

# INVADERS, ATTACKERS AND DESTROYERS: TRESPASSING-RELATED TERMS AND REPRESENTATIONS IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

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## Abstract

Discourses on herding have focussed on the “exact” representations of the social actions of itinerant herders who clash with farmers while grazing on supposed cattle routes. Media coverage on the herdsman-farmers conflict has deployed ideologically laden terms to represent herding as trespassing on farmlands and herders as foreigners and trespassers. Using van Leeuwen’s Representation of Social Actions and Actors model and Martin and White’s Appraisal Framework, this paper examines how different trespassing-related terms (i.e. invade, attack and destroy) were deployed in the Nigerian newspaper headlines to represent herders and their activities with a view to discussing the kinds of representations that were constructed of the nomads through the texts. Findings revealed that using transactive role allocations, nominalization, descriptivation, identification, aggregation and attitudinal lexicalization, these social actors were evaluated negatively as intruders, raiders, and destroyers. The negative othering underscores the general perception and suspicious treatment of nomads in their host farming communities.

**Keywords:** media representation, trespassing, evaluation, newspaper headlines, Fulani herdsman, farming-herding conflict, social actors and actions analysis, Nigeria

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## **Background and Problem**

In recent times, research on discursive representation of actors of violence has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention in (critical) discourse analysis. The studies, aimed at examining language use especially by the media focused on terrorists (Ahmad, 2016; Sanz Sabido, 2013), militants (Chiluwa, 2010), revolutionists and rebels (Al-Gamde and Tenbrink, 2020), and protesters and demonstrators (Trew, 1979, Sadeghi, Hassani and Jalali, (2014) and on the issues of religion (Ghauri and Umber, 2019; Poole, 2016; Powell, 2011), ethnicity and racism (Webster, 2018, Nyamnjoh, 2010). Focusing on discursive strategies such as labelling, polarization, argumentation, agency suppression and backgrounding, etc. the research has shown that the media dominantly portray these minority social actors as violent and a threat to the society. In addition, the research has examined (de)legitimation strategies used in the representations and evaluations of the supposed perpetrators of violent actions, and submits that media bias is central in the construction of their identities and reproduction of dominant ideologies. Despite this ample research, there is a paucity of critical discourse studies in the African context, even though discourses on especially conflict are predominant in the media given the violence-prone nature of the Africa continent (Aremu, 2010). Scholars such as Chiluwa and Chiluwa (2020) and Nartey and Ladegaard (2021) have examined media reports on herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria and Ghana, respectively, but do not focus on representations bordering on ownership of and trespassing on grazing and farming area.

Clashes between herdsman and farmers have recently escalated into widespread violence, attracting the attention of the media, which report on the day-to-day incidents of the resource-based conflict. The media are filled with many reports on the ownership dispute and clashes between herdsman and farmers to the extent that there is “not a single day without a negative reportage on the farmer-pastoralist conflicts” (Agyemang, 2017, p. 23). Trespassing has become the dominant reportage frames used in representing the crisis as contest for and invasion of grazing and farming space. Before now, herders were presented as living in a harmonious, peaceful, symbiotic relationship with the farmers (International Crisis Group Report, 2017). According to Igwebuike (2020), they had co-existed and interacted with the southern farmers and landowners who viewed them as mere harmless nomads and pastoralists. The mutual symbiotic relation was such

that “while grazing their herds in the south, pastoralists were providing farmers with manure, milk and other animals products. In return, they received grains and vegetables and took the farmers’ animals into their custody” (Leonhardt, 2017, p. 4). Recent emerging media representations, in particular however, portray cattle grazing as an invasion and destruction of farms (Ele, 2020, Idowu and Okunola, 2017). Since the media is a powerful institution involved in the business of representation, the particular angle media stories are framed becomes the dominant perspective on how people view events and people as well as shaping audience’s opinion (Mccombs, 2011). Thus, the media play a significant role of not only informing people but also acting as a key filter through which people learn about the activities of the “other” and form their opinions (Ross, 2019).

Media representations tend to exhibit prejudice against the nomads (Nartey & Ladegaard, 2021). According to Nartey and Ladegaard (2021), media selective reporting of violent incidents through sensational headlines, alarmist news contents and bias quotations projects the Fulani herdsman group as the “undesirables” in Ghana. In the same vein, Chilwa and Chilwa (2020) submit that the conscious language choices of the Nigerian media, such as “attack” instead of “clash” in representing violent actions of the conflict portray the violence as one-sided as well as constructing the herders as a violent group. These representations influence public understanding of herding-farming issues as well as shaping media consumers’ perception and categorizations of the herders’ group. More importantly, since the conflict is primarily resource-based and a struggle over access of a contested space (Onah, Asadu, & Aduma, 2019), the use of trespassing-related vocabulary to describe social actors and actions has implications on the understanding of issues relating to ownership and non-ownership of the area. This study, therefore, explores the linguistic and ideological representation of Fulani herdsman with a view to pointing out how the Nigerian media employ violence- and trespassing-related vocabulary to report their activities. Specifically, it examines how the media reports on Fulani herders’ activities construct the identity of the herders as violent trespassers and non-owners of the supposed grazing fields. This becomes necessary as “different ways of representing social action encode different interpretations of, and different attitudes to, the social actions represented” (van Leeuwen, 1995, p. 81).

### **Nomadic Herding, Ownership of and Trespassing on Farmland**

Nomadic herding through seasonal and occasional mass movement of herds from the arid north to the humid south is shrouded in conflict between the herdsmen and the farmers over access and ownership of grazing routes and farms. Impacts of climate change such as drastic reduction in rainfall, increase in the rate of dryness and heat, etc. in the north have intensified the southward movements and herders' interactions with farming communities along the migration and grazing routes, leading to frequent clashes and violence (Obioha, 2008). Such movements by transhumant herders are accommodated in the ECOWAS Protocol on Transhumance Treaty (1998) which stipulates free movement of persons, services and goods in and across borders of ECOWAS member states. However, in some African countries such as Nigeria where there are no longer marked transhumance corridors and grazing areas, pastoralists are occasionally "vulnerable to allegations of trespassing" (Leonhardt 2017, p. 59).

Trespassing by grazing on farms is one of the undisputed causes of farmer-herder conflict (Adomako, 2019, p. 1). Due to the expansion of farmland through commercial agriculture as well as industrialization, previously created cattle routes in the 1960s have collapsed and there are always controversies in determining legitimate rights of access and control of contested grazing areas (Odoemene, 2017; Ele, 2020). According to Leonhardt (2017, p. 27), "In the 1970s, the system of stock routes began to collapse, as farmers increasingly claimed ownership of the land crossed by the stock routes and began to cultivate the well-manured plots. Cattle following the stock routes so inevitably wandered into newly created farms, leading to conflict and violence". Consequently, there is increased competition for land leading to ownership and non-ownership issues as well as accusations of trespassing. While the herdsmen claim to have been using the routes since the colonial days, the farmers argue that the land is their family inheritance, thereby considering the herders as invaders. According to Idowu (2017, p. 188), "The Fulani herders claim there is freedom of movement-of man and cattle, interaction and association in the country while the farmers see the farmland invasion as not acceptable and infringement on their personal and communal properties".

Issues bordering on rights of ownership to grazing routes and farms as well as trespassing have triggered national policies. In Ghana, for instance, the policy of expulsion was promulgated which authorized evacuation of herders from Ghana as well as classifying herdsmen as *persona non grata* and foreigners, thereby denying them access

to herding in the country (Olaniyan, Francis, & Okeke-Uzodike, 2015). Also, there was the deployment of a joint military-police taskforce code-named “Operation Cow Leg” targeted as driving out Fulani herdsmen (Adomako, 2019). On its own part, the Nigerian government passed the Grazing Reserve law that allows it to legally acquire a minimum of 10 per cent of the country’s land area and constitute it into grazing reserves for lease allocation to pastoralists (Leonhardt, 2017). While the Nigerian Federal Government’s attempt to establish grazing reserves (cattle colonies) was targeted at curtailing indiscriminate grazing and trespassing on farms, the Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) bill was politicized and viewed as a land-grabbing strategy in favor of the northern Fulani. According to Onah, Asadu and Aduma (2019), leaders from the southern Christian-dominated farming areas opposed the ideas and argued that provision of cattle colony to the Fulani herdsmen is a subtle agenda to “Islamize” and “Fulanize” the country. Consequently, such unsuccessful implementations of the grazing policies to guarantee rightful access to land use have continued to escalate communal tensions between farmers and herders (Ele, 2020). Herders-farmers violence is also mainly played out in the media, which present it in different fronts including representations on right to access and ownership of land as well as trespassing on private farmland. In particular, selective word choices such as “nomads vs. natives” and “indigenes vs settlers” (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014) contribute to influencing media consumers’ perceptions of the ownership and non-ownership status of the conflicting parties.

### **Media Representations of Herders-Farmers Violence**

The media are in the business of representing people and actions and their representations play a vital role in shaping and forming our perceptions of others and events. Media representations are often based on socio-cultural stereotypes and ideologies, which tend to portray the out-group negatively (Ross, 2019). In the herders-farmers violence, the herdsmen are systematically portrayed negatively in media representations (Chiluwa & Chiluwa, 2020; Igwebuike, 2020; Nartey & Ladegaard, 2021). For instance, the herdsmen are linked to criminality and are identified with negative stereotypes such as rapists and armed robbers (Adomako 2019; Bukari & Schareika 2015). Media prejudiced portrayals of the nomads contribute to an exclusionist and a discriminatory discourse that puts the nomads at the margins of Ghanaian society (Nartey & Ladegaard, 2021). Despite the fact that herders-farmers violence is two-sided, “Media reports are

often rife with violent acts committed by herders contributing to an erroneous perception that Fulani herdsmen are not law abiding” (Adomako, 2019: 2). In the Nigerian press, there is a negative stance of the herders group as they are identified as killers. According to Chilwa & Chilwa (2020, p. 16) “the Nigerian press succeeds in creating the killer-herdsmen “script” with which the herders and their activities are frequently evaluated, and this forms the general perception of the herders, including those (herdsmen) that may have been victimized”. Furthermore, metaphorical constructions serve to justify the demonization of the herdsmen (Igwebuike, 2020). According to Igwebuike (2020), the Nigerian press use metaphors of dangerous water, hunting and cleaning agents to construct herdsmen negatively as disasters trying to eliminate farmers. Also, Alfred and Oyebola (2019, p. 3) have shown how the Nigerian editorials syntactically positioned the cattle herders as “Agents of destruction and death and syntactically portrayed Nigerians and farmers as the victims/affected of these security issues”.

One of the prominent media frames is “aggressor versus victim” representation by which the herdsmen are presented as an armed group attacking the farmers with dangerous weapons (Higazi, 2016). Before the escalation of the violent identities, herdsmen were known to move about with traditional sticks, arrows and machetes to help them navigate the bushes and separate fighting cows on their way down to the South (Abdulai & Yakubu 2014). However, by identifying the group with such labels as “cutlass-wielding herdsmen” or “well-armed herdsmen” the media presents them as an armed violent group (Ajibefun, 2018; Ciboh 2017). In the same vein, a significant pattern of media representation is invasions of farms and subtle land grabbing tactics under the guise of cattle grazing (Bamidele 2018). Media reports tend to suggest that the main triggers of the increased clashes between farmers and nomads include trespassing on farmland. In this regard, violence- and trespassing-related vocabulary is employed to present the continued violence as invasions, attacks and dispossession of farmland. For instance, the media’s metaphorical use of “descended on” constructs the herders as invaders who launched surprise ambush on host communities (Alfred & Oyebola, 2019, p. 9) while the use of metaphors of dangerous water such as “stormed”, “poured” and “flooded” construct massive invasion and takeover of a place (Igwebuike, 2020). Such media representations of the “other” have become influential in constructing, reproducing and reinforcing shared and dominant ideologies in the society (van Dijk 2000). These collectively shared ideologies or representations are “usually tied to particular discourses, which

work to shape the meanings and identities attached to ‘other’ people” (Torkington and Ribeiro, 2019, p. 24). According to Ross (2019), representations of the “other” are largely negative with hegemonic and discriminatory stereotypes suggesting criminality (Ross, 2019).

### **Representing and Evaluating Social Actors and Actions**

Social actors and actions are constantly being represented in the media from different ideological angles. Van Leeuwen (2008) proposed a comprehensive theoretical approach “Representing Social Actions and Actors in Discourse” to explain the different ways through which social actions and actors are represented and defined in discourses. Some of the categories of his theory include transactive and non-transactive role allocations, nominalization, descriptivation, identification and aggregation.

According to van Leeuwen (2008), social actors are allocated with active (activation) role or passive (deactivation) role. Social actors are represented as active forces whose actions have effects on other participants while other actors can be passivated and represented as recipients or goals experiencing the actions of the agents. In the same vein, social actions are often presented as transactive and nontransactive actions. According to van Leeuwen (2008), transactive material processes involve an actor and a goal (or Patient) while non-transactive processes have only one participant, the Actor. While the actions in transactive processes have effects on people or things, they do not affect other people or things in the nontransactive processes. Actors can also be represented generically (genericization) or specifically (specification), as well as referring to them personally or impersonally (van Leeuwen (2008). They can also be presented as individuals or as belonging to a group. Using plurality or mass nouns, actors are represented collectively and denoted as a group of people (collectivization) while a group of actors can be treated as statistics using definite and indefinite quantifiers (aggregation). Identification as a discourse strategy of representing actors is when social actors are defined in terms of what they are (such as their ethnicity, religion, etc.). A part of identification is descriptivation, which is when social actors are assigned certain qualities using adjectives. It is important to know that by using any of the discourse strategies in representing actors and actions, the media are projecting particular points of view, ideologies, as well as influencing readers’ opinions towards the represented.

In media representations, social actors and actions are also evaluated. Martin and White (2005) provide the appraisal framework for the analysis of writer's stance and evaluations of actors and actions. According to Martin and White (2005), the three concepts of attitude, engagement and graduation are key in determining how writers express their approval or disapproval of people and actions. In particular, the system of attitude encompasses how "feelings, including emotional reactions, judgements of behaviour and evaluation of things" are expressed in texts (Martin & White, 2005, p. 35). While graduation is concerned with how feelings are amplified or lowered, engagement deals with linguistic resources by which the writer's voice is positioned intersubjectively (White, 2001). In the analysis, Martin and White's (2005) appraisal resources will be used to examine evaluative aspects of language use.

### **The Corpus and Methodology**

The data are online news reports on herders-farmers conflict collected from the websites of four Nigerian national newspapers, namely, The Punch, The Guardian, Leadership, and Daily Trust. The printed and electronic format of the four newspapers are among the most widely read and leading Nigerian dailies. The newspapers were selected because of their national coverage, perceived popularity and accessibility. They cut across both the northern and southern parts of Nigeria. The first two are located in the southern part while the last two are located in the Northern and, specifically, in the capital city of Nigeria. In terms of political orientation, The Punch and The Guardian are among the few overtly non-political newspapers, in terms of their balanced coverage of events without explicit display of allegiance to any political, ethnic or religious group (Adesoji & Hahn, 2011; Ademilokun & Taiwo 2014). Leadership is generally considered pro-government and has the backing of its strong politician owner, Samuel Ndanusa Isaiah while Daily Trust is moderately apolitical but displays strong bias towards pursuing northern Nigerian agenda (Daramola, 2013). The study covered the period (2017 – 2019) when the conflict was at its peak.

The search words used to collect data were "herdsmen", "herdsmen invasion" and "herdsmen attack". These returned large numbers of news reports. Hence, there was the decision to limit the corpus to news headlines containing at least one of the search words. Headlines are key to news reports as they attract the attention of readers as well as persuading them to read the whole news story (Bell 1991). They constitute a discourse site

for ideological manipulations and evaluations of situations using eye-catching phrases, emotive vocabulary and rhetorical and graphological devices (Taiwo, 2007). In the same vein, headlines also play a prominent role in orienting the interpretation of news by readers (Develotte & Rechniewski, 2001). More importantly, due to their short and catchy nature, newspaper headlines contain carefully selected words used to evaluate people and events. A total number of 160 news headlines comprising 40 each from the four newspapers were purposively sampled and used in the analysis. Table 1 below presents the frequency count of the use of trespassing-related terms in the selected newspapers.

**Table 1:** Sources and Frequencies of the Use of Trespassing Terms in the Data (2017 – 2019)

<b>Newspapers</b>	<b>Invasion</b>	<b>Destruction</b>	<b>Attack</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Northern</b>				
Daily Trust	05	02	16	23
Leadership	04	04	26	34
<b>Sub-Total</b>	09	06	42	57
<b>Southern</b>				
The Punch	21	15	20	56
The Guardian	04	01	33	38
<b>Sub-Total</b>	25	16	53	94
<b>Grand Total</b>	34	22	95	151

Table 1 presents the number of times that words related to trespassing occur in the newspapers. “Attack” has the highest number, occurring 95 times. It implies that, more than all the other forms, trespassing is mainly constructed as an attack on the farmers and farmland. The next is “invasion” with 34 occurrences. Though invasion is closely related to attack, it differs as invasion entails entering and occupying a space by force while attack involves some degrees of physical assault. “Destruction” has the least number of occurrences with just 22, most of which come from the southern-based newspapers. This could be related to the fact that most of the farms destroyed are located in the southern part of Nigeria. In addition, the southern newspaper deployed more of the trespassing-related vocabulary at 94 times than their northern counterparts at 57 times. The implication of this is that the southern newspapers seem to be altruistic towards the southern farmers who are reported as the victims of the violence and

trespassing. In the next section, instances of the use of the trespassing vocabulary are identified and analyzed using van Leeuwen's (2008) and Martin and White's (2005) theoretical approaches.

## **Data Analysis and Discussion**

### ***Invasion, Attack and Destruction as Social Actions***

"Invade", "attack" and "destroy" are trespassing-related words deployed to represent social actions of the herders as trespassing. Through these, the herdsmen are portrayed as violent trespassers. In the corpus, "attack" has the highest number of frequency at 95, followed by "invade" at 34 and lastly, "destroy" at 22. Such trespassing terms are reflected in the following headlines:

- (1) Herdsmen **invade** Imo community, **destroy** multi-million naira crops (*The Punch*, August 17, 2017)
- (2) Again, Troops Nab 7 Herdsmen **Destroying** Farmlands in Benue (*Leadership*, March 01, 2018)
- (3) Herdsmen **destroying** our crops-Anambra farmers (*Daily Trust*, April 19, 2019)
- (4) Herdsmen **attack** Delta community, kills police officer (*The Guardian*, February 01, 2019)
- (5) Herdsmen **Destroy** Farm, **Poison** Dam In UNILORIN (*Leadership*, February 12, 2018)
- (6) Residents flee home as herdsmen **invade** Cross River community (*The Punch*, December 6, 2017)
- (7) Tension in Delta communities over **fresh attack** by herdsmen (*The Guardian*, May 23, 2017)
- (8) 8 persons feared dead as suspected herdsmen **attack** 2 Benue villages (*Daily Trust*, May 09, 2017)

"Invade", "attack" and "destroy" are used in the headlines to evaluate herdsmen's actions as trespassing. They constitute negative judgements of the situation and by using them, the media present the herdsmen as violent actors engaging in trespassing acts. In particular, while "destroy" portrays violent acts of damaging sources of livelihood and investments in Examples 1, 2, 3 and 5, it depicts murderous acts of contaminating water in Example 5. On its own part, "invade" explicitly depicts intrusion and occupation of a space. Using the term to describe the actions of herders in Examples 1 and 6, the herders are depicted as trespassers who have illegally taken over some communities in the southern states of Imo and Cross River. In the same vein, "attack" carries the notion of

violent force geared towards causing injury or harm. The resultant effects of such violent acts include the death of a police officer in Example 4 and the killing of eight persons in Example 8. Using the *affect* resource “flee” in Example 6 and “tension” in Example 7, the newspapers evaluate insecurity caused by herdsmen’s invasion and attack, respectively. Inclusion of southern communities (Imo, Delta and Cross River), village (Benue) as well as other spatial locators (e.g. Anambra) as the areas invaded, attacked and destroyed by the herdsmen construct the nomads as the dangerous “outsiders”. This is because up to about 90% of herdsmen are of the Northern Fulani ethnic group (International Crisis Group Report, 2017) and the communities reported to be attacked in the headlines are in the southern regions. Thus, a recurring pattern of using “invade”, “attack” and “destroy” farms and communities in close connection with herdsmen paints the picture that the nomads are trespassing on the farming communities in the southern parts. Lexical items such as “again” and “fresh” reinforce the view of frequent disturbances of the herdsmen in the region.

### ***Role Allocation of Social Actors***

Herdsmen are allocated the roles of agents and patients. As agents, they play an active part in the represented violent activities while as patients; they are at the receiving end of a supposed counterattack.

### ***Herdsmen as agents***

Herdsmen are generally represented as having aggressive, destructive role. In the headlines, they are assigned more with transactive roles whereby their violent actions have adverse effects on the farmers and security officers than with non-transactive roles. Since “the ability ‘to transact’ requires a certain amount of power” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 60), herdsmen are elevated from having lower status in the society to having powerful roles by carrying out violent transactive material actions.

### ***Transactive Actions***

Some examples where herdsmen are allocated transactive roles are presented below:

(9) Again, herdsmen invade Falae’s farm, attack policemen (*The Punch*, June 20, 2017)

(10) Suspected herdsmen attack villages, kill 2 farmers in Benue (*Daily Trust*, April

- 3, 2017)
- (11) Suspected herdsmen attack farmer in Edo (*The Guardian*, August 02, 2018)
  - (12) Herdsmen destroy farms in Osun villages (*The Punch*, January 29, 2018)
  - (13) Suspected herdsmen sack 2 communities, raze 27 houses in Nasarawa (*Daily Trust*, March 27, 2019)
  - (14) Herdsmen attack Benue community, kill five farmers (*The Punch*, January 05, 2017)
  - (15) Herdsmen Attack Workers, Sack Local Govt Secretariat in Ondo (*Leadership*, February 13, 2018)

The headlines above present different transactive actions of herdsmen. Syntactically, the herdsmen are placed at the subject position of the material processes (invade, attack, destroy, etc.), thereby making them responsible for the varying trespassing acts. The implication of this direct and explicit representation is that the herders are constructed as the aggressors in the herders-farmers conflict. For instance, trespassing is explicit in Example 9 in which herdsmen are represented as invading Falae's farm once again and attacking policemen. "Again" in the headline presupposes the former Nigerian Minister of Finance's farm has had previous invasion(s). Herdsmen invasion and attack sometimes lead to killing of farmers as stated in Examples 10 and 14. "Destroy" as trespassing extends to pulling down of farm crops (Example 12) and burning of houses (Example 13). Significantly, "sack" is a *judgement* resource used to evaluate herders' activities as trespassing. From the metaphor of job and employment, "sack" entails dispossession of a space. By its use in Example 15, it presents the view that herders have extended their violent acts from the farmers and security forces to other members of the communities, including the local government workers.

### ***Nontransactive Actions***

In the data, nontransactive actions involving a single actor participant are realized through nominalizations. Nominalizations objectify a given action as a phenomenon rather than as an active process. According to Mayr and Machin (2011), in nominalizations, verb processes are converted into noun constructions and the degrees of impact of social actors' actions are minimized. While nominalizations obscure agency or make invisible an actor of a given action, nominalizations in the corpus foreground the

agency of actors and only background already known patients. Instances of nontranscative actions are:

- (16) IMO youths raise alarm over herdsmen invasion (*The Punch*, May 03, 2017)
- (17) Bishop raises concern over Herdsmen attacks (*The Guardian*, March 25, 2018)
- (18) Herdsmen attacks: 2,000 children out of school in Nasarawa (*The Punch*, June 15, 2019)
- (19) Death toll risen to 78 in Nasarawa Herdsmen attacks (*Daily Trust*, April 18, 2018)
- (20) At least 30 killed in herdsmen clash (*The Guardian*, November 22, 2017)
- (21) Magboro community raises the alarm over herdsmen invasion (*The Punch*, February 01, 2018)
- (22) Palpable Fear in Edo Community over Herdsmen Attack (*Leadership*, January 28, 2018)

Nominalizations are realized in “attacks”, “invasion” and “clash”. These nominal have reduced and minimized the effects of their verbal processes as well as constructing the actions as objects. Unlike in the transactive actions (Examples 9 – 15), actions here have been converted into abstract nouns. However, the use of nominalizations is strategic as they personalize the violent actions. That is, the nominal nouns are qualified with the adjective “Herdsmen” as in “herdsmen attacks”, “herdsmen invasion” and “herdsmen clash”. Through this, the herders are identified as the violent actors. In particular, the nominal phrase “herdsmen clash” specifically identified only herders in a violent act that entails more than one conflicting party. A “clash” involves two warring participants. By writing the headline as “At least 30 killed in herdsmen clash” (Example 20) instead of “At least 30 killed in herdsmen-farmers clash” shows that the headline is biased against the herdsmen. That is, by qualifying “clash” with only “herdsmen”, the newspaper has taken a stand that it was the herdsmen who clashed with the unspecified participant; in this case, the farmers. The bias in the headline is obvious in the body of the news report, as the clash is an attack on the herdsmen by the farmers in Adamawa State, northeast Nigeria. In the same vein, pluralising “attack” as “attacks” in Examples 17 - 19 portrays the violence as constant and frequent. *Judgment* resources “raise alarm” (Examples 16 and 21) and “raise concern” (Example 17) evaluate the reactions of the southern farming

communities (Imo, Magboro, etc.) as warning against impending dangers of herders trespassing. Also, the *affect* resources “palpable fear” (Example 22) evaluates the emotions of the people as panic and insecure. In all, despite the fact that nominalizations are used, the two participants (actors and goals) are easily discernible in the headlines.

### ***Herdsmen as Patients***

Apart from representing herdsmen as agents of trespassing acts, they are also assigned the role of patients. As patients, herders are represented as suspects and victims of a crime. That is, during police interventions and control of crimes, the herdsmen are “arrested” and, subsequently “killed”. The underlying representation is that herdsmen are apprehended for engaging in criminal offences or captured for illegal possession of arms. This portrayal maintains the positive presentation of the police as proactive in maintaining law and order, including curtailing disturbances and trespassing. For instance:

(23) Troops Nab 7 Herdsmen Who Destroy Farmlands (*Leadership*, March 02, 2018)

(24) Troops arrest Fulani herdsmen planning attack on Benue community (*The Punch*, February 08, 2018)

(25) 4 Herdsmen Arrested For Attacking Ogun Communities (*Leadership*, May 09, 2019)

(26) Seven herdsmen arrested in Benue while destroying farms (*The Punch*, March 02, 2018)

(27) Troops kill 36 armed herdsmen in Benue (*Daily Trust*, May 21, 2018)

(28) Military parades captured armed herdsmen (*The Punch*, April 28, 2018)

(29) Herdsmen raze Adamawa village, army kills 10 fleeing attackers (*The Punch*, February 28, 2018)

The headlines in Example 23 – 29 present herdsmen as patients of the material processes of arrest, captured, nabbed, killed, etc. These material processes, especially arrest, captured and nabbed, entail that the herders were caught in violent acts. Identification of herdsmen with the negative tags such as “armed herdsmen” (Example 28) and “fleeing attackers” (Example 29) in the headlines reinforces the view that herdsmen are violent and constitute a threat to the peaceful life of the farming

communities. Hence, they are represented as “deserving” victims of policing. “Fleeing attackers”, removes negativity from the police killing by subscribing to the view that the herdsmen were killed while “evading” from the army after attacking a village (Example 29). The underlying representation is that the herdsmen are arrested and killed while trespassing through destroying farms (Examples 23, 26 and 29) and attacking farming communities (Examples 24 and 25). This representation supports the killing of herdsmen who are by the labels considered threats to the supposedly peaceful communities.

### ***Other Agents: Police and Farmers***

Apart from the herdsmen, the police and farmers are two other agents represented in the headlines. As already seen in Texts 23 – 29 above, the police are represented as having an active, preventive role – arresting and killing herdsmen who trespassed on the farming communities. In addition to this, the police also perform the role of curtailing trespassing activities through interception of arms (Example 30) and prosecution of violent herdsmen (Examples 31 and 33):

(30) Police intercept herdsmen with firearms, army uniforms in Ebonyi (*Daily Trust*, April 21, 2018)

(31) Benue police prosecute 188 herdsmen over anti-grazing law (*The Punch*, June 05, 2018)

(32) Police recover three corpses as Fulani herdsmen attack Plateau commuters (*The Punch*, February 14, 2018)

(33) Police to prosecute herdsmen for destroying farmlands in Edo (*The Punch*, January 21, 2018)

(34) Police confirm 4 dead as herdsmen attack Ebonyi community (*Daily Trust*, March 13, 2018)

Examples 30 – 34 are headlines that positively evaluate police and negatively portray herdsmen. As agents, the police are positioned as subjects of the security activities. Conversely, the herdsmen are portrayed as the perpetrators of the violent activities which the police are controlling.

As agents, the farmers and the farming communities are presented as passive victims (patients) of the herdsmen attacks. As vulnerable people, they mainly “protest” (Examples 35 and 36), “lament” (Examples 37, 39 and 40) and “accuse” (Example 38)

herdsmen for their plights. For instance:

(35) Abia women protest farm invasion, sexual harassment by herdsmen (*Daily Trust*, January 04, 2018)

(36) Indigenes protest against killings by herdsmen, ransack forest in Edo (*The Guardian*, 26 June 2019)

(37) Edo farmers lament herdsmen attacks (*The Punch*, June 19, 2017)

(38) Kaduna indigenes accuse herdsmen of harvesting crops (*The Guardian*, April 06, 2017)

(39) Herdsmen destroying our farms, Ekiti residents cry out (*The Punch*, March 05, 2017)

(40) Women farmers lament activities of herdsmen in Enugu (*The Guardian*, March 26, 2017)

The representation is that this class of people is vulnerable and defenseless to the violent trespassers. The image created is that of a generalized collectivity of powerless victims whose farms have been trespassed on. The newspapers use *affect* resources “cry out”, “lament”, “accuse” and “protest” to evaluate the feelings of the group as fear and pain. In particular, the use of the tags “indigenes” (Example 36) and “residents” (Example 39) depicts legal ownership and occupation of the trespassed area. According to Igwebuike (2016), “indigene” entails aboriginal inhabitants of a place and confers a kind of ownership while “resident” depicts legal occupier of a space. In the same vein, explicit tags such as “Abia women” (Example 35) and “Edo farmers” (Example 37) also add to the designation of the actual occupiers and owners of the farms that were destroyed and attacked. Abia and Edo are states in the southern part of Nigeria.

### ***Genericization and specification***

Social actors are referred to generally or specifically in the news headlines. Genericization is when social actors are represented as general classes of groups or individuals while specification occurs when social actors are identified as specific individuals (van Leeuwen 2008). In the data, herdsmen are identified generally through collectivization, and specifically through identification. *Collectivization* is realized using plurality or mass nouns to denote a group of people. In this case, trespassers or actors of violence are identified collectively with the plural common noun “herdsmen”. The

newspapers avoid identifying them as specific individuals but rather genericize them as herdsmen. Despite the absence of qualifying definite or indefinite article attached to the term, “herdsmen” in the Nigerian context is generic and denotes a group of northern cattle breeders. Frequent use of this plural form has created a mental schema that conscripts all cattle breeders as the “violent herdsmen”. On the other hand, herdsmen are equally identified as specific identifiable individuals through *identification*. They are defined in terms of their ethnicity. In Examples 41 – 46, ethnic identifying classifiers such as “Fulani” and “Hausa” are used to describe herdsmen as belonging to the Fulani and Hausa ethnic groups. The classifiers particularize their identities as well as making it explicit that the “violent” herdsmen are of the northern tribes:

(41) **Fulani** herdsmen invade Ondo varsity’s farm, destroy crops (*The Punch*, September 12, 2017)

(42) 1 Killed As Suspected **Fulani** Herdsmen Invade Community in Ondo (*Leadership*, January 04, 2018)

(43) Tension in Makurdi over planned attack by suspected **Hausa/Fulani** herdsmen (*The Punch*, April 28, 2018)

(44) **Fulani** herdsmen kill 32 in Kogi State attack (*The Guardian*, March 16, 2018)

(45) 54 Berom Communities Sacked By **Fulani** Herdsmen (*Leadership*, February 2, 2018)

(46) **Fulani** herdsmen set Falae’s five-hectare oil palm plantation ablaze (*The Punch*, January 21, 2018)

In Nigeria, almost all cattle breeders are designated as Fulani herdsmen despite the fact that some other tribes still have people who own cattle herds. The media have also contributed to disseminating and influencing such perceptions. In addition, this view is not unconnected to the fact that about 90% of the Fulani herd cattle (International Crisis Group Report, 2017). Thus, by specifically identifying the herdsmen who trespass on the farming communities in the southern Nigeria as “Fulani” and “Hausa”, the newspapers have specifically portrayed that the Fulani are involved in the trespassing. Odoemene (2017) describes this use of ethnic identifiers in conflict reporting by the media as “ethnification”. According to Odoemene (2017), ethnification constructs the conflict as ethnic struggles between Fulani herdsmen and indigenous farmers and this has contributed to the intractability of the conflict as well as the volatile identity politics

in Nigeria. In Example 43 in particular, the media have not only made explicit the agency of the trespassers as Hausa-Fulani but have also passed a judgement on their ethnicity. Shrouding the agency with the adjective “suspected” has not limited or minimized the agency, as readers would still be influenced to see the violent actors as the Fulani herdsmen. Masking the agency would have been done by using the phrases “suspected attackers” or “suspected invaders” instead of “suspected Fulani herdsmen”

### ***Descriptivation***

Descriptivation involves assigning different qualities and features to social actors. Pre-modifying adjectives such as rampaging, invading, armed, killer and militia are deployed to evaluate herdsmen as aggressive trespassers in Examples 47 – 51:

(47) **Invading** herdsmen kill woman on own farm, destroy crops (*Daily Trust*, Jan 04, 2018)

(48) 2 LG Staff Hacked, As **Rampaging** Herdsmen Sack LG Secretariat In Ondo (*Leadership*, February 14, 2018)

(49) **Armed** herdsmen allegedly destroyed 750 hectares of rice farm in Taraba (*The Punch*, October 31, 2018)

(50) **Killer** herdsmen: Obaseki imposes 90-day ban on grazing in Edo communities (*The Punch*, April 16, 2018)

(51) Army kills four **militia** herdsmen in Benue (*Daily Trust*, April 17, 2018)

The descriptive adjectives are *judgement* resources used to evaluate the herders' actions as violent. The underlying representation is that herdsmen are a dangerous group who engage in violent trespasses. Specifically, while the descriptions “rampaging” (Example 48) and “invading” (Example 47) designate herdsmen as a violent group, “killer” (Example 50), “armed” (Example 49) and “militia” (Example 51) extend their designation to include illegality and unlawful possession of arms and weapons. These negative descriptive labels are substantiated in the headlines with the various violent acts (killing, attacking and destruction of farms) attributed to them. The descriptive labels also discredit the already-known identities of the group as peaceful cattle breeders as well as normalising their violence. The designations of being armed and killer are contrary to the identity of traditional and regular cattle breeders who herd with sticks and machetes for clearing the bush path and for protection against wild animals (Abdulai

& Yakubu, 2014). In the same vein, the imposition of grazing ban (Example 50) that triggered mixed reactions seems to be in order as it was decreed to curb the trespassing activities of “killer” herdsman. Likewise, killing of herdsman (Example 51) seems to be justified in the headline as the army is reported to have eliminated “militia” herdsman and not ordinary cattle breeders.

### **Aggregation**

Social actors are aggregated, quantified and treated statistically through definite and indefinite quantifiers. According to Leeuwen (2008), aggregation works to manufacture consensus opinion, even though it presents itself as merely recording facts. In the corpus, victims of herdsman’s attacks, invasions and destructions are aggregated through definite and indefinite quantifiers. While definite quantifiers tend to present news items as factual and authentic, indefinite quantifiers foreground the massive effects of the affected. For instance:

(52) Herdsman displaced **680,000**, destroyed N400bn property - Ortom (*The Punch*, May 08, 2019)

(53) Herdsman attack leaves **10** dead, **3,500** homeless in Cross River (*The Guardian*, 02 April 2017)

(54) Herdsman attacks: **500** still missing in Benue Group (*The Punch*, November 25, 2017)

(55) **Dozens** of women taken captive as herdsman raid villages in Numan (*Daily Trust*, Sep 14, 2018)

(56) **Many** feared dead as Fulani herdsman attack villages (*Daily Trust*, Dec 4, 2017)

(57) Herdsman Kill **Over 20**, Injure **Over 30** In Benue - Gov. Ortom (*Leadership*, January 2, 2018)

(58) **Four** killed, **scores** injured as herdsman attack farmers in Taraba (*The Punch*, June 4, 2018)

Using indefinite quantifiers such as many (Example 56), dozens (Example 55), scores (Example 58) and over (Example 57), victims of herdsman’s attacks and invasions are measured and quantified. Specifically, aside from providing the numbers of the people affected by the violent trespassing actions, the indefinite quantifiers magnify the

effects of the attacks. They are intensification strategy to foreground large numbers of people affected in the herdsmen's attacks. On the other hand, definite quantifiers present the actual number of displaced and homeless people as 680,000 (Example 52) and 3,500 (Example 53), respectively. The quantifiers also depict the number of missing persons as 500 (Example 54) and the amount of money lost to the destructions as N400bn (Example 52). These big numbers help to create a picture of massive casualties in the violent incidents. In particular, Example 52 evaluates both the human and material losses incurred because of herdsmen's attack and invasion.

### **Conclusion**

This study has analyzed how the Nigerian news headlines have shaped social representation of the Fulani herdsmen as trespassers. The findings show that through transactive role allocations, nominalization, descriptivation, identification and aggregation, the herdsmen are represented as aggressive trespassers on the farming communities. Such representations trigger the ownership and non-ownership of the contested grazing and farming areas. Specifically, the use of certain spatial identifiers from the southern farming communities project the view that the communities are under siege by the trespassers. In addition, the use of the ownership and possession tags such as indigenes and residents to designate the farming communities bequeath some legal rights of ownership and occupation to the area. Conversely, descriptive labels such as "invading herdsmen" and "rampaging herdsmen" construct the herders as the intruders. In the same vein, syntactic positioning of the herdsmen as the subject of "attack", "invade" and "destroy" support their description as violent trespassers while representing the farmers with words of anguish such as "lament" and "cry out" portray them as the patients and victims of the violent acts. In sum, representations in the headlines support the obvious "othering" in which the herders are constructed as the violent "other". The study has shown that headlines used in reporting conflict situations need to be carefully written as the words in them have some implications in readers' understanding and interpretations of the conflict actors and actions. In the case of the herders-farmers conflict, the negative othering contributes to the confrontation in the relationship between the herders and farmers as well as reflecting how the nomads are treated with suspicion by their host farming communities.

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