15 said,

From the article, it didn't try to say much from the community but on the gunmen, they are like blood thirsty people from the article (P15).

They claimed that the article focused more on the perpetrators, creating an image of the violence of the attack rather than the suffering of the victims. Participants observed that the experience of the farmers was reduced in the way that the press referred to them.

Let's start from the people, how can you call a whole group, it is very degrading and disrespectful to report a whole lot of lives as communities, just the word communities...so the people are not being represented well in all these articles, we need names, we need faces, these people are human beings. The people need more representation, that is the point (P18).

They noted that the farmers' experience was reduced to numbers that did not adequately present to the reader the impact of the FH violence.

Some participants suggested that the experience of the farmers was not fully reported because they were poor and irrelevant to the press. They noted that because the farmers are economically disadvantaged and located in the rural areas, news reports about the attacks on farmers have been brief, imprecise and inaccurate. P6 added,

It felt like they were local communities like they were people who really didn't matter...The news kind of happened very recently so I have seen how other news

outlets report certain news and I know how it would have been reported if it was in a more urbanised area if they were well to do (P6).

For this participant, it is not that the farmers are unreachable by the press but that the press deemed them less newsworthy because of their status. According to the participants, the farmers are poor and so their stories are told differently to those who are more wealthy and powerful. They added,

...they have been relegated to the bottom of society, the strata of society and then their lives and their worth in society have probably been diminished by virtue of maybe their social standing, maybe they don't have a voice speak for them, there is nobody to champion their cause you know so they are now deemed as dispensable people (P12).

The farmers seemingly lack the agency which may have been afforded to them had they been wealthy or located in an affluent area in the country. Furthermore, participants thought that the farmers had no one to call attention to their suffering and so the news media continues to treat their experience inconsequentially.

Additionally, participants noted that experience of the farmers was made worse by the Nigerian government's inability to protect them. They noted that the Nigerian government had neglected the farmers, further exposing them to the attacks of the Fulani Herders. P12 said,

They are people who maybe the government of the day does not take seriously so you don't find serious effort to safeguard them, their lives and their property and that probably explains why in real life moving away from the article, you find people who have been in IDP camps in a state (P12).

Participants stated that the government's neglect of the farmers meant that were forced to leave their homes, moving into camps for the internally displaced people. P12 stated that unresponsiveness of the government to the plight of the farmers has meant that,

...the victim is made to look like they have the responsibility of safeguarding life and property (P12).

The participant states that the government's failure to safeguard the farmers suggests that the farmers are responsible for securing themselves from the attacks of the FH. The participant's response implies that the farmer's resort to violence because the Nigerian government has failed them.

5.4.4 Summary of evaluations from Group 3

This section presented the themes identified in the interview with participants who had read the news article which portrayed the 'unknown gunmen' as the perpetrators in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Participants in this group described the FH as the attackers in the news article. They highlighted their personal knowledge, relationship with victims of other attacks perpetuated by the FH as well as previous news reports as sources for the identification of the perpetrators of the conflict. It can be observed that the FH are once again described as the perpetrators in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. They are also described as vicious killers who leave carnage behind. On one hand, the FH are vicious because the government hasn't handled the situation properly. On the other hand, they are vicious because the press reports them so. According to participants, the description of the FH as the unknown gunmen presents them as a force too powerful for the Nigerian government, translating the FH from herding to terrorism. Additionally, participants' responses reveal the Farmers as disenfranchised victims in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. That is, through the actions of the news media (focusing on the perpetrators, relying on elite sources, ignoring the suffering of the farmers), audiences are unaware of the full impact of the conflict on the farmers. Thus, they take measures to protect themselves and to prevent further victimisation in the conflict. Furthermore, participants in this group focus on other actors in the Herders-Farmers conflict and the role they play. According to participants, the news media seems to rely on elite sources for information on the conflict, which leads to the description of the perpetrators as 'unknown' gunmen and the farmers as figures rather than humans who have lost their lives. Participants also focus on the

government, who have failed to adequately discover the perpetrators in the conflict or a permanent solution to the conflict. As a result, everyone knows (according to the participants) the attackers are the Fulani Herdsmen but they are said to be unknown for political reasons.

When reflecting on the viciousness of the FH, some of the participants suggested that the FH seemed heavily equipped to engage in warfare, arguing that the FH had continued to terrorise their victims unchallenged. The participants' response seemed to suggest that the FH were not mere Herdsmen but gunmen/knifemen. This response indicated an interpretation of the FH as gunmen, a prime for the stereotype of the FH as warlike. Thus, the participants' response shows the potential activation of the stereotype of the Fulani Herders as warlike. It aligns with the findings from the first part of the study: it was argued that when the news reports referred to the FH as gunmen, it would serve as an implicit message to the reader, potentially activating stereotypic interpretations of the FH as warlike. Contrastingly, when participants claimed that the description of the Fulani herders as unknown gunmen gives them an 'air of invisibility', it suggests that the FH are a mysterious force beyond the capabilities of the Nigerian government. It indicates the prime for the stereotype of the FH as the nomad savage who is transgressing – going beyond the limits of what is acceptable. However, this connects differently to the findings of the first part of the study. While the findings in the first part of the study suggested that the representation of the FH as those whose violence cannot be contained by the efforts of the government signifies them as transgressing, the participant's response indicates that it is the *news description* of the FH as an unknown group that signifies them as transgressing. That is, the news report highlights the FH as a mysterious group whose violence the Nigerian government cannot manage, perhaps because of their nomadic lifestyle, while participants believe that the mysterious identity of the attackers makes their violence unmanageable. Thus, while both the news description and the participants' interpretations highlight the FH as transgressing, it can be argued that the news report about the perpetrators as unknown gunmen did not activate the interpretation of the FH transgressing. Firstly, the participants believe that the FH are undefeatable because the news report highlights their

unknown identity. Secondly, the news report that the participant was asked to read did not contain primes of the FH since the attackers were described as unknown gunmen. According to Althaus and Kim (2006), priming can only be argued to occur if the interpretation is a match to the news content.

A significant point of evaluation is that participants focused on certain aspects more than others. Participants tended to focus on the government and the news article rather than on the perpetrators as observed in the evaluations of other groups. They tended to be more critical of the news media and the government. They also paid more attention to the victims in the attack, highlighting how the news media and the government had failed the farmers and how the news report did not contain the truth of what they knew about the conflict. Furthermore, their responses offer insight into perceptions of the conflict, the role of the news media as well as the role of the government in the resolution of the conflict. Participants' responses indicate a distrust in the information that the news media provides about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. It suggests that audiences may be more receptive to information about the conflict from non-traditional sources (such as victims in the conflict) rather than from the news media or elite sources. This may be problematic to the resolution of the conflict because individuals will resort to resolving misunderstandings in their own way, utilising non-diplomatic methods, further escalating the conflict.

5.5 Common themes

The aim of the second part of the study was to capture the audience's perception of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict activated by reading the news article. The evaluation of the participants after reading the various news articles were analysed to observe constructs that were activated. This was to identify and distinguish aspects of their perceptions which coincide with traits of the actors discovered in the first part of this study, the qualitative content analysis of 208 news articles. The qualitative content analysis in the first part of the study revealed that the FH were the main perpetrators, described and portrayed in ways that were deemed to be primes of stereotypes of the FH as warlike, invader and nomad savage.

The farmers were the victims in the news, described in a manner that could further prime stereotypes of the FH. As this study adopts an experimental approach to garner audience perception, 21 participants were recruited and divided into three groups where they were assigned to read different representations of perpetrators in the conflict – perpetrators as Fulani Herdsmen, perpetrators as Farmers and perpetrators as ‘Unknown gunmen’. The previous sections of this chapter disclosed participants’ perceptions of the actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers’ conflict using thematic analysis. This section will disclose some of the similarities of the evaluation of the actors shared among the three groups. This is important because it showcases the perceptions of the actors that may arise when participants read the news about the Herders-Farmers’ conflict. It also showcases the impact of the presence of implicit stereotype constructs through representations in the news and the kinds of interpretations it might prime among audiences. In all three groups, it was observed that participants evaluated the state and non-state actors with regards to:

1. Organised violence
2. Victimology
3. The Nigerian government in the Herders-Farmers conflict
4. The role of the Nigerian news media in the Herders-Farmers conflict

5.5.1 Evaluations of organised violence

Participants in the study had various interpretations to the actions of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers conflict. Participants who read the news article which portrayed the ‘FH as the perpetrators’ identified the FH as the non-state actors in the conflict who enacted violence against the farmers. They also described the violence perpetuated by the FH as an inherent aspect of their nature and as an unnecessary means to ensure the survival of their livestock. In evaluating the Fulani Herders, participants in this group believed that killing came naturally to the FH and that it was something that the FH enjoyed doing. Some participants claimed that the FH ‘have an instinct for violence’ (P19) and ‘they derive joy in what they do’ (P19).

Participants in this group stated that the FH are 'good at what they do' (P4). Other participants connected the violence perpetuated by the FH to the nomadic pastoral lifestyle of the FH. They claimed that the FH were violent, knowing that they would have to kill to ensure the survival of their cattle. The participants in this group stated that the news report presented an accurate description of the role of the FH in the conflict as it pertains to organised violence. As P13 concluded,

I will continue to think that they are violent. I will feel that someone is trying to deny the obvious if the herdsmen were presented differently in a news article (P13).

Most participants in the group were in agreement with the representation of the violence attributed to the FH in the news article they were asked to read. They stated that the FH:

...just want to kill, we have seen it over the years (P16),

...we all know that it has gone beyond that (cattle herding) ...if you tune on to your TV set, you will hardly miss out not seeing any story on these people attacking...you probably have friends and relatives who have first-hand experiencing this thing (P7),

...they are the ones we know to do this thing (P13).

One aspect observed is that participants seem to assume that the violent nature and lifestyle of the FH is *common knowledge*. To them, the news media is merely reifying what they and everyone else around them already knows about the Fulani Herders.

Contrastingly, some of the participants who had read about the farmers as perpetrators described the FH as the initial instigators of violence. Participants assumed that the FH had attacked the farmers and that the violence attributed to the farmers in the news report was in response to the attack. Although the news report presented to this group had framed the farmers as the attackers, participants managed to describe the FH as violent. They said:

I tag them as people who are trigger happy, they just want to kill for fun, just kill at any slight provocation (P8).

...there is no where you move around in Plateau State that you don't see these herdsmen and they don't cause trouble (P11).

...they are troublesome, the Fulani Herdsmen because they value their cows more than human life (P17).

...there must have been a pending conflict that had not been settled...they were born fighters...if you encounter a Fulani man and you are violent towards him...he will remove his violence towards a very high level because has been trained to survive (P2).

Some of the participants in the second group assumed that the farmer's violence was in response to the FH violence. They disagreed with the description of the farmers as the sole perpetrators of violence, furnishing details of the conflict that were not present in the news reports they were asked to read. They argued that the farmer's violence was to protect what was theirs and to defend themselves from the attacks of the FH. P5 stated,

...the farmers themselves don't feel secure...and they feel there is a need to protect their products and their resources.

To the participants in the second group, the FH are easily incited to violence while the violence of the farmers is in response to FH violence. Most participants in the group claimed that the news report did not provide a full picture of events in the conflict. According to them, the news report was missing a crucial detail of FH attack that must have preceded violence from the farmers. They expressed displeasure at the news article's attempt to present the farmers as the instigators. While participants in the first group expressed agreement with the representation of the FH in the news article, most of the participants in the second group were in total disagreement with the representation of the farmers in the news article. Some of them claimed,

...someone told them Fulani men...were born fighters, trained to survive in the wild...always moving their cattle (P2).

Like in the first group, participants in the second group relied on personal knowledge of the FH to evaluate the violence attributed to farmers in order to blame the FH. Some other participants in the second group stated,

...that is how it has been portrayed in by most articles that I have read on this subject matter...(P11).

Participants in the second group evaluate the violence perpetuated by the farmers by referring to the violence perpetuated by the FH. In their opinion, the farmers' violence will not exist without FH violence. Since FH violence is a precursor to the farmers' violence, the farmers' violence is justified. Just like the readers in the first group, participants in the second group believe that FH violence is inherent and a part of their lifestyle—capable of activating violence from other groups. Although the farmers have engaged in violence, they are less blameworthy in the conflict – they are only acting to protect themselves. The participants in the second group seem to justify the violent actions of the farmers in the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

As for participants in the third group, who were asked to read about the perpetrators as unknown gunmen, the Fulani Herdsmen were once again identified as perpetrators. They said,

For the gunmen, I feel that they could have been presented with a specific name like a terrorist, boko haram or Fulani Herdsmen. Yeah, I think that Fulani Herdsmen are terrorists because their actions prove so...(P3).

They described the violence attributed to the unknown gunmen as terroristic in nature. To the participants in this group, the violence perpetuated by the FH is symbolic in nature and potentially politically motivated. P12 claimed,

There is a scheme to diminish the population (of certain parts of the Middle Belt).

Some of the participants in the third group believed that the FH violence revealed a conspiracy to kill people of the Middle Belt in something akin to genocide. The participants also described the violence attributed to the unknown gunmen as vicious because of the damage they left behind and because of they had gone unchallenged by the government and by the farmers.

Yes, they are vicious because of what they leave behind, the results of their actions you could use that to say that these guys are vicious guys but when you look at the advantage they have I won't say that they are vicious because their might has been, they haven't met their match and so it is not an even fight (P12).

Other participants in the third group, believed that the FH were a people that love to kill for no reason at all (P15).

Like most participants in the first two groups, participants in the third group believed that the FH were the unknown gunmen because of their personal knowledge of the conflict as well as from the press. To the participants in the third group, the violence perpetuated by the FH is not just part of their nature; rather, it has some purpose to reduce the population of the Middle Belt.

For most participants in the study, the violence perpetuated by the FH is integral to their identity, it is an aspect of their lifestyle and an activity done at leisure. They agree with the representation of the FH as perpetrators in the conflict as it supports what they know about the conflict. Contrastingly, most participants in the second group did not agree with the representation of the Farmers as violent. They argued that although the news article did not provide background details to the conflict of the Fulani Herders attacking first, the farmers' violence was in response to the violence associated with the identity and lifestyle of the FH. Participants' responses seems to suggest that the violence perpetuated by the farmers would not have been an issue if the FH had not attacked them first. Thus, by arguing that the farmers are violent to defend and protect themselves, they justify farmers' violence as an appropriate response in the conflict. Participants in the third group seem to covertly encourage farmers'

violence when they claim that FH violence has abounded because it has gone unmatched by the farmers.

5.5.2 Evaluations of victimology in the Herders-Farmers' conflict

The second part of the study revealed that participants in the study evaluated the victims in the Herders-Farmers conflict differently. Most participants described the non-state actors in the conflict to highlight who was deemed a victim in the conflict and who was merely presented as such in the news reports that they were asked to read.

For participants who had been asked to read about the FH as the perpetrators, the farmers were immediately identified as the victims. They claimed that the news report presented the farmers as those who cannot do anything to help themselves against the violence of the FH except to escape. They said,

I have a problem with how they were presented as weak and unable to do anything except run, how they don't do anything except fleeing and dying in their quest to flee (P4).

They are portrayed as helpless victims that cannot really do anything (P10)

Participants also defined the victimhood of the farmers around their ownership of the land and the ensuing loss of land that followed the attack from the FH. Some of the participants stated,

I mean they are in their houses; they are on their property. I don't think they could have been any more prepared...they were just helpless...not a battlefield (P16).

Then the people are running away from their community, your own land, where you belong, where you feel you should call home...you are made to leave that place...for safety (P13).

Participants further framed the victimhood of the farmers as those who had survived the attacks of the FH and continue to remain resilient in the face of adversity. Referring to their personal experience with survivors to an attack, the participant said,

There is always that feeling of trying to move past or adapting to a violent situation that comes with it...if I view them as victims, I've taken away that spirit of resilience from them (P1).

The participant also added,

If you see the conflict dynamics in Plateau State, you will realise that people no longer run from attacks, they try to find their local solutions (P1).

The participant perceives the farmers as those who have survived attacks, framing their resolution as seeking 'local solutions' which often includes violent retaliation against their attackers. The notion of 'local solutions' is commented on by other participants in the group who claim that the farmers aren't as helpless as the news report represents, since:

...there is something that they can do for themselves...knowing that they have actually taken it upon themselves after not getting a kind of support from the government (P10).

Most participants in the first group highlighted the farmers as helpless victims, while others framed them as 'survivors' capable of handling their challenges. The victimhood of the farmers, according to the participants, is one that has been precipitated by government neglect which forces the farmers to act.

Moving on to the second group: participants who had read the news report about the farmers as perpetrators defined the farmers as the true victims in the Herders-Farmers conflict. They claimed that the FH had attacked them first and that the farmers were victims who were merely reacting to the initial attacks of the FH.

The Mambila group reacted because they were already being attacked so it was just like self-defence...(P2)

...the Fulani Herdsmen are the ones attacking and doing most of the killing and these people are trying to defend themselves (P11).

The victimhood of the farmers, which has birthed the farmer's violence, is further exacerbated by the Nigerian government's inability to secure the lives of the farmers.

Because the farmers themselves don't feel secure from the federal government and they feel that there is a need to protect their products and their resources (P5).

To the participants in the second group, the farmers' violence is an unspoken refusal to remain powerless victims in the conflict. Farmers' violence is a mitigated response that seeks to retain control over what is theirs. By so doing, the participants define the victimhood of the farmers around the threat to landownership.

The Mambila are indigenous groups, they are the owners of the land...you cannot call them perpetrators, perpetrators are those who come to take the land (P2).

The victimhood of the farming community is connected to notions of identity which is tied to land ownership. The farmers are not merely victims because of the attacks on them but they are also victims because the attacks signify a threat to landownership which is connected to their identity. The farmers are the true victims because their identity is under constant threat when the FH attack them.

Likewise, participants in the second group referred to the Fulani Herders—who were reported as the victims in the news report they were asked to read—as 'mediated' victims. That is, the victimhood of the FH has been constructed by the news report and is not the reality of the Herders-Farmers conflict. Participants said,

The news report was written in a manner that tried to make it seem as though the herdsmen were victims...they love playing victims...they now form that they are the victims...(P11)

They were represented as victims (P17).

For some participants in the second group, the FH as victims is a mediated construct put forward by the news media. It was also a role that the FH played in the presence of the news media and not true since 'everyone knows' about their violent character. The victimhood of the Fulani Herders is a staged performance put together by the news media which participants believed can present the farmers negatively, influencing the understanding of the conflict, especially for those unaware of the nature of the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

In the third group, participants who had been asked to read about the perpetrators as unknown gunmen argued that the farmers were the victims in the conflict because of the police's failure to thoroughly investigate the attacks. They also evaluated the victimhood of the farmers as something that could not be truly understood because the news media were too lazy to thoroughly investigate the conflict but relied on official sources. They noted that because the farmers were socially disadvantaged, the news media did not pay adequate attention to their troubles, potentially denying the farmers their victimhood in the conflict. Finally, participants evaluated the victimhood of the FH in the frame of the viciousness of the attacks perpetuated by the FH. They claimed that the FH would often leave pain and sorrow in the wake of their attacks.

What is most significant in the evaluations of the non-state actors by participants in the study is the different approaches and perspectives to their victimhood. In all the groups, the farmers were defined as the true victims in the Herders-Farmers conflict. The farmers' victimhood was something that was caused by the repeated attacks of the FH, as well as the neglect of the government and the news media. It was not something that was made up by the news media, instead it was understood as something that was downplayed by the media and by the government. In contrast, most participants in the study did not think that the Fulani Herders were

victims in the Herders-Farmers conflict. Most of them believed that the news media was concealing the truth about their role in the conflict. The victimisation of the FH was defined as something that was constructed by the news media and by the government. Participants' perception of who is the victim in the Herders-Farmers conflict is important, because it impacts on how the conflict is understood, as well as on ideations around its resolution. Most participants seem to think that the FH are not impacted by the conflict even though they have lost their lives and property.

Another significant point is participants' recognition of the role of the news media in shaping perceptions of the non-state actors in the conflict, vis-à-vis who is victim and who isn't. Participants' evaluations of the victimhood in the conflict, and the role of the news media, connect to dated but relevant observations of the news media role in creating, sustaining and challenging perceptions of armed conflict put forward by Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2010). Specifically, when participants note that individuals who are unaware of the dynamics of the Herders-Farmer's conflict learn about the non-state actors from the Nigerian news media, they may not fully grasp the extent of the issue altering the conflict in significant ways.

5.5.4 The role of the Nigerian press in the Herders-Farmers' conflict

Another common theme observed in this study was participants' perception of the Nigerian press in reporting the conflict. Participants claimed that the press, exemplified in the news article they were asked to read, presented the state and non-state actors in various ways. For some of the participants who had been asked to read about the FH as perpetrators, the news reported the FH as superhuman. For participants who were assigned to read about the farmers as perpetrators, the FH were presented as victims. Participants who had read the news about the unknown gunmen as perpetrators believed that the press, in conjunction with the Nigerian government, were concealing the role of the FH as perpetrators in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Generally, most participants in all the groups argued that the press was attempting to present a positive image of the Nigerian government and security personnel. After reading the news article, participants stated that the news report attempted to represent the government and security personnel as being proactive in securing

the lives and property of the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Participants also highlighted the effects of censorship on how the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict is being reported, noting that the government tend to dictate what information about the Herders-Farmers' conflict is presented to the public. Participants concluded that they did not trust the press' report about the Herders-Farmers' conflict in Nigeria.

Some of the participants in the group asked to read the news article about the FH as perpetrators claimed that the emphasis of the news report on the FH made them perceive the FH as the main characters in the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

...because they took more time in describing their journey in how they are able to go from one state to another state, travelling through the bushes, shooting sporadically in different marketplaces and literally made them the main characters...(P4).

Other participants in this group noted that the news report's attention to the action of the FH presents them as a group that is untouchable.

For the herdsmen I think that they are portrayed as an untouchable group; they have been given a lot of power in this article. I think they are being portrayed as a god-complex kind of group as if they cannot be touched, untouchables (P10).

Participants in this group also believe that it is the portrayal of the FH in the news report that contributes to their perception of the FH as superhuman.

...tell me how good these people are and how they have moved from one place to other place pulling destruction off and then you (the news report) just tell me the effects of their destruction without actually telling me what has been done (P4).

For some of the participants in the group that had been assigned to read the news report about the farmers as perpetrators, the news report was merely an attempt to present FH as victims. The FH were not victims but represented as such within the news report.

This news report was written in a manner that tried to make it seem as though the herdsmen were the victims (P11).

The notion that the press was presenting an image of the FH in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict was shared by some of the participants in the third group. Participants who had read the news report of the unknown gunmen as perpetrators argued that the unknown gunmen were the FH. Some of the participants believed that the news report was concealing the FH by referring to them as unknown gunmen. They argued that they had conversations with some of the victims of the Herders-Farmers' conflict and the victims claimed that they had been attacked by the FH.

I could get the perception that it was Fulani people they (the victims) were talking about. But in the reports on the media and everywhere else that I saw it, it was just gunmen (P6).

Some other participants believed that the unknown gunmen were the FH because they had read about previous attacks in the news and the perpetrators were the FH.

Yes, I think that they are (Fulani Herdsmen) because the news given off is that there is a clash between these herdsmen and then the society...yes, my perspective is built on an already existing fact, based on stories I have heard...(P21).

On the other hand, some other participants stated that the news media was presenting the perpetrators as unknown gunmen because they were not doing a good job of investigating the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

There is generally a problem of lazy journalism in the country which has been widely acknowledged and many people talk about it...The style is about calling

the police for comments as opposed to asking questions that will prompt specific answers (P12).

For some of the participants assigned to read the news about the unknown gunmen as perpetrators, the term 'unknown gunmen' was an appellation for the herdsmen made up by the news media and the government to conceal the involvement of the FH. They noted that the presentation of the FH as unknown gunmen in the news could be as a result of censorship. Some participants noted that the Nigerian government is aware of the power of the press to influence the masses. They argued that the press has been censored by the Nigerian government to reduce the power of the news media. Participants claimed that the Nigerian government dictates what the press presents about the Herders-Farmers' conflict in Nigeria.

So now the government has understood this and they are able to really fuel it through the use of fake media now everything you see in the news is not as it is in real life in Nigeria because the news outlets have been gagged by the government (P18).

Participants opine that because of the limitations placed on the press as a result of the government's censorship, the version of events presented by the press is not real. Participants highlight the possibility of all news reports about the conflict being a construction of reality rather than a genuine report of what has happened. Participants also added,

So, the media feeds the populace what the APC government wants right now (P18).

Participants allude to the possibility that the press reports events according to the dictates of the government. They note that the press must do as they are told by the Nigerian government, or they may face severe consequences, such as paying extortionate fines or the permanent closure of the news organisation.

I hold the view that there is a serious censorship, there are things that you will say and you will be slammed with hefty fines and those things are probably factual (P12).

Participants claim that the press is urged to:

...try to portray the government in a positive light and to tone down reportage of events...they are encouraged to try to make things look nice (P12).

Thus, it is not surprising that most participants in all the groups in the second part of the study argued that the Nigerian press tries to present a positive image of the Nigerian government. According to participants interviewed for this study, the press would often present the Nigerian government and security personnel as being active in responding to the attacks as well as taking measures to prevent the occurrence of further attacks.

And then you (the news report) also make it look like the government is trying...without actually telling me what has been done and even your reporting on your actions does not show me that you did anything... the writing emphasised that they must commend the efforts of the police and its sister body for how quickly they swung into action but you didn't tell me the effects of your action (P4).

Participants noted that the news article attempted to present the government and the security personnel as acting to resolve the conflict. They claimed that the government is 'portrayed as trying to do something' or that the 'government is trying,'. However, because people are still losing their lives to the Herders-Farmers' conflict, the representation of the government as acting to handle the Herders-Farmers' conflict seems questionable. Similarly, a participant noted that the press would present the security personnel as 'doing something' but in truth nothing was done to curb or prevent the conflict.

Almost similar story line, the police come and gives a report that says they will find them, but nothing is always done (P6).

By claiming that the news report is an 'almost similar storyline', the participant points out the press presentation of the police. The police give a report to the press, they confirm the attack, and they make promises to arrest the perpetrators. To the participant, the news report tries to present the government as functioning, serving to protect the people. However, the reality is different, as no one has been reported to be arrested. As another participant points out,

For example, it said that they are still trying to investigate and capture the herdsmen and all that. So, we are meant to believe that throughout this battle and all that no single one of the herdsmen have been caught and questioned and who their leader is sending them, what is happening (P16).

The participant concludes by stating,

And the government, they seem like they try to put it out us that they are trying their best that they are doing the most that they can but seriously their best is not good enough (P14).

Participants believe that the Nigerian press attempts to present an image of the Nigerian government and security personnel as acting to prevent the escalation of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. However, there really isn't any proof that the government has made any effective decisions in the Herders-Farmers' conflict, at least none reported by the press.

Additionally, participants believed that press underreports details of the conflict because they are 'liars' or rather part of a system of lies and manipulation orchestrated by the Nigerian government.

I will go with the press being the liars because I feel that the press are scared to release out the real number and the press is not part of the group (P3).

...we see in the news that sometimes we believe and sometimes we do not believe cause Nigeria is a manipulative country (P14).

Some participants believed that the press may have been threatened to be censored by the Nigerian government in reporting about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Participants note that the threat of government censorship, has caused the press to underreport the severity of the Herders-Farmers' conflict, choosing instead to present a positive image of the government. The positive image that the press presents of the Nigerian government is one trying to act but not really taking any action. This is evidenced in the lack of follow up articles where culprits have been arrested. As a result, most participants referred to the news articles in this study as a Public Relation stunt for the Nigerian government.

What is most significant about the evaluations of the media's role in the conflict is participant's overt acknowledgement of the mediatisation of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Most participants seemed to believe that the news media was presenting images of the non-state actors, particularly the Fulani Herders, in problematic ways. On one hand, they are demonised as the perpetrators; on the other hand, they are presented as victims, with the news media colluding with the Nigerian government to bury the actions of the FH. Thus, when it comes to the FH, the news media is a site where the image of the FH as violent perpetrator and victim is shaped, facilitated and conditioned—usually at the expense of the farmers. Consequently, according to the participants in the study, news readers get a limited version of events. Public knowledge about the conflict is limited to the detriment of public opinion which can influence the government's impact on the conflict. Participants also seemed to believe that if one must learn about the conflict, they must speak with the victims of the conflict rather than learn from the Nigerian media. Although the news articles included in this study did not come from what would be deemed reputable news sources, the distrust participants displayed while reading these news articles indicated a negative attitude and a deep level of distrust towards the Nigerian news media.

5.5.3 The Nigerian Governance in the Herders-Farmers conflict

In addition to the evaluations of organised violence and the victimology of the conflict, participants in this study highlighted aspects of governing and policing with regards to the conflict. Participants noted the inadequacy of the Nigerian government to secure the lives and

property of the farmers. Participants also deemed that the Nigerian government seemed to be controlling and manipulating the way the details of the conflict were reported in the news.

Participants who had been assigned to read about the FH as perpetrators noted that the presentation of the FH possessing sophisticated weapons implied that they were more equipped than the Nigerian government.

So when you describe the villain as well armed, what goes on in my head is that this person is really powerful and more competent than the police (P4).

The description of the FH possessing superior weapons than the Nigerian Police force caused them to perceive the Nigerian government as being inadequate to handle the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

Additionally, participants who had been assigned to read about the unknown gunmen as perpetrators believed that the Nigerian government had not taken the proper steps to secure the farmers. Participants in this group did not believe that the government was being proactive about securing the lives of the farmers in the conflict. They said,

...my first thought is that the government did not deploy any form of security to the concerned or victimised, or affected states. So, I felt like the government turned a deaf ear to the happenings (P21).

Participants deemed that the Nigerian government had been inattentive and have acted thoughtlessly in their handling of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. They also observed that the government has, through their actions, undervalued the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict, to the detriment of those who have lost their lives and properties.

Participants who read the news report about the farmers as perpetrators noted that the government seemed unable to secure the lives of the farmers or prevent further attacks against the victims. Participants in this group believed that the Nigerian government had not done

enough to secure the lives of the farmers, and this changed the dynamics of the conflict, since the farmers are left to defend themselves. P2 noted,

The government don't care about the people of the community so they are taking decisions into their own hands, so they are seeing how they can protect themselves (P2).

When evaluating the news reports that they had been asked to read, participants also connected the role of governance and policing in the Herders-Farmers conflict to the Nigerian news media. Participants noted that the Nigerian government tended to manipulate and control the information made available to the press. Most participants believed that this was an attempt to conceal the effects of the violence in the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

I think for some reason they are trying to make the whole stuff not look as serious as it is... (P8).

Some participants alluded to the possibility that the government had covered up an event by denying its occurrence or manipulating the details of the event in order to influence perception of the issue.

So, I feel that, and basically they may know that 30 people were killed but then they just tend to feel that the numbers are just too much and maybe because...to paint their state as bad so they tend to reduce the number of the casualties involved. So, it is what they tell the media that is what they will tell the public (P20).

Some participants contend that the Nigerian government has an image to protect, and they will most often challenge the truth to maintain their image. The government does not want to be seen as incompetent or that the Herders-Farmers' conflict has tried their ability to secure and protect the lives and property of those involved. They will therefore provide the media with a different version of events to make themselves look competent. Contrastingly, some participants believed that the

Nigerian government provided details that were not accurate to garner support from abroad, claiming that,

What is happening is either they increase the number so that they can get more funding from NGOs all of that or they reduce the numbers so that the government doesn't look bad (P10).

In addition to this, participants noted that the government sometimes provided an alternate version of events in an attempt to 'deescalate' the situation.

The figures the commissioner of police in Adamawa state gave were totally different from what the state gave. I think that the article is trying to give a proof of how our government...and how public offices try to manipulate the figures of such incidents. I feel that they do that because they do not want to escalate the whole issue (P14).

Participants' responses suggest a distrust in the Nigerian government as a news source in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Their responses may offer insight into the role of sources in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Participants' responses in this study suggest that traditional sources do not provide information that is reliable or trustworthy. The lack of trust in traditional news sources indicates that participants do not think that they are the legitimate bearers of facts in news reporting, especially when it comes to the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

5.6 Summary of the qualitative experimental semi-structured interview

This section of the research set out to answer the research question on the readers' perception of the non-state actors in the coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. It follows from the qualitative analysis of newspaper articles which discovered the presentation of the FH as perpetrators and the farmers as victims. To investigate the perception of the non-state actors in the conflict in the second part of this study, participants were asked to read three different articles which presented the FH as perpetrators, the farmers as perpetrators and unknown gunmen as perpetrators. Participants were

then interviewed, and their responses were thematically analysed revealing activated stereotype constructs within their evaluations of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict (see Table 12).

	Primes of the stereotype of the actors in the conflict	Descriptions of the actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict	Stereotypes of the actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict	Evaluations (activated constructs) of the actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict	Stereotypic views of the actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict	Common themes
FH as Perpetrators	Time of the attack (late at night/early hours of the morning), descriptions of the FH (rampaging, bloodthirsty), actions of the FH (decapitation, abductions, hacking etc.) etc	FH as brutal/cruel/vicious	FH as nomad savage			FH as vicious killers, farmers as victims, government as ineffective and news media as weak.
	Personalisation within the news, farmers as peaceful,	Farmers as hospitable and peaceful.				
	Nature of the attack (swift reprisal attack) Reason for the attack (vengeance) Vengeance mission etc.	FH as outlaw and vengeful		FH as Superhuman	Unconquerable, untouchable.	
Farmers as victims	Farmers as peaceful	Farmers not engaging in reprisal attacks				
FH as perpetrators	FH as militia, state of being armed (well-armed, heavily armed)	FH as militants/terrorists and as unknown gunmen	FH as warlike	FH as killers	FH have instinct for violence, violent by nature, bloodthirsty, They enjoy killing, no value for human life, value cattle more than human life etc	
				FH as superhuman	Well-armed	
				Farmers as fleeing, as displaced	FH as warlike	
	FH as non-indigenes, description of the farmers, FH as 'pouring in', occupation agenda etc	FH as foreign/alien and as occupiers	FH as invaders	FH as foreigners and occupiers	FH from other West African country, killing to occupy farmer's land.	
				Farmers as indigenes	Loss of ancestral home, where they belong.	
Farmers as victims	Farmers as fleeing, as displaced, cattle grazing in farmland.			FH as warlike		
				Farmers as powerless		
Farmers as Perpetrators		Farmers acting in self-defence, ethnic militia to protect the interests of the farmers		Farmers as indigenes and as peaceful	FH as nomads, wanderers, farmers as hospitable and welcoming, and as peaceful	
FH as victims				FH as non-victims and nomads	FH as the instigators of violence, FH as cattle, as troublemaker, as group to be feared.	
Unknown Gunmen as Perpetrators				FH as unknown gunmen Unknown gunmen as vicious killers		
				Farmers as powerless		

Table 11 Primes of the non-state actors in the News about the Herders-Farmers' conflicts showcasing representations and perceptions

At the start of the second part of this study, most of the participants described the FH in a negative way in the pre-test survey. The available knowledge about the Herders-Farmers' conflict indicated that the FH were violent and hostile, arrogant, vengeful and unforgiving. The FH were also landless, religious extremists involved in senseless killings and fighting. The FH were described as a group that had the intention to dominate other ethnic groups, as a social group to be feared and as a group that is destructive.

Therefore, it was not surprising that most of the participants in the study referred to the FH negatively. The participants in the first group who were assigned to read the news about the FH as perpetrators interpreted the FH as inherent violent killers as well as killers to protect their livelihood. Participants in the first group assigned to read about the FH as the perpetrators perceived the FH as cold-blooded killers who hide under the lifestyle of pastoral nomadism to perpetuate violence against the farmers. Participants in this group ascribed the violence of the FH to a selfish need for the survival of their cattle. Furthermore, participants in this group claimed that the news report presented the FH as a very strong group who cannot be contained by the Nigerian government. It was argued that these interpretations of the FH as inherent killer revealed the activation of the stereotype of the FH as warlike since participants connected their violence with their nature. It was also argued that the interpretation of the FH as killers for the preservation of their livelihood revealed the potential activation of the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage since participants connected the killings to the pastoral nomadic lifestyle of the group. Likewise, the perception of the FH being uncontrollable by the Nigerian government revealed the potential activation of the stereotype of the FH as nomad savage, since it was connected to notions of the FH being above the law.

Participants in the second group assigned to read about the farmers as the perpetrators assumed that the FH instigated the violence that led to a counterattack against the FH reported in the news. They claimed that the FH were nomads who were trying to capture farmers' land. While this is a stereotype of the FH as invaders, it was not activated by the news article, since the news article did not contain any details of the FH as occupiers or as settlers but as victims.

In the third group, participants assigned to read the news about the unknown gunmen as perpetrators argued the gunmen were the FH. They claimed that the FH were a vicious group who continued to be cruel because they had gone unchallenged by the government and the farmers. Participants' responses suggested the potential activation of the stereotype of the FH as warlike, since the participants interpreted them as more than herders but a terrorist group.

While the Fulani Herdsmen were characterised as the main perpetrators in the conflict, the farmers were described as the victims by most participants in the study. Participants in the first group described the farmers as indigenes who were being stripped of landownership by the actions of the FH. Participants in the first group also suggested that the Farmers were not as weak as the news report presented them; they argued that the farmers were capable of protecting themselves from the attacks of the FH. The evaluation of the farmers being able to protect themselves was repeated by participants in the second group. They argued that the violence of the farmers was precipitated by the violence of the FH, justifying it as self-defence and as a requirement for protection since the Nigerian government had failed to do so. Participants in this group claimed that the farmers were victims who were simply trying to protect what was theirs, suggesting that the FH were mindless killers. In contrast, Fulani Herders, who were the victims in the article where the attackers were described as farmers, were argued to be constructed as victims and not truly victims in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Participants in the third group who were asked to read about the attackers as unknown gunmen argued that the description of the FH as unknown gunmen in the news disenfranchised the farmers of their victimhood in the conflict. They claimed that the government failed to secure the farmers and that they worked with the media to conceal the role of the FH in the conflict.

Participants' responses indicate an awareness of the news media in conflict in shaping how readers will make sense of it. They highlight some of the challenges that the news media faces in a competitive authoritarian country like Nigeria, where journalists are imprisoned and killed for publishing details of issues that the government deem unacceptable. Participants' responses also reveal perceptions of the role of the government in permanently resolving the conflict. Participants

show an understanding of government failure to manage the development of the dynamics of the conflict. They indicate the significance of public opinion to government policies. However, if perceptions of non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers conflict are contentious and problematic, it could impact on public opinion.

The responses from participants in the second part of the study not only reflect the activation of problematic stereotypes of the FH, but reveal interpretations of the non-state actors in the conflict that could have an impact on the dynamics and resolution of the conflict. The implications of the findings in both parts of the study will be reflected on in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.0 Overview

The Herders-Farmers' conflict is a resource-based conflict conflagrated by the differences in the ethnic and religious identities of the key actors involved. Given the debates around media coverage of protracted conflict and the effects of ethnic identity on resource-based conflict in western research, this study attempted to investigate the press coverage of the actors in the African press as well as the perceptions of the actors in the conflict. Nigeria offers a unique perspective for the study of the media and actors in armed conflict because of its rich history with colonialism which has contributed to the way ethnic identity is understood and expressed in various settings. This study was divided into two parts: the first part involved a qualitative content analysis of 208 newspaper articles from four Nigerian newspapers. The goal of the first part of the study was to discover how the stereotypes of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers conflict were primed within press coverage. The news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict was analysed using qualitative content analysis, to identify the representation of the non-state actors capable of priming stereotypic views among audience members. Because sources are vital to the process of conflict news reporting, the qualitative content analysis also included an analysis of the sources and their role in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict, discovering the ways that news sources may contribute to the primes of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. The second part of the study intended to capture the perceptions of the non-state actors primed by the news reports about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. This was accomplished by thematically analysing individual interviews with 21 participants. Three research questions were proposed to identify the representations and the perceptions of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict:

1. What are the primes of the non-state actors in the press coverage of Herders-Farmers' conflict in Nigerian newspapers?

2. How do news sources contribute to the primes of the non-state actors in press coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict in Nigerian newspapers?
3. What are the perceptions of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmer conflict primed by the news coverage?

In this concluding chapter, the empirical findings from the study around the three research questions will be thematically addressed. Afterwards, the limitations of the study will be presented, with avenues for further study suggested. Following this, the core contributions of the study at the empirical, methodological and theoretical levels will be outlined. The chapter will end with reflections on policy interventions needed to improve conflict news reportage in Nigeria.

6.1 Key findings from the research questions

In the preceding empirical chapters, the findings which emerged from each research question were presented. To avoid repetition, this section will focus on the key findings and their significance to scholarship.

6.1.1 Priming stereotypes in the news

This study has argued that the news reports about the Herders-Farmers conflict contains implicit messages capable of priming stereotypes of the non-state actors. The study has also shown that this is accomplished by the association of violence with the identity of the non-state actors in the conflict. This is enabled by the practice of war news reporting that draws attention to the acts of violence, using words and descriptions that are dramatic, providing problematic context that is a graphic proof of the violence. These two findings bring a more nuanced understanding of how the primes of the non-state actors may be activated by implicit messages in the news reports as well as how the conflict maybe characterised as an ethnic one.

The Herders-Farmers' conflict has been described as a resource-based conflict, exacerbated by climate change and population expansion in the Middle Belt region (Egbuta 2018: Oli et al 2018: Ajala 2020). However, in Chapter 4, the study demonstrated that the news media coverage of the conflict used implicit messages that essentialised the identity of the non-state actors as integral to violence. By coding the ethnic identity of the non-state actors as being elemental to the violence, the news reports define the Herders-Farmers' conflict as an ethnic one. The Nigerian news media does not do this overtly; rather, the use of specific nouns, adjectives and phrases in conjunction with the ethnic identities of the non-state actors covertly identifies the conflict as an ethnic one. In centralising the ethnic identity of the non-state actors in the news reports of the conflict, stereotypes of the ethnic groups are replete, capable of activating negative perceptions among Nigerian news readers. Similarly, the lifestyle associated with non-state actors in the conflict was essentialised as integral to the acts of violence reported in the news. While it may be considered that the news report's portrayal of the lifestyle of the Fulani Herders connects in some way to the scarce resource thesis of the Herders-Farmers' conflict, this study argues that it does not. The news reports analysed in this study do not connect the violence of the FH to the scarcity and competition for land and water. Instead, the news reports—through word choice—connect the violence perpetuated by the FH to the pastoral nomadic lifestyle. This is particularly problematic because as this study argued in Chapter 3, one of the key stereotypic beliefs that abound about nomadic pastoralism is that all practitioners are of Fulani ethnic origin. However, studies have shown that this is not the case, as other ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria are pastoral nomads (Blench 2010). When the news reports about the Herders-Farmers' conflict covertly attach the violence of the FH to pastoral nomadism, the implicit message within the news report is that not only is pastoral nomadism harmful to sedentary societies, but it is causal to the violence they perpetuate. Therefore, the study argues that by associating the violence of the non-state actors to their ethnic identity and their lifestyle, the news reports define the Herders-Farmers' conflict as an ethnic one.

Furthermore, the study demonstrated that the victimhood in the conflict was showcased around the suffering of the farmers, providing proof of the violence of the Fulani Herdsmen rather than revealing how both sides have been impacted by the conflict. This conclusion is based on the differences between portrayal of the violence perpetrated by the farmers and violence perpetuated by the Fulani Herders, as well as by the portrayal of the farmers as the victims of the violent nature and lifestyle of the FH. To this end, the study suggests that the primes included in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict may be derived from an ethnic mental framework, producing implicit messages which are primes for the stereotypes of the non-state actors. The ethnic mental framework is derived from a democracy and journalism that is primarily patriotic to the home village (region, province, ethnic group, cultural community etc) rather than to nation building (Nyanmnjoh 2015) – a monumental challenge to the growth and development of Nigeria as a nation. All four newspapers included in the study are owned by people from the southern region of Nigeria that has historically been at odds with the northern region where the Fulani are located. The study agrees with academic literature which reveals that the allegiance to the ideals of one's ethno-political location impacts on the portrayal of non-state actors in the news, directly affecting the interpretation of events among news readers.

Victimhood in the Herders-Farmers' conflict was also demonstrated in the reported loss of access to land. Here, as previously mentioned in Chapter 4, the news media unwittingly connects the victimhood of the farmers to a token of their ethnic identity. The victimhood of the farmers is discursively realised spatially. That is, the land which was passed down to them by their ancestors is a site that has been forcefully seized, overtaken and occupied by the violence of the Fulani Herdsmen. The loss of the 'home place', which has been defined by its availability to the farmers through bloodline, highlights how the news media emphasises discursive territoriality. The study aligns with academic debates about discursive territoriality which argue that the Nigerian news media harnesses material and emotional dimensions of space, aligning particular people of particular territories, privileging their claim over the

material benefits of the space (Adebanwi 2007). Discursive territoriality indicates a struggle over territory which is actually a struggle over identity. In defining victimhood around land loss, the press uses the structural context in which relations to land are located particularly as resources for mobilisation of identity, to emphasise the genuineness and the authenticity of the farmers as victims in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. As was seen in Chapter 5, relationship to space becomes central to defining who is victim and who is perpetrator in the conflict. This study argues that the press utilises the emotional powers of space, constructing the Middle Belt region spaces as belonging to the farmers.

Taken together, the study argues that the covert association of the violence of the non-state actors to their ethnic identity defines the conflict as an ethnic one, distributing primes within the news report, activating stereotypic perceptions of the non-state actors. Additionally, defining victimhood in relation to landownership (which is tied to ethnic identity) further shapes the news-consumers' understanding of the Herders-Farmers' conflict as an ethnic conflict.

6.1.2 News Sources and Primes of the non-state actors.

News sources are an important aspect of the news making process, verifying the occurrence of an event and oftentimes providing precise details. The qualitative content analysis attempted to showcase the ways that news sources included in news reports about the Herders-Farmer's conflict contributed to the primes of the non-state actors in the news coverage. The study applied existing academic literature on identifying and classifying the news sources according to their type – elite, quasi-elite and nonelite. Then the research focused on the textual position of the sources according to journalistic conventions. This was followed by identifying their textual contribution to the primes present in the news article. In doing this, the study identified two ways that the news sources contribute to the primes of the non-state actors in the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. This proved useful, as the findings highlighted the ways that certain journalistic norms allow news reporters to position statements from news sources and the ensuing primes contained within the sources' statements. Through this approach, the study argued that news reporters utilise journalistic

conventions to strategically include various news source statements, revealing how the sources contribute to primes.

On the whole, the study suggested that news sources from the different non-state actor groups in the conflict were utilised differently in the news. Moreover, their statements were treated differently. While the findings suggest that nonelite sources were significantly included, contradicting academic literature that claims ordinary citizens are rarely included as sources in armed conflict news reporting (Lee 2010), these nonelite sources were primarily from the farmers. Nonelite sources from the Fulani Herders were rarely included in the news of the conflict. Instead, quasi-elite sources representing them spoke on their behalf. Statements from the quasi-elite sources representing the Fulani Herders were reported in problematic ways, with elite sources negating their veracity. On the other hand, the findings revealed that statements from quasi-elite sources representing the farmers were treated more positively, featuring closely with statements from non-elite sources, so much so that even when elite sources provided contradictory statements, the positioning of statements from the sources associated with the farming community would still be accepted as the truth of the event. While the study acknowledges that the inclusion of nonelite sources from the farming community highlights the changing dynamics in the relationship between news sources and journalists offering alternative views (Gonen 2018), the exclusion of the Fulani nonelite sources means that readers do not learn about the experience of the FH. The notion of the Fulani Herders as sole perpetrators in the Herders-Farmers' conflict remains cemented among readers. While it may be argued that the lack of nonelite sources from the Fulani Herders is because they live a nomadic lifestyle, journalists could have taken proactive steps by asking Fulani Herders quasi-elite sources to connect them with victims of attacks by farmers to get a more balanced perspective of the conflict. The lack of nonelite voices from the Fulani Herders implies that notions of journalistic balance and fairness, as proposed by Boudana (2016), are lacking in the news report.

Furthermore, the source analysis revealed the general lack of expert voices in the news report. The study argued that the higher presence of quasi-elite sources in the news further augments the definition of the Herders-Farmers' conflict around ethnic identities. Scholars have argued that quasi-elite sources straddle the intersection between being ordinary citizens and being representative of the local community (Tiffen et al. 2014). The quasi-elite sources from the farming community are leaders from various ethnic groups in the Middle Belt. While their version of events may be true, their statement contained primes of non-state actors. This meant that their presence in the news, without alternate voices from neutral armed conflict experts, further defined the Herders-Farmers' conflict as an ethnic one. Moreover, since they are not experts, their statements are not be neutral but supportive for the cause of the farmers. As such, the study agrees with literature (Dolan 2005) that argues that the inclusion of quasi-elite sources ignores other key players, fanning discontent among locals. In the context of the Herders-Farmers' conflict, this means that readers are less aware of the suffering of the Fulani Herders in the conflict and are more likely to encourage less diplomatic and peaceful resolution to the conflict.

6.1.3 Perceptions of the non-state actors in the Herders' conflict

The presence of implicit messages in news messages can automatically cue negative opinions about social groups influencing subsequent evaluations (Mendelberg 2008; Casper et al. 2010; Banks and Hicks 2015; Fazio et al. 1995). To assess the extent to which this is true among Nigerians, the study examined the activation of stereotypical perceptions of non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict through a qualitative experiment among 21 participants assigned to three different groups. In doing this, the study revealed that implicit messages about non-state actors routinely described as the perpetrators in the conflict were activated among the readers. This is because participants assigned to read specific news reports that contained implicit messages (as disclosed in Chapter 4) about specific groups coincided with participants' knowledge about the non-state actors as discussed in Chapter 5 (section 5.1). Contrastingly, participants who had been asked to read the news article that did

not contain stereotypes of the non-state actors routinely described as perpetrators evaluated the non-state actors differently. To this end, the study argues that the accessibility of relevant knowledge constructs in long-term memory made applicable by news content can produce priming effects among readers. The responses from participants in the study in Chapter 5, section 5.1 revealed knowledge stored in the memory about the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. The degree to which the news reports about the non-state actors and its applicability to the stored knowledge construct revealed the priming effects among participants in Groups 1 and 3 was explored in Chapter 5. Even though the evaluation of the non-state actors among participants in Group 2 contained stereotypes, the fact that participant's perceptions of the non-state actors were not the same as those present in the news report they had been asked to read proved that these stereotypes were not primed by the news report. Nevertheless, the evaluation of the non-state actors among participants in Group 2 reveal interesting perceptions of the conflict.

Further, the analysis in the second part of the study revealed that participants defined the violence associated with the non-state actors differently. The violence perpetuated by the Fulani Herdsmen was associated with their lifestyle and their ethnic identity. Fulani Herders' violence was approached and understood as an unreasonable, provocative act. Contrastingly, the violence perpetuated by the farmers was perceived as a response to instigative FH violence. This is because participants in the second group believed that the farmers were engaging in violence to protect themselves and their land from the Fulani Herders. In evaluating farmers' violence in this manner, the study argues that violence is interpreted through ethnic identity in manifest and latent ways. Violence is construed in conjunction with ethnic identities in manifest ways when violence is associated with the lifestyle and identity of non-state actors. Violence is latently construed in conjunction with ethnic identities when the violence is associated with ensuring continuous land ownership. The interpretation of violence in this manner may be because ethnic identities are more salient among Nigerians than nationhood. Thus, when news coverage places emphasis on violence and associates it with

ethnic identities, accessible constructs are made applicable resulting in stereotype evaluations. Furthermore, the dynamics of the conflict may be significantly impacted with non-diplomatic measures encouraged as a mechanism for its resolution.

Additionally, the study revealed that the evaluation of violence by identity was also explored in the definition of victimhood. In Chapter 5, the study disclosed that the Fulani herders were believed to be the ultimate perpetrators, with news of their victimhood called to question. Here as well as with the evaluations of violence, victimhood in the Herders-Farmers was associated with the loss of land, subliminally defining victimhood along the lines of ethnic identity: those who are not sons of the soil cannot be victims in the conflict. Non-state actors associated with un-belonging on the basis of indigeneity had their victimhood delegitimised. According to the findings of this study, the Fulani Herders have lost their right to be victims in the Herders-Farmers' conflict because they lack the salient form of power to grant their victimhood legitimacy. This is not only because they have been routinely reported as violent perpetrators in the conflict. It is also because they are not defined as indigenes in the Nigerian political context; indigeneity in Nigeria excludes those who have not had a permanent place of residence within Nigeria, inherited from their ancestors. Since the Fulani Herders are living a nomadic lifestyle, they are not indigenous to the Middle Belt region and therefore not truly victims. The perceptions of victimhood in the conflict that this study discovered allows the study to agree that there is a citizen-deficit in Nigeria where people can or cannot be indigenes of state but can be citizens of Nigeria (Adebanwi 2009).

The second part of this study observed that the victimhood of the Fulani Herders was interpreted as mediated by the news media. The news media seemed to be a tool that was used to project an alternate identity of the Fulani Herders, highlighting perceptions of the role of the news media in the conflict. There was an expression of distrust for the Nigerian press with assumptions that the news media was censored by the Nigerian government and at risk of oppressive measures limiting the practice of journalism. The study argues that sentiments of scepticism in the professionalism of journalism is common in countries with competitive

authoritarian regimes. Although Nigeria claims to be a democratic country, there is evidence of media surveillance, the oppression of dissenting voices and overall limited press freedom (Akinwale 2010). Additionally, while there has been a growing level of distrust in the news media generally around the world, the press has the ultimate responsibility to hold leaders accountable in their watchdog role, ensuring that citizens enjoy peace and security.

Finally, the second part of the study observed a negative perception of the Nigerian government in the Herders-Farmer's conflict. In Chapter 5, the study revealed that participants believed that the Nigerian government were impacting the outcome of the conflict in two ways: firstly, in their handling of the conflict, the Nigerian federal government has not proffered a lasting solution to prevent further killings; and secondly, the suppression of information about the conflict with the news media becoming a propaganda machine. In this regard, the study posits that the Nigerian government would need to propose sustainable policies that will address the Herders-Farmer's conflict.

6.2 Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

There are a number of limitations to this study relating to its scope and methodological approach. The main limitations are in the areas of journalistic perspectives and coverage of the conflict; the study misses a Northern and Middle Belt news media perspective and the perceptions of the Herders-Farmers' conflict on social media. The study suggests avenues for further research.

The focus of this study has been the representations and the perceptions of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict in the Nigerian Middle Belt. The study did not engage with news media from the north or the Middle Belt of Nigeria. Therefore, the findings do not make claims for a generalisability of the representation of the non-state actors in all news media in Nigeria. From the perspective of the four newspapers included in the study, the researcher has attempted to demonstrate that the representations of the non-state actors are from a southern-digital perspective. That is, the perspectives of the non-state actors in the findings of this study express the perceptions of the non-state actors present in southern

newspapers available online. What remains to be done is an empirical investigation of the representations of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict in Northern and Middle Belt newspapers to ascertain the perceptions of the conflict. This will be interesting because it may provide differing representations of the non-state actors that are not stereotypical but factual to their role in the conflict.

Another limitation to the study is the lack of a journalistic perspective of the coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict to ascertain motivational factors for the coverage of the conflict as well as information about sourcing patterns in the conflict. The data for this study has been derived from a qualitative content analysis of news articles providing interesting perspectives of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmer's conflict. However, an interrogation into journalistic perspectives on the coverage of the conflict will provide interesting insights into the Nigerian journalist approach to conflict news reporting in Nigeria.

The final limitation concerns the absence of social media perspectives of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Although the study carried out interviews with audience members, 21 participants were not sufficient to provide generalisable findings for the perceptions of the non-state actors in the conflict. Nonetheless, the study provided empirical evidence of the priming of stereotype constructs of the non-state actors which is not only the first of its kind, but offers a more nuanced and contrasting conclusion to those found in the field about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. There is significant scope for future research to interrogate the perceptions of non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict in social media discourse, specifically Nigerian social media forums such as Nairaland.

6.3 Key Contributions to knowledge

The results of this research, as presented in the previous chapters, make substantial contributions to the field of armed conflict news reporting with regards to non-state actors and to news readers' meaning making of the non-state actors, vis-à-vis the news coverage of the conflict at the empirical, methodological and theoretical levels.

6.3.1 Empirical contributions

First, the research fills a geographical gap in the general field of the armed conflict. While there is a growing number of investigations of armed conflict in Nigeria, very few have covered the Herders-Farmers conflict. They have often done so from a broad perspective (paying attention to the coverage in all of Nigeria) or narrowed down to specific areas in the Middle Belt region (for instance Gever and Essien (2019) considered news coverage of the conflict in Tivland, Benue state; Tenuche and Ifatimehin (2009) focused on the conflict in Kwara state; while Adisa (2009) centred on Kogi state). There was a gap that needed addressing for the entire Middle Belt region as well as for the representation of the non-state actors in the conflict; the findings of this study enrich scholarly understandings of the news coverage of communal violence in Nigeria. Additionally, there are limited number of studies that have interrogated audience perception of armed conflict in Nigeria. There was also a gap to address audience perceptions of non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict. Through this study, the researcher has provided an analysis of the coverage of the conflict in (1) six Middle Belt areas most impacted by the conflict (2) a qualitative content analysis of over 200 news articles of the conflict from 4 digital news platforms (3) the representation of non-state actors in armed conflict (4) the role of news sources in the representation of non-state actors in the news (5) qualitative experimental interviews. This particular composition of research has not been explored before. Thus, the research provides a rich set of findings that considerably enhance understandings of the representations and perceptions of non-state actors in the news coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict.

In particular, the study has demonstrated that while the Herders-Farmers' conflict has been defined as a resource-based conflict (Ingawa et al 1999; Tenuche and Ifatimehin 2009; Egbute 2018; Adisa 2019; Tade and Yikwab 2020; Brottem 2021), the news media's attention to violence and the attachment of the reported violence to the non-state actors means that the conflict is really defined as an ethnic one. Based on this, the study argues the research into conflict news reporting will benefit from more qualitative research as this will allow deeper

interrogation of the representations of the non-state actors as well as the contributions of news sources to these representations, humanising data.

Another gap that the research fills is the empirical evidence of the representation of non-state actors in armed conflict in news coverage. Much of the research has focused on non-state actors such as individuals, anti-government insurgents and recognised militant organisations. By focusing on the representation of the Fulani Herders and the farmers (neither of whom have been legally declared political organisations by themselves or by the Nigerian government), the study has provided evidence from an important and under-explored perspective in armed conflict. Through the findings on the representations of the farmers and the Fulani Herdsmen, the study shows that the news media will rely on pre-existing frameworks to define the actions of the non-state actors in ways that are stereotypical to the social group problematising them.

Furthermore, by including data from the analysis of news sources contribution to the representation of non-state actors in the conflict, the study has revealed how journalists may co-opt the professional standards of the news media to define and emphasise stereotypic characterisations. Specifically, the study has shown that news sources that represent the various groups were treated differently by the news media. The analysis of the treatments of source statements from the Fulani Herders and statements from the farmers provides empirical evidence of this. Furthermore, the analysis reveals the presence of non-elite news sources in armed conflict reporting. However, statements from non-elite sources from the Fulani Herders rarely appeared in this study's sample. Thus, rather than making claims that the news media excludes non-traditional sources in the coverage of armed conflict, the study provides proof of inclusion of non-traditional news sources who contribute to the representation of the non-state actors in Herders-Farmers' conflict. However, the inclusion of non-traditional sources in conflict reporting should be done in a fair and balanced manner.

With particular reference to the perceptions of non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict, the research has provided empirical evidence of readers' meaning making of the

conflict. The study has shown that victimhood in the conflict is assigned by the interpretation of the cultural understanding of identity. Similarly, perpetrators in the conflict are defined by their affiliation and closeness to notions of indigeneity and citizenship by indigeneity. These are strategies that news readers may employ to translate the morality of the questionable actions of the non-state actors in the conflict. Apart from this, the study has revealed the impact of the press' emphasis on the violence in the Herders-Farmers' conflict is threefold – (1) the dehumanisation of the non-state actors in the conflict, (2) fear and apprehension towards non-state actors in the conflict creating a sense of panic and foreboding for the resolution of the conflict and (3) the support and endorsement of the use of non-diplomatic means to resolve the conflict. This in turn results in a dramatic change in the dynamics of the conflict. Likewise, the interpretation of the actions of the non-state actors in the conflict around identity reveals the continuous erosion of the national consciousness. Specifically, ethnic identities are subconsciously called upon and relied on in making sense of the actions of the non-state actors.

Furthermore, the study has shown that there is distrust for the elite and the news media which in turn impacts on sense-making of the conflict. The perception that the news media has become a propaganda machine for the Nigerian government means that people are less likely to believe aspects of the news that do not align with their perception of the conflict. This state of weakened trust in the media, and hopelessness in the Nigerian government, means that people are more likely to support and encourage non-state actors in the conflict to respond to the violence in problematic ways.

6.3.2 Methodological Contributions

The unique configuration of the study's approach allowed for the examination of meaning-making among readers using a qualitative experimental approach. Through this, the study has revealed that the representation of the non-state actors in the news of the Herders-Farmers' conflict plays a significant role in readers' perceptions. In particular, the study has shown that while the representation of non-state actors using non-descriptive terms (such as the Unknown

Gunmen) may in some instances serve to mitigate and depoliticise the conflict, it may obfuscate and connect the Herders-Farmers' conflict with other forms of conflict in Nigeria. More importantly, such implicit messages will lead to the activation of stereotypic interpretations of the non-state actors. Through the study, the researcher has highlighted how the different textual representations of the non-state actors can communicate and activate varying interpretations among readers. While it will take a significant level of work for readers to trust the Nigerian press, adhering to the principles of peace journalism will go a long way to impact on audience perceptions of the non-state actors.

Secondly, the qualitative interview in the second part of this study was grounded in the delivery of rendered mediated situations to test the reactions of readers in a reflective manner, unveiling the process of meaning construction. In doing this, the present study generated empirical evidence to explain the meaning making processes of news readers, discovering the interpretive aspects of cognition involved in the process. Quantitative experiments are usually utilised for these purposes. However, they often conceal the actual processing (Robinson and Mendelson 2012). By adopting the qualitative approach, the study has demonstrated the value of qualitative experiments in sense-making of non-state actors in armed conflict, as well as to the field of mixed methods research.

6.3.3 Theoretical contributions

This thesis has applied the theory of priming (Althaus and Kim 2009; Higgins 1999; Bargh 1996), a theoretical concept that has solely been applied to Western and quantitative perspectives. The strength of the concept lies in the ability of news media messages to activate existing knowledge in the reader's mind concerning social groups. Adopting this theoretical basis has allowed the researcher to examine the processes of knowledge activation of the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers' conflict among news readers. Investigating the effects of news messages among news readers would have been inadequate without discovering what the implicit messages of the non-state actors are and how they may be included in the online news coverage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict. By integrating the

interrogation of primes of the stereotypes of the non-state actors in the news report as well as observing the activation of the stereotypes among news readers, the study has been able to develop a more nuanced approach that allows other researchers to study how priming works in qualitative contexts. The qualitative approach to the study through interviews (in the second part of the study) revealed the interpretive process and showcased the activation (of nodes) and consequent evaluations of the non-state actors in the conflict. This approach has been useful, as the study observed that implicit messages through representations that are not deemed adequate will not prime stereotypic interpretations. Instead, representations that are deemed appropriate to cognitive representations will prime negative evaluative responses. Without highlighting this fact, the need for conflict-sensitive reporting will be overlooked and ignored.

In this regard, the study has demonstrated that priming theory is distinguishable from other news media theories (such as framing and agenda setting theory). Cultural factors and the editorial policies that focus on violence in armed conflict news reporting combine to foster the inclusion of implicit messages in news reports. The presence of implicit messages is reified by news sources who provide soundbites that reinforce stereotypic representations. The approach in this study has revealed how cultural factors, editorial choices and professional practices contribute to the incorporation of stereotypic perspectives of social groups to produce primes in armed news reporting. It is not that the news media pays attention to the armed conflict, it is that the news media pays attention and emphasises specific aspects and elements in the conflict, such as the violence perpetrated by the non-state actors and the identity of the non-state actors. There is a need for news producers to consciously avoid adopting unconscious ethicized ways of reporting which Nyamnjoh (2015) has referred to as 'journalism that pays homage to the village'.

Furthermore, the research has demonstrated the distinction between priming and other media theories in the examination of cognitive processes, revealing that participants did not 'learn', as is commonly put forward with framing theory and agenda setting theory (Iyengar

and Simon 1993; McCombs and Reynolds 2002). The study argues that news reports about the Herders-Farmers' conflict activated *pre-existing* perceptions of the non-state actors among audiences. Without news about the conflict, participants were aware of the Fulani Herders. The news reports (especially for participants in Group 1) primed stereotypic evaluations of the Fulani Herdsmen because it contained implicit messages that were a match to their perceptions of the Fulani Herdsmen. The study argues that this brings a more nuanced understanding of priming theory, showcasing how the incorporation of implicit messages of social groups can prime stereotypic evaluations. While more research needs to be done about this, it is an important finding in the priming theory in armed conflict news reporting which scholars need to consider in subsequent studies.

6.4 Recommendations

This study reveals that the reportage of the Herders-Farmers' conflict was not conflict-sensitive, as the news reports were polarising, ethnically oriented and implicitly encouraged violence while silencing useful alternatives. Additionally, the news about the Herders-Farmers' conflict was lacking in expert voices, as most of the sources in the news were nonelite and quasi-elite sources from the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt. Certain practices observed in the news, such as the use of non-elite sources (victims, eyewitnesses), show that the Nigerian press is on the right path to conflict-sensitive reporting. However, the analysis of the non-state actors in the news about the Herders-farmers' conflict, the sources included in the news and the possible evaluations of the news among the audiences, revealed some shortcomings in the reportage about the Herders-Farmers' conflict. The research proposes some viable alternatives that journalists in the Nigerian news media can adopt to produce conflict-sensitive news.

A key area that needs to be addressed by journalists is the representation of violence. Reporting the Herders-Farmers' conflict using language that connects actors to specific acts of violence only serves to agitate readers, encouraging fear and hate, while discouraging resolution to the conflict. For instance, participants in the study have stated that the

representation of the FH as an armed group has increased their fear of the FH. Additionally, by essentialising actors to violence in the news reportage, the press defines actors negatively, dehumanising them. The coverage of actor's violence as a territorial conquest may aggravate the conflict, as it defines the use of violence as a legitimate tool for conflict resolution. Furthermore, it is important that the news reports attempt consistent balanced coverage of the conflict and the actions of the actors, with some justification, as proposed by Boudana (2016). One participant who had read the news article about the farmers as perpetrators did not realise the extent of farmers' involvement in the conflict, assuming that the Fulani Herders were the only culprits. If journalists can provide coverage, as well some form of justification, for the characterisations of the actors and their actions in the Herders-Farmers' conflict, news consumers may have a fuller and more meaningful understanding of the conflict. Journalists must ensure that they are not reifying negative perceptions of social groups within the news. When reporting about violence, journalists should describe the event without defining social groups as inherently violent.

A second recommendation to journalists would be about the source usage. It is important to give voice to all the actors in the conflict. Prioritising sources from the ethnic groups in the Middle Belt undoubtedly gives a one-sided view of the conflict, but it also contributes to negative ideations of the actors in the conflict. It can be argued that members of the FH are difficult to locate and interview, but so are farmers. Most of the attacks happen in remote locations, but the farmers are given the opportunity to tell their story, whereas the FH are often ignored and neglected. Speaking to victims and eyewitnesses of attacks against the FH can provide useful perspectives about the conflict and it can humanise the FH. Overlooked source groups such as experts are important to the perception of the conflict and by extension actors in the conflict. It is important that newspapers give a fair coverage to source groups in the news. Journalists must seek out nonelite sources from the Fulani Herders to showcase their suffering in the conflict if they are showing the suffering of the farmers.

A third recommendation for news producers would be about developing an editorial guideline for covering conflict in Nigeria which ensures that religious and ethnic identities are not made salient in the reportage. At the moment, there is no such editorial guideline dedicated solely to the coverage of armed conflict in Nigeria. It is important that news organisations, in conjunction with the National Union of Journalists in Nigeria, come together to develop an editorial guideline which offers guidance for reporting armed conflict as this may reduce the potentiality of bias and polarisation. Additionally, journalists should receive adequate and regular training on how to responsibly report conflict in sensitive ways with the newly produced editorial guideline providing support.

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Appendix A

Coding frame for the representation of the non-state actors

Identifying implicit messages about the non-state actors in the Herders-Farmers conflict that are stereotypical.

Category 1: Fulani Herdsmen as Invaders

This has anything to do with the definition of the Fulani Herdsmen as entering a territory or space without permission with connotations to disrupt, control or claim resources in the Middle Belt region.

Subcategory: Fulani Herdsmen as alien/foreign

Definition: Descriptions and word choices of the Fulani Herdsmen that alludes and suggests that they are unfamiliar to the existing population posing a threat to the cultural dynamics of the native inhabitants of the land.

Examples:

Fulani Herdsmen are not Nigerian

Fulani Herdsmen have come from a different country

Subcategory: Fulani Herdsmen as occupiers

Definition: This is the description of the Fulani Herders as a group that forcefully enters and establishes control over a territory to assert dominance leading to lasting changes in the social, cultural and even political landscape.

Examples:

The Fulani Herdsmen have taken over the Middle Belt region...they kill their victims and do not leave but remain.

The Farmers are exposed to incessant attacks and forceful occupation of their land.

Category 2: Fulani Herdsmen as Nomad Savage

This has anything to do with the definition of the Fulani herdsmen and their nomadic lifestyle as uncivilised or primitive. It also includes descriptions of the Fulani Herdsmen contrasted with settled, agrarian communities.

Subcategory: Fulani Herdsmen as Brutal/Cruel/Vicious

Definition: These are descriptions of the Fulani Herdsmen and their actions that highlight them as extremely cruel, violent and ruthless. The display of violence and aggression is connected to the nomadic lifestyle of the Fulani Herdsmen.

Examples:

In the recent attack, the Fulani Herdsmen went on a rampage killing the farmers.

The Fulani Herdsmen razed many buildings before leaving.

The Fulani Herdsmen killed the children, women, the disabled and the elderly who were unable to make an escape in their recent attacks.

Subcategory: Fulani Herdsmen as Transgressing

Definition: This involves the descriptions of the Fulani Herdsmen as challenging and disrupting conventional norms and boundaries typically held by settled and sedentary populations. This can include suggestions that the Fulani Herdsmen engage in practices that contrast sharply with that of the farmers. It can also include the Fulani Herdsmen maintenance of their own legal and political systems which conflict with national laws and governance structures.

Examples:

News reports of attacks perpetrated by the Fulani Herdsmen after a peace and reconciliation meeting with the farmers.

News reports of the attacks perpetuated by the Fulani Herdsmen after policies and regulations have been put in place to purportedly prevent further attacks.

Category 3: Fulani Herdsmen as Warlike

This includes descriptions and characterisations of the Fulani Herdsmen as having a tendency towards engaging in warfare or having a readiness and enthusiasm for combat.

Subcategory: Fulani Herdsmen as Militant/Terrorist

Definition: This involves descriptions of the actions of the Fulani Herdsmen in ways that suggests that they have a militaristic culture, the glorification of violence, engaging in conflict to achieve their goals.

Example:

Descriptive terms such as militia, militaristic descriptions of their actions such as sieging, besieging, launching attacks, singing war songs etc.

Subcategory: Fulani Herdsmen as gunmen

Definition: This is the description of the Fulani Herdsmen that suggest that they use firearms in the Herders-Farmers conflict.

Example:

Description of the Fulani Herdsmen using sophisticated weapons, engaged in gun battles with members of the Nigerian Police Force. Descriptions that transform the Fulani Herdsmen beyond cattle herding to criminality and banditry.

Subcategory: Fulani Herdsmen as vengeful

Definition: This includes the definition of the motivations of the violence of the Fulani Herdsmen as a desire for vengeance, suggesting that they have engaged in violence to retaliate a perceived wrong.

Example:

The Fulani Herdsmen engage in swift reprisal attacks.

The Fulani Herdsmen have attacked the farmers because they thought that one of theirs had been attacked and killed by the villagers.

Coding frame for the news sources

News Sources

This refers to any individual, groups or medium that provides information used to create news content.

Category 1: News source Type classification

This involves the classification of news sources according to the academic tradition of news sources referred to within the news article as crucial to the authenticity of the reported news event.

Subcategory 1: Non-elite source

Definition: This includes news sources who are not part of the traditional power structures, institutions that contribute to the news coverage of the Herders-Farmers conflict.

Example: Victims, survivors, eyewitness.

Subcategory 2: Quasi-elite source

Definition: This includes news sources who are not part of the government structures and institutions but are representative of those affected by the conflict.

Example: Leaders of ethnic groups, leaders of religious groups, leaders of special interest groups etc.

Subcategory 3: Elite sources

Definition: This includes news sources that hold significant power with their perspectives traditionally prioritised in news coverage.

Example: Government officials, representatives from the police, representative from the army etc.

Category 2: Position in the news report

Headline: this is traditionally a brief summary about the reported event labelling the news event.

Is there a source in this part of the news article?

What source group do they belong to?

What have they said?

How were they referred to in the headline of the news article?

Are there primes of the non-state actors in their statements?

What primes?

Is it a match to the details and primes in the headline of the news article?

First paragraph (s): the first part of the news report that provides crucial information about the event being reported in the news providing the reader with the key facts.

What source type is referred to in the lede?

What has the source said?

Is it a match to the details in the news headline?

How did the news report refer to what the source had said?

How do the sources refer to the non-state actors in the news article?

Are there primes of the non-state actors in their statements?

What primes?

Is it a match to the details and primes in the headline of the news article?

Middle paragraph (s): often referred to as the body of the article, contains additional information as well as background information about the reported event.

What source is referred to in the body of the article?

What has the source said?

Are there statements or quotes from the source in this part of the article?

How do the sources refer to the non-state actors in the news article?

Are there primes of the non-state actors in their statements?

What primes?

Is it a match to the details and primes in the headline of the news article?

End paragraph (s): includes section of the news article that wraps-up the news story by briefly summarising the key points or appearing at the end of the news article.

Is there a source present at the end of the news article?

What source?

Are there statements or direct quotes from the source in this part of the news article?

How do the sources refer to the non-state actors in the news article?

Are there primes of the non-state actors in their statements?

What primes?

Is it a match to the details and primes in the headline of the news article?

Category 3: Role in the news

Subcategory 1: Covert leading

Definition: This is based on the positioning of the information from the news source in the news article.

Example: When the details from a news source appears in the main body of the story, rather than in the headline or in the first paragraph of the news story.

Subcategory 2: Overt Leading

Definition: This is based on the positioning of the information from the news source in the news article appearing at the start of the news article – in the headline and the first few paragraphs of the story.

Example: When details from a news source appears in the headline and first paragraph of the news story.

Subcategory 3: Covert-integrated lead

Definition: this includes instances in the news report where the where the headline summarises key points from the statements provided by two source types. Like the covert lead, there is no

direct quotation from the source in the headline, however their statements contain primes that align with the primes in the headline.

Example: Headline reads – Killings continue in village in Taraba state

Lede reads – According to a source who managed to escape the recent attack, the attackers killed the men in their homes while they slept. The victim said, ‘the Fulani Herders came at night while we were sleeping and attacked us.’ The chief of the village stated, ‘the Fulani Herders came while we were asleep, they burnt and destroyed our village’.

Subcategory 4: Overt-integrated lead

Definition: this includes instances in the news report where statements from two source types have been directly quoted in the headline. The primes in their quoted statements are repeated within the news article, particularly within the lede and main body of the news article.

Example: Headline reads – ‘Fulani Herders attacked my village, killed my family and burned my home’ victim and Chief claims.

Lede reads – Last night, the Fulani Herdsmen attack a village in Southern Kaduna where they allegedly killed families of farmers’, burnt their houses and destroyed their farms. An eyewitness, now the only survivor of her family stated, ‘the Fulani Herders came to our village at night to attack my village, they killed my family members and burned my home.’ The Chief of the village added, ‘when the Fulani Herders attacked, they killed families and destroyed homes’.

Appendix B

Survey Instrument

Demographics

1. What is your name?
2. Where are you from in Nigeria?
3. What ethnic group best describes you?
4. How old are you?
 - a) 20-30
 - b) 30-40
 - c) 40-50
5. What do you do for a living?
 - a) Student
 - b) Worker (please specify)
6. How long have you lived in the United Kingdom?
7. Are you familiar with the concept of the middle belt in Nigeria?

Yes	No
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8. How familiar are you with the farmers and herdsman conflict in the middle belt of Nigeria?

Yes	No
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9. Is your source of information about this conflict from the news?
 - a) If yes, what news outlet
 - i. Newspaper

- ii. Social media
- iii. Television/Radio
- iv. If No, what is your source of information about the conflict?

Ideas about the conflict and their sources

10. Have you read about this conflict before?

Yes

No

11. How often do you read about the conflict?

Very often

Often

Rarely

Very rarely

12. Who do you think are the actors in the conflict?

13. What do you think the conflict is all about?

a) Ethnicity

b) religion

c) resources

d) all of the above (please explain)

14. Can you identify any of the ethnic groups involved in the conflict in the middle belt region?

Yes

No

If Yes, please mention them

General ideas about the actors in the conflict

15. What is the one thing you think members of these ethnic groups are famous for?

16. Have you had any experience with any persons who identifies as a member of the ethnic group?

Yes

No

If yes, can you share your experience – who they were and what happened?

17. Did your experience with them change how you viewed all people who identify as members of that ethnic group?

18. Have you been told or read any stories about any of the ethnic groups (involved in the conflict) before?

Yes

No

If yes, can you share your experience – who they were and what happened?

19. Who told you the story or where did you read about it?

20. Do you think that the story may have influenced your perceptions about the people who belong to these ethnic groups?

Interview Questions

1. What are your first thoughts after reading this article?
2. What do you think about the way the article was written and the portrayal of the actors in the conflict?
3. What do you think about the actors in the conflict after reading the article?
4. What are your thoughts about the way the actors and the conflict were presented in the article?
5. What image about the actors was the most poignant to you?
6. Why does this image stand out to you?

7. Is the presentation of the actors in this manner similar or different to what you've heard, read, or experienced with the members of the group - can you share the similarities between your personal experience, or a story you have heard or read which is like the representation of the actors in the news article?
8. Has this article caused you to look at the actors in this conflict differently – how different?
9. Do you think that the gunmen are Fulani herdsmen?