

## Rhetorical Visions of Fulani-Herdsmen Conflict in the Nigerian Press: A Fantasy Theme Analysis

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There has been a recurrent rate of prevalent and pervasive violent conflicts between herders and farmers in Nigeria. Issues emanating from environmental degradation, and socio-political disorder have shifted pastoralist migratory patterns and increased tensions between farmers and herders. This, however, has influenced conflicts and hostility between farmers and herders, leading to violent clashes, killings, forced displacement, attrition of inter-communal interactions, as well as the annihilation of agricultural and livestock outputs. The Nigerian press, however, has successfully created a shared meaning of the Fulani-herdsmen activities in the country within a particular rhetoric community. These include agents with different characteristics in a similar/different setting, taking several actions, thereby formulating a particular rhetorical vision. The major rhetorical vision established in this paper is conflict and the underlying symbolic reality of peace. This paper examined articles in the Nigerian press as related to Fulani-herdsmen's activities and the fantasy themes embedded in it.

Keywords: Conflict, fantasy theme, farmers, Herdsmen, rhetoric visions

The intermittent rate of prevalent and pervasive violent conflicts between herders and farmers in Central and West Africa, from the Democratic Republic of Congo to South Sudan to Mali to Nigeria (wrong sentence). Issues emanating from environmental degradation, climate change, and socio-political disorder have shifted pastoralist migratory patterns and increased tensions between farmers and herders (International Crisis Group, 2019). This, however, has influenced conflicts and hostility between farmers and herders, leading to violent clashes, killings, forced displacement and migration, attrition of inter-communal interactions, as well as the annihilation of agricultural and livestock outputs (Mercy Corps, 2015). According to Olayoku (2014), the Nigeria Watch database has recorded 615 violent deaths related to cattle grazing, out of a total of 61,314 violent fatalities in Nigeria. In an explorative study of 111 relevant cases, which were reported by the press across the 36 states of Nigeria from June 2006 to May 2014 he was able to establish the frequency, the intensity, the patterns, and the geography of such conflicts across Nigeria.

This conflict is further aggravated by the increase in demand for land and water resources, a sample illustration of this is when the crops of a farmer is destroyed by some cattle, it leads to a direct loss and affects the livelihood of the farmer and this may exacerbate pre-existing tensions between ethnic groups if the farmer and herder are of different ethnicities, sparking broader conflict and violence (International Crisis Group, 2019). Related cases payout for herders when cattle are attacked and killed, often in

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retaliation to the destruction of farmland. The progressive increase in the occurrence of clashes between herdsmen and farmers has been confirmed by different research findings and reports. SBM Intelligence (2016) reports that whereas only 18 incidences were recorded between 1997 and 2010, there was a surge of 371 attacks between 2011 and 2015.

In the heart of this crisis, several authors have expressed their divergent views as regards issues surrounding the farmers-herders' crisis. These issues include; causes of conflict, media coverage of the conflict, and also the government's effort in tackling the conflict. As established by Fiki and Lee (2005), Land scarcity is the major causative factor for the Herder-Farmers crisis in Nigeria; they opined that there exists a rising paucity of arable land and water resources which are equally vital to sustaining crop cultivation and cattle herds. This is further exacerbated by the increasing population of farmers, herdsmen, and their herds, increasing scarcity of arable land due to land degradation, droughts, and cultural differences among ethnic groups that mostly farm or graze cattle. The study reported that out of about 150 households interviewed, 22 reported loss of a whole farm of standing crops, 41 reported losses of livestock, while eight households from both sides reported loss of human lives as a result of the farmers-herder crisis. It also showed that over 40% of the household surveyed had experienced agricultural land-related conflicts, with respondents recalling conflicts that were as far back as 1965 and as recent as 2005. The study further reveals losses from these conflicts are of far-reaching dimensions and implications on both sides. Hence, both the farmers and herdsmen were affected by issues such as crop destruction, cattle-killing, loss of lives, home razing, etc. Although both sides are affected, its implications on the Nigerian economy cannot be overemphasized; reduction in output and income of crop farmers as a result of destruction of crops by cattle and indiscriminate bush burning, displacement of farmers, erosion, etc.

In contrast, Olomojobi (2017, p. 13) argues that Herder-Farmers conflict in Nigeria is not just as a result of land and water scarcity but are politically inclined. He further posits that conflicts with purely political or economic antecedence easily assume religious and ethnic dimensions in Nigeria. Religion and ethnicity are manipulated to fuel impartial political disagreements into violent conflicts. On the whole, it could prove difficult to describe conflicts in the country in absolute terms because there exists a solid relationship or overlay between ethnic, religious, and political precincts in Nigeria's plural setting (Ojo, 2006, p. 369). The study examines the spate of herdsmen-farmers' crisis in Nigeria's nascent democracy. The paper highlights several factors responsible for the malady, which ranges from differences in religious and ethnic views to corruption cum religious intolerance and problematic citizenship as the bane of the polity. The study, however, infers that until political disagreements are detached from major crises and conflicts in Nigeria, and good governance promoted, then the country may begin to move gradually away from a failing state status.

However, contrary to the views and suggestions of existing authors as regards herdsmen farmers' crisis, this research endeavors to unearth some of the powerful discursive messages that exist in Herder-Farmers conflict stories. This will help reveal the major causes of the conflict and hidden intentions and further provide plausible solutions to the Herder-Farmers crisis.

## **Literature Review**

### **Fulani-Herdsmen Conflict**

The dispute between farmers and herdsmen is a prolonged matter in Nigeria. According to Blench (2003), aggressive collisions between them have been rampant from the 1980s but

reached fresh impetus in vigor and recurrence at the nation's reversal to civilian administration in 1999. This escalating rise in conflicts between these two sets of cohorts is affirmed by diverse investigative discoveries and expositions. The record shows that though just 18 occurrences were observed from 1997 to 2010, 371 ambushes happened in the space of 2011 and 2015 (SBM Intelligence, 2016).

This dissension has caused the demise and dispersion of numerous persons in several areas of the country. Casualties are not restricted to clashing herdsmen and farmers as guiltless citizens of host societies. Human Rights Watch (2013) notes that disagreements between Fulani farmers and herders substantially worsens deaths of 3,000 individuals in North-Central Nigeria between 2010 and 2013 as well as cruelty among communities. On February 24, 2016, Fulani-herdsmen were evidenced to murder more than 300 persons on February 24, 2016, in Agatu, Benue State, a sign of ruthlessness that is identical to such contemporary age.

Farmers-herders' crisis has always been reported in the media. As Oyesomi, Salawu, and Olorunyomi (2017); Oyero, Oyesomi, Abioye, Ajiboye, and KayodeAdedeji (2018); and Oyesomi, Salawu, and Onyenankeya (2019) note that the media play a crucial role in reporting salient issues. Farmers-herder's strife is now extra dangerous because of increased firearms among them. Irrespective of propagated disputes of their possession of firearms and other complex ammunition for their safety of lives and animals from cattle thieves, such custody of weapons tends to induce an intuitive response from herdsmen in cases of disputation with farmers. Fulani herders are mostly connected to abductions and rape incidences in communal husbandry. One instance is the kidnapping of previous Secretary to Federal Government, Chief OluFalae from his farm in Ilado, Ondo State on 21 September 2015 by certain Fulani herders (Lawal, Olumide, & Akingboye, 2015). He was later released on September 24, 2015.

This hijacking coerced South-Western leaders to give a two-weeks deadline to Federal Government, resulting in perturbed public affairs, clearly showing unnerving operational heights of these herders in the nation (Olusegun, 2016).

## Fantasy Theme Analysis

In this case, fantasy is not adopted in the common context of an imaginative and unrealistic thing. Rather, it connotes inventive and insightful elucidation of phenomena (Foss, 2009, p. 98). Fantasy allows avenues for persons and communities to comprehend disorderly life events.

Bormann posits that experiences are mostly tumultuous, while fantasy settings are expressive and orderly (Bormann, 1985, p. 9). Explanations behind such fantasy themes give room for onlookers to assess global opinions common to collective lifestyles, languages, and customs alongside reflecting how these insiders perceive themselves, communal convictions and recall similar encounters (Waite, 2008, p. 10). Regardless of each cohort's trial to generate personalized feelings, these groups yield interactive similarities via joint fantasies (Eadie, 1982, p. 78). So, fantasy themes facilitate unanimity and solidarity among people.

Ernest Bormann founded fantasy theme exposition and found that sole exploration of identity among reports cannot build fantasy types as orators frequently adopt fantasy type as rhetoric tools in discussions (Bormann, 1985, p. 7). This usage aids recognitions of cohorts with solid connections.

Such fantasy types typically reveal if groups have attained joint rhetorical foresight, explicitly developed and properly comprehended by listeners and orators (Bormann, 1985, p. 7). People mostly utilize generalized narratives to create rhetorical insight instead of exaggerating fantasies with specified contextual characteristics (Bormann, 1985, p. 7).

Though groups do not state characters when constructing fantasy themes, they influence the way members in stories are depicted. In playing out situations, some persons must be chosen as centralized targets and portrayed in favorable perceptions, whereas others are displayed in pessimistic light. Such protagonists and antagonists produce the action. Participants adopt these fictions to discern their incidences. Common fantasies are clear descriptions of past or foreseen futuristic encounters that unravel and formulate public actuality of partakers (Bormann, 1985, p. 9).

Bormann's technique is creating an exaggerated approach for analyzing and investigating social conversations within groups for a greater understanding of its creativity process (Cragan 1981, p. 69). Cragan expounds that methodical target is the message rather than circumstances, spectators, or speakers. This enables critics to illustrate rhetorical dramatization that yields public actuality to analyze interpretations, motivations, and sentiments embedded inside rhetoric discernment.

Given the complexity of rhetorical perceptions that are grounded in joint identity, it is mostly arduous for non-members to completely grasp imaginary relations of clusters. Bormann proffers that critics should operate using essential components to rebuild collective rhetorical foresight. For him, this is possible via critic's search for patterned features of theatrical events and contexts, followed by ingenious development of such intuitions from illustrative reverie strings (Borman 1985, p. 401).

Foss (2009, p. 99) proposes character, setting, and action themes of every pattern as themes help classification and interpretation of communal events via expressive terms or wordings that make up communal insights.

Fantasy theme evaluations help intellectuals discover the limits of rhetoric groups and show compound representative territory (Bormann, 1985, p. 8). As related to Fulani-herdsmen conflict, the media gives opportunity for both protagonist and the antagonists to provide facts (messages) about the activities of this group.

Amazingly, views of fantasy themes have not been used in Fulani-herdsmen conflict, which is rampant or lacking in societal linkages within representations and contextual dramas. Such messages develop communal actions and serve as major origins for exposition in gathering joint topical fantasies within groups.

## Symbolic Convergence

The capacity of symbolic convergence theory originates from people's likelihood in attempting to comprehend occurrences of individuals with specific motives and personalities, their choices, deeds, and resultant effects (Bormann, 1985, p. 4). He also shows that via combined imaginations of representational conjunction, it is understandable that people successfully or otherwise strategize to accomplish their aims given personal interpretation of behavior in fantasies. Moreover, comprehending such symbolic convergence allows rebuilding awareness of previously shared fantasized rhetoric as greatly dependent on indicated information produced by such figments (Bormann, 1985, p. 5).

In breaking down related details for a better understanding of rooted participatory illusions, there is need to scrutinize items implemented in formulating these messages (Hinnant & Hendrickson, 2018). Bormann (1985, p. 5) portrays that expressive ideas might incorporate unusual and imaginary writings of fictional persons, often involving realistic happenings to society's citizens or recordings in genuine historical documents, news, or spoken past and traditions. He sees such substantial input as dramatic details that induce fantasies known as fantasy theme. These remarks are utilized in actual scenarios to connect subjects of fictitious discussion, which enable participants' opinions on communal situations.

When persons start outlining details with imaginative types, this provides extra proof of communized fantasy themes (Bormann, 1985, p. 7). As participants add to society's fantasies, all that is stated shows procedures of identifying and incorporating the entire clan and its actualities. People that share rhetorical insight profits by complementary dramatic events that restrain fantasy themes, thus compelling them to choose certain cultures and action steps.

According to Bormann (1972, p. 402, 406), implementing such a lifestyle makes persons restructure essentialities and bypass timing allocated to hobbies since the interest serves as a diversion. Mechanism of fantasy themes resulting in communal sensation and bond from within, including how these occurrences intersect into absorptive tasks that yield required constituents of allusive convergence.

## Rhetorical Vision

Joint insights do not just provide actuality for humans, but a personalized understanding of symbols can link to develop realistic communal responsiveness (Foss, 2009, p. 97). This awareness commences manifestation as ideological themes start connecting to produce situations, settings, and characters. Bormann refers to the most generalized structure as 'rhetorical vision' (Eadie, 1982, p. 78). Identical descriptions in sustaining such combined foresight are possible when the cohort shares prevalent visionary rhetoric, thus illustrating how this sharing allows symbolic unionization. As rhetorical visions portray themselves, people start collaborating, getting exhilarated, and active in creating more dramatical linkages with common symbolic reality of villains and heroes (Bormann, 1972, p. 399).

Rhetorical insight combines lengthy matters, present scenarios, and interrelated fantasies to produce plausible and convincing dramas (Cragan, 1981, p. 69). Despite Cragan's descriptions of such captivating dramatic activities, their resultant visions could have diverse impacts on participative individuals, which are not consistently eternal and particularly clear. Bormann (1985, p. 8) elucidates, "Rhetorical visions might be mesmerizing and connect to matters of more or less relevance to fantasy-sharing people. One person could disburse numerous expressive insights enabling actualities of interests, politics, doctrines, and close associations. Some foresight can be common among handful of persons, lasting for momentary durations. Again, some might be so broad that they involve all dimensions of public realism, known as *lifestyle rhetorical visions* that have all-encompassing illustrative apparatus."

Accordingly, such linguistic shrewdness could have diverse structures, that are key in constructing categorical 'master analogy.' Bormann expounds that major incidences of a cluster which aggregates numerous components into a splendid and logical entirety. Such dominating correspondence makes people that have common insights to possibly be firmly grounded in joint perceptions (Waite, 2008, p. 11), bound in communal imaginations enabling cognitive and united descriptions and usefulness as an epitome.

## Fantasy Theme Analysis of Fulani-Herdsmen Conflict Messages

The rise of Fulani herdsmen's activities and its reportage in the Nigerian press makes it important to unearth some of the powerful discursive messages that exist in Fulani herdsmen's stories. These publications range from stories on acts of conflicts to condemnations from the public and government officials, and also defense speeches from the group itself.

The wide range of assumptions that exist due to the representation of the Fulani-herdsmen conflict by the media is that of a notorious, deadly insurgent due to several media reports of killings and terror in some local communities in the country. For example, in *The Punch's* editorial, May 6, 2016, the Fulani-herdsmen were branded as 'new face of terrorism in Nigeria' following its ranking as the fourth most lethal violent body worldwide in 2015 Global Terrorism Index.

The span of disputes by the Nigerian press is a key to opinions and cognizance of nationals concerning related dissensions. The news medium is a critical actor during discord duration. Clashes have unique benefits to media due to informative worth. Society cares about safeguarding and protecting their terrains; hence, in cases of strife, they promptly rely on media for updated details.

The intensified empathy of people from existent disagreements can be seen from enterprising angles by media. 'It leads if it bleeds' and 'Bad news is good news' are cornerstones of numerous news agencies since dispute brings attention. Tumbler (2009, p. 396) insists that reporters stress aggressiveness to yield higher valuable commodities that are profitable.

What is known today about the actions of Fulani-herdsmen is majorly influenced by the media, many haven't witnessed any of their actions but can boldly give an illustration of these attacks. Hence, the media has influenced the symbolic convergence that exists amongst the public, which makes it necessary to study the fantasy themes that exist in media messages considering both the protagonists and the antagonist of the Fulani-herdsmen conflict.

Ernest Bormann created a fantasy theme to examine subgroups and find attributes of bigger social amenities, which was implemented by sociologists and psychologists in the past to grasp collective interactions. Additionally, he states that analyzing smaller collective relations gives illumination into the complexion of broad communicativeness and social discourse (Bormann, 1972, p. 396).

Fantasy theory reflects the process by which disbursing joint imaginations yields symbolic convergence. Bormann (1985, p. 4) illustrates that essential interactive dynamism of this theory is members' symbolic collusion brought about by shared fantasies. After the intersection of indicative convergence, persons can discuss rhetorical insights for sharpening global perceptions. Interpretations, feelings, and reasons are included in rhetoric views, and subsequent actions are based on their cognition of visions and authoritative actuality (Cragan & Shields, 1981, p. 3). Such cognizance translates into coherent communal realism.

To explore fantasy themes that exist in media messages of Fulani-herdsmen conflict, this research posits these research questions:

- RQ1: What are conspicuous fantasy themes of Fulani-herdsmen conflict that exist in the top Nigerian press?
- RQ2: Who are principal perpetrators of violence in the conflict between herders and farmers, as indicated in news reports published in the selected newspapers?
- RQ3: What are the rhetorical visions of conflict, and the overarching meanings, and how do they signal via symbolic convergence theory?

## **Methodology**

The current study centers around the subtle perspectives at procedures of reporting Fulani-herdsmen activities and how these links to their capacity of the social system. The evaluative

fantasy theme is being deployed to outline symbolic convergence that targets characters, actions, and scenarios that are merged for joint rational realistic discernments (Bormann 1985; Foss 1989; Garner et al., 1998; Aleman et al., 2005). Setting themes finds locations for persona to display their contributions; character themes structures features, standards, and motivations to participants via explanations, and action themes reflect narratives and conduct of dramatization actors. Such operations grow into fantasies that encourage ethical sequence. This will allow mapping of details regarding Fulani herdsmen's activities and dispositions that transpired from diverse contestation chronicles.

Regardless of media topographical congestions with various forms of channels and outlets, the traditional media (newspaper) remains relevant. The sheer volume of newspaper consumption makes this medium worth scrutiny. While the play value of online blogs and newspapers are being acknowledged, the posts do not provide ample coverage of conflict situations.

The newspapers in this study are *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, and *Guardian*, and the reasons for this selection are manifold. First, these papers are prominent and known for their wide reach. Also, they tend to capture major publications about the subject been considered.

The actors being considered to include Herdsmen, a liberal supportive advocacy group called Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, also referred to as MACBAN (established in early 1970s with Kaduna headquarters according to Wikipedia), that focuses on advancing Fulani-herdsmen welfarism in the country. Also, the Gan Allah Fulani Development Association of Nigeria (GAFDAN) saddled with the responsibility of protecting the dealings of Fulanis. The final actor being considered is the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) which includes President Muhammadu Buhari, president of federal republic of Nigeria, Lai Mohammed who is the current Nigeria's Minister of Information and Culture, Malam Garba Shehu and Femi Adesina who is Senior Special Assistant of Publicity and Media as well as special media and publicity advisor to the president.

In the current study, the term 'Antagonist' refers to a person or a group of people who actively opposes or is hostile to someone or an ideology. Hence, someone who offers opposition to the conflict situations as presented by the herders and farmers in the country. The term 'Conflict' underlines a state of opposition between persons, ideas, or interest made apparent through violent clashes between a minimum of two groups at a given point in time. This study is primarily concerned about the conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria resultant. 'Fantasy Theme' is understood as something imaginary and not grounded in reality. Instead, fantasy is used here to mean 'the creative and imaginative interpretation of events. The fantasy theme provides groups and individuals with a way to understand the chaotic experiences of life. 'Farmers' refer to those who are involved in planting and growing of arable crops. Specifically, these are sedentary cultivators in various regions of Nigeria who have direct interactions- and disputes resultant from that place- with herders.

'Herdsmen; refer to prevalently Fulani nomads who rear and move their cattle from Northern Nigeria down South. They are hosted in farming communities and come in contact with farmers in various parts of Nigeria. The usage of the word herders in this study is alternated with herdsmen and pastoralists.

'Protagonist' refers to an advocate or champion of a particular cause or idea. Hence, the advocate and supporters of the pastoralist in conflict situations. 'Rhetorical Visions; refer to how a particular group of persons or community, poses a shared meaning of a particular phenomenon. In this case, this study tries to explore the shared meaning created through media texts, articles, reports, etc. among different groups of people.

## Findings

For each actor, it is expedient to detect major fantasy themes via elements of action, character, and setting. Renowned fantasy themes will also be determined to investigate their functionality process in indexing discordant scenarios through symbolic convergence theory.

### MACBAN as Conflict Protagonist

MACBAN, instituted in early 1970 with Kaduna head office, is a free partisan advocacy faction centered on furthering the well-being of Nigerian Fulani pastoralists. A speech attributed to the chairman of this association's north-central region, Ciroma Danladi with a theme centered on Retaliatory Conflict shapes her fantasy theme:

“These attacks are retaliatory. As much as I don't support the killing of human beings, the truth must be told that those who carried out the attacks must be on a revenge mission.”

Although, there are counter statements as regards the above speech emanating within the same group. The apex cattle breeders' organization, Miyetti Allah, has distanced itself from reports of condoning recent deaths of more than 100 individuals in Plateau State. It doesn't change the fact that the group has been confirmed perpetrators of similar conflict actions in recent times. An example is the killing of 26 people by herdsmen in Benue earlier this year, also the killing of Catholic priests and 17 worshipers in Benue by the same herdsmen and lots more.

*Setting:* The setting for Danladi Ciroma's statement is Berom (or Birom), which is the biggest indigenous cluster in Nigeria's central Plateau State. Encompassing about four local government areas (LGAs), that include Riyom, Jos South, Gwol (Barkin Ladi), and Jos North. The speech describes this community as a place where criminal activities thrive, which could add authenticity to the character's claims and actions.

*Character: Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria:* The group's initial participants were mostly controlled by resident Fulanis with the prior notion of improving their upkeep. Muhammadu Sa'adu piloted, the association during the 70s in Plateau and Kaduna States. Sa'adu (birthed in Jos and trained in Kaduna) was pivotal to soliciting new actors (Miyetti Allah, 2018).

Plateau and Kaduna had aerial branches connected to the local communal government, inconsistent gatherings, and incomplete adherence to state or national aspirations. Notwithstanding, its expansion to other states encouraged popularized nomadic learning and accessibility to pastures by cattlemen.

One main aim of MACBAN is to be the broad syndicate of national Fulani herders with undertakings that involve mediating with the government for farming, pastoral cultivations, land usage rights, and settling disputes between herdsmen and farmers. Furthermore, they aid safeguarding and boosting available pastures for rearing cattle nationwide. But not every herder wishes to remain within grazing restrictions as the body supplies factual data to persuade itinerant postural doubters in accepting this ideology.

The higher occurrence of farmer-herder disagreements from 2011 has made this formerly unidentified cluster to be widely recognized as key welfare advocates of Fulanis.

*Actions:* Over time, actions of these groups, as reported in most Nigerian dailies, are that of crisis, killings, and conflicts. MACBAN as an umbrella for the Fulani-herdsmen as stylish stood by their group despite several accusations. In response to an interview

conducted by *Vanguard* Newspaper, Baba Othman Ngelzarma as MACBAN's Country Secretary when asked:

"while you attribute this to personal opinion, the reality of the matter is that those who carried out the latest killings appeared like those who have been wreaking havoc in Plateau in recent times. Given that, what is your response to those who say that Mr. Danladi Ciroma should be invited by the DSS to tell what he might know on Plateau at the moment?" (*Vanguard*, 2018).

He responded that security personnel has obligations with the operational mechanism as huge expectations abide with these to stop national deaths. As well known, participants are influenced in terms of what happened in diverse locations from Domboro to Kasa. Actors have suffered from loss of assets and livelihood. For instance, conflict results in Benue farmers being kept in internally displaced camps, stripped of their convenience. Herders change residences, loose lives, and cows and no one wins this situation. The sole answer is for protective agencies to be active in attempting to render impartiality to culprits."

Also, MACBAN was credited in an article titled "MACBAN Prefers Cattle Colony to Ranching System." The article further explains why the group preferred the establishment of a cattle colony than the ranching system as proposed solution to the end farmer's herdsmen crisis in Nasarawa state.

This indicates that even the association is aware of the crisis perpetrated by their members, and they are looking for ways in which things can be settled to benefit its members mostly.

*Fantasy Theme:* As a group whose purpose is advancing upkeep of every Fulani pastoralist by communicating with the government in regards to herders, pastoral learning, utilizing land rights, and mediating strife between farmers and herdsmen. MACBAN has a fantasy theme that adjudicates the good and bad of herdsmen-farmers conflict.

The central moment in MACBAN's fantasy was when the group allegedly supported murders of beyond 300 persons in Plateau state. This, however, brought a barrier among the populace and the group because no matter how committed to one's purpose, you don't support the massacre of about 300 people. The status of requesting a cattle colony emphasizes the group's effort in ending the conflict, however, in the interest of its members.

The message being sent to readers is that of a provocateur group who secretly incites her members to commit illegal acts and herdsmen, as a malefactor, a term in Latin for the wrongdoer. And much like a benefactor acts benevolently to others, often anonymously or indirectly, the same is generally true for a malefactor acting malevolently.

## GAFDAN as Conflict Protagonist

GAFDAN is a body that registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) in January 2016 and preserves Fulanis activities (*The Nation*, May 7, 2016. pp.18-19). GAFDAN embodies attractions of all Fulani people in all occupations inclusive of rearing cows. In an interview with GAFDAN's Secretary-General, who is a Fulani by the name of Alhaji Saleh Bayeri at *The Nation* newspaper, when Bayeri was asked: "Is it correct that Fulanis do not pardon any mistake to them?" He explicitly responded in rhetoric manner:

This characterizes Fulani men as they institutively desire to exact vengeance. It is inborn and from their veins, beginning with customary acts. A traditional culture exists that, if conquered at that time, half a year will be allocated for preparing against whosoever defeated you. After that duration, personal strategies will help the other opponent's demise, such that the fresh winner becomes a hero with four wives as reward for manly courage and strength. This ethnical lifestyle is extended beyond their geography (p. 19).

Bayeri's answer reveals the typical Fulani lifestyle that is important in grasping herders' disposition. It might appear intriguing that he is a Nigerian Fulani authority and reports this proudly on paper; however, a disparager will regard it as an inadvertent exposure and the symbolic convergence extant in the Fulani rhetoric community (Adesuyan, 2018).

*Setting:* The setting for GAFDAN here is the Northern part of Nigeria, which serves as the base for most Fulanis in the country. The interview above reveals the typical way of life of a Fulani characterized by his immediate geographical location.

The speech describes the community as a place where you are encouraged to take revenge for a defeat, hence, supports revenge at any cost.

*Character:* GAFDAN was established and bestowed with the major responsibility of preserving basic liberties of Nigerian herders incorporating constitutional rights to free conveyance, ownership of private luxury, and solitary organizational execution."

*Action:* In *The Nation* newspaper on May 7, 2016, Bayeri attempted to repudiate his consciousness of justifications for Fulani herders assault in Benue when inquired of violent events on Agatu in Benue? Notwithstanding, he established his reaction:

When you hear that Fulani-herdsmen attacked a community, ask that community if there was no clash said 10-15 years ago. You will find out that one or two leaders of the Fulani might have been killed there...if they kill our one, we kill 10. (p. 9)

It was indeed fascinating to listen to Bayeri on *Premium Times* (Thursday, May 12, 2016) that February's dangerous strike in Benue was a counter-attack on Agatus following murdering accusations in 2013. Also, GAFDAN in defense of its member's action tracks disputes' origin to Northern demographic reductions, deforestation, fewer water reserves, increased planting productivity, fishing and animal breeding but faults elongated conflict and dominant violence to lacking political jurisdiction, contemptuous insincerity and usage of ethnical recognition by unsuccessful governance and inefficacy of safety machines. It is, therefore, evident that GAFDAN's actions are similar to that of MACBAN, who promotes the activities of her members and provides reasons for such acts.

*Fantasy Theme:* The examined articles on GAFDAN judged the group to be unfair and to an extent, selfish in her dealings. This is because the group is majorly concerned with the welfare of its members with little or no regard for the peace of the nation. GAFDAN has a group that has a fantasy theme that endorses acts of conflict.

The central moment in GAFDAN's fantasy was included in a 70-page letter conveyed to President Buhari terrorizing that Boko Haram discord would be immaterial if these dissensions are not settled such that all parties gain. It also had requests for free pastoral accessibility in places he called 'trouble spots' all over 75 LGAs and 21 states such as Yola, Edo, Rivers, Shaki (Oyo state), Delta, Oye local government at Northern Ekiti, Gombe, Cross-Rivers, Akwa-Ibom and Bauchi (*The Nation*, January 18, 2018).

The message being sent to readers is not different from that of MACBAN, who secretly incites her members to commit illegal acts. Thus, there exists a symbolic convergence between both rhetoric communities. There is a shared meaning on how conflict is perceived and how it could be resolved in the interest of their members.

## Federal Government of Nigeria as Conflict Antagonist

FGN comprises separate branches: judicial, executive, and legislative. Their competence is rooted in Nigeria's Constitution of the National Assembly, the President, and federal courthouses, including Supreme Court (Athanasius, 2018). One key responsibility of the federal government of Nigeria is to ascertain that the nation is preserved via maintenance of law and order are maintained for eventual serenity and tranquility in this country. However, the federal government has been accused of not living to its expectations as regards herdsmen-farmers clashes.

Bayo Oluwasanmi, a reporter with *Sahara Reporters*, said:

“The aloofness and the distance of the Nigerian government in protecting our people is surprising, disturbing, and disappointing. The Nigerian government and the courts have cast a blind eye and deaf ear to the need to protect the lives of vulnerable Nigerians” (*Sahara Reporters*, July 26, 2016).

Many have questioned the lackadaisical response of the federal government to various killings allegedly perpetrated by herdsman, hence putting to the populace to doubt the involvement accusation levied against the presidency.

*Setting:* The setting here is the nation as a whole of Nigeria, Nigeria is composed of multiple ethnicities and cultures. Still, economic elements cause substantial movement of its people from diverse religious upbringings to live in a national habitat that is external to ethnical roots; hence, vast combinations of several traditions and religions. This could account for the Fulani settlers who settled in other states to find ends meet.

Up until now, regardless of extreme situations, many Nigerians continually live together in serenity; however, recent killings as a result of religious, ethnic, and social differences have challenged the peaceful coexistence that exists amongst Nigerians.

*Character:* The role of Nigeria’s federal government is ensuring the safeguarding of citizens and their valuables, which extends to those residing inside and outside the nation. Such an aspect is extremely necessary to eradicate all threats to livelihoods. Accordingly, the court of law, armed forces and police have been active to protect liberties and rights of Nigerians and national residents. Personal attitudes coexisting in our communities have been modulated to obey set rules and regulations, while violators will be sanctioned.

*Action:* In a news article published on May 6, 2018, titled “Buhari wrong, Fulani-herdsmen move around with AK-47 rifles – Gov. Ishaku”, the President was quoted saying;

The problem of herders in Nigeria is a very long historical thing. The Nigerian herders don’t carry anything more than a stick and occasionally a machete to cut down foliage and give it to their animals, these are carrying AK-47 (*Vanguard*, May 6, 2018)

Nigeria’s President said this in defense of herdsman during his bilateral meeting with the President of the United States, Donald Trump, in Washington DC.

However, in the same article, Governor Ishaku of Taraba state, Nigeria was quoted to say that it couldn’t have been imaginary that farmers were killed with AK-47 rifles in their clash with herdsman in Taraba and Benue states:

It’s wrong for the President to say herdsman don’t move around with guns. I mean, who then kills who? It couldn’t have been imaginary that people have been killed with AK-47 in the farmers-herdsman clashes. We have to stand up to the truth and do something to stop the killings.

The actions of the president were questionable, as the federal government of Nigerians was allegedly silent for a while on the issue of herdsman-farmer’s crises. After so much pressure by Nigerians, the presidency finally broke its silence in an article titled “Buhari breaks the silence, orders ‘herdsman’ brought to justice.”

Also, Federal Government eventually recovered from its enthusiastic, partisan response to massive deaths and arson by Fulani militia late in January by initiating a committee of 10, headed by Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo. Consisting of nine state governors, it is anticipated to handle exacerbated challenges of rampant assaults by Fulani pastoralists and their collusions with farmers, while at the same time catching violent offenders.

*Fantasy Theme:* The examined articles on The Federal Government of Nigeria presented the government as one who is slow to react to the needs of its citizens. To some extent, some people see the President as one who values the lives of cows than the lives of human beings.

Some went to the extent of tagging the President a 'lifeless president,' a phrase that allegedly emanated from the US president, Donald Trump. He was quoted to say, "I never want to meet someone so lifeless again" after meeting with President Buhari (*The Punch*, August 27, 2018).

The central moment in the Federal Government's fantasy was the lackadaisical attitude and delayed response as regards tackling the herdsmen-farmer's crises. The message being sent to readers is that which promotes loss of hope in the federal government of Nigeria in living up to the responsibilities of securing the lives of properties of citizens and also promoting law and order in the country.

## Discussion

In the case of the rhetorical vision of conflict, using Fulani-herdsmen fantasy themes, or the shared interpretation of crises and attacks that satisfy the psychological needs of a group (Bormann 1985), violence discourses emerge. Here, it was discovered that the shared meaning that exists when the name Fulani-herdsmen is mentioned is terror, to a particular rhetoric community, it is a group characterized by violence, protected by the federal government of Nigeria. In discoursing such apparent inhumane acts with the audience, herdsmen can develop hostility and popularity simultaneously.

These Fulani-herdsmen fantasy themes proffer two expressive insights: one is a violent group characterized by terror and one of a group whose interest is protected by the federal government. Embedded in each insightful rhetoric exist imaginative matters which differ and which provide diversified symbolical explanations of conflict situations.

This research enhances one's understanding of both conflict coverage and press content by taking into account the symbolic actualities of violence/terror, benefits, and irresponsibility that emerge in Fulani-herdsmen fantasies. Violence or terror as an illustrative realism performs greater tasks of distinguishing ideological issues. Killings and massacre orchestrated by the group have an apparent impact on noiseless harmony between host societies and herders. Protagonists here majorly supported violence act under the disguise of protecting the interest of pastoralists.

Actions that result from the protagonists' behavior include: protect your people at all costs; vengeance is not a bad idea; stand for your right; get what you want by any possible means, and do not give in to threats. The implication is that by enacting these behaviors, herdsmen became more hostile and ruthless in their attacks.

Within the rhetorical vision of conflict as a retaliatory act, MACBAN and GAFDAN both expressed their utmost objective, which is to liaise with the government for herdsmen, pastoral upbringing, optimizing land rights, and solving discord between farmers and pastoralists. This, they held on to justify the attacks on farmers and called on the federal government to create a cattle colony as a means to end the gruesome killings.

The symbolic reality of privilege is a crucial element in understanding the importance of these herdsmen-farmers conflict stories. First, an indistinct privilege of the president who is of the Fulani heritage, these supposedly gave the herdsmen buoyant support to commit those terror acts. Secondly, the constitutional recognition of MACBAN and GAFDAN also backed their privileges to discuss and negotiate with the government on how best they

think the conflict can be settled. This gave birth to the request of cattle colonies, which was later accepted by the federal government. (*Vanguard*, January 11, 2018).

Irresponsibility, as a symbolic reality, is unique to the antagonist (Federal Government of Nigeria) considered in this paper. The slow and delayed response as regards the herdsman-farmers crises made most Nigerians lose faith in the protective function of the federal government, and some decided to take laws into their hands. An example of this is the case of Ekiti State Governor, Ayodele Fayose who warned herdsman against turning the state into a war zone (*Vanguard*, January 18, 2018). However, the federal government's late response came with a committee to look into the conflict situation and also directives to the Nigerian police force to arrest anyone caught in such act. This is considered synonymous with the popular saying 'mercy after death.'

One limitation of this research is that it did not examine journalists' decisions about the use of protagonist and antagonist narratives when covering conflict news. For example, how journalists frame violence, privilege, and irresponsibility as they relate to conflict and which details they choose to make salient would enhance our overall understanding of this phenomenon. Another limitation is that it is solely possible to predict the meanings of such allusive perceptions. Communal rhetoric is not analyzed to discover the joint implications of figurative materiality.

Notwithstanding, we could observe preconceived motives for activities that abide in rhetorical discernment (Foss, 1989). Readers are to assimilate appropriate approaches of dealing with conflict, via peace accord aspirations of conflict antagonist, as well as terrible methods to handling conflict, using protagonists that believe vengeance is not a bad idea, it is the only means of repaying an evil done.

The overall rhetorical goal is resolving and controlling conflict. Reverie provides an avenue to foresee peaceful co-existence among indigene and non-indigene settlers in the case of Fulani herdsman. When well examined, it will be noted that both the protagonist and antagonist only seek one thing, which is to peacefully coexist and go about one's daily business without the fear of losing one's life.

## Conclusion

This study sought to unearth some of the powerful discursive messages that exist in Herder-Farmers conflict stories. Hence, revealing facts and hidden intentions and further evaluate the narratives and identity of the Herders-Farmers crisis as established by the media. It was established against the background that the Nigerian press is a genuine actor during the sprouting phases of conflict conditions. The media's duty during such situations, with conflict being a foremost news value, involves the surveillance function of information gathering and relay, and the correlational function of information analysis and interpretation.

Findings of the study revealed that these herders-framers fantasy themes offer two rhetorical visions: one of a violent group characterized by terror and one of a group whose interest is protected by the federal government. Within each rhetorical vision, there are fantasy themes that contrast and offer broad symbolic interpretations of conflict situations. The findings of the study also influenced the understanding of both conflict coverage and press content by taking into account the symbolic realities of violence/terror, privilege, and irresponsibility as they surface in Fulani-herdsman fantasy themes.

Consequent upon its findings, this study concludes that the selected national newspapers have successfully established a defined identity of the herders-farmers' conflict

in Nigeria as that which is similar or equivalent to terrorism. It was further discovered that most of the reports on the herders-farmers conflict were centered on the herders as the main initiator of the conflict. Therefore, the national newspapers were excessively subjective and less expository in their coverage of the conflict.

Correlating the finding that revealed the rhetorical vision of terrorism as the dominant news frame together with the finding that indicated herders as the principally reported perpetrators of violence in the herders-farmers conflict, it can be concluded that the selected newspapers presented the herders-farmers conflict more as criminal attacks by herders on rhetoric communities and less as dualistic conflict between herders and farmers over scarce resources. To this end, the narrative of the newspapers, rather than simply reflecting, actually revises the conventional "bi-polar" construct of the conflict as clashes between herders and farmers. It is expected that this rhetoric pattern would influence how the identity newspapers' readers and the Nigerian public at large proscribe on the conflict actors. Consequently, they are more likely to hold aggressors-versus-victim's interpretation as against an aggressors-versus-aggressors reading to the conflict, perceiving herders as the aggressors and farmers (and members of their community) as the victims, rather than as combating parties.

Conclusively, it was discovered that the herders-farmers conflict was birthed as both parties sought greener pastures in their daily dealings, which is meant to bring about the economic development of the nation. However, going through violence means to achieve this has been critically condemned by the public and the media has successfully established and sustained the public's perspective of the conflict situation with an overarching theme of terrorism.

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