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# Bangladesh: Time spent online, conflict and radicalization

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**Abstract:** The aim of this research is to investigate the risk of online radicalization, and invariably conflict, among young adults, particularly university-attending students, by relating their vulnerability to online radicalization with the amount of time they spend online. This research develops an original conceptual framework that maps out social influence, attributes of resilience and online safety vis-à-vis radicalization to assess and identify the said relationship. The study predominantly adopts a quantitative research approach using a sample of 600 University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) undergraduates. Analysis of data collected from students shows that the high-internet-user group, i.e. those who use the internet for seven hours or more

a day, are more likely to find radical and religiously offensive material online; less likely to be influenced by family, faculty and community members; and have lower access to learning and knowledge resources that can render them resilient to radicalization and conflict. The results fare better for females than males, belonging to the high-internet-user categories, but female students are expected to be susceptible due to gender norms. In conclusion, it is posited that high-internet-user students are more vulnerable to online radicalization than others.

**Keywords:** online radicalization, preventing violent extremism (PVE), countering violent extremism (CVE), youth, Bangladesh.

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Following the globalization of violent extremism at the turn of this century, in-depth research, academic studies and investiga-

tions have been conducted globally to explore various aspects and dimensions of violent extremism and conflict. With the advent of smart phones, increased accessibility of the internet, and more time spent by the youth online, it has become imperative for researchers to start exploring the relationship between this new avenue of human communication and spread of violent extremism.

The current study is an outcome of a twelve-month-long project named the Building Resilient Universities Project (BRUP), funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a US-based private sector institution, and implemented by University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB). The over-arching goal of the project was to inculcate knowledge and encourage practices of civic education, social media literacy and emotional health among faculty members and 2,500 students across universities. The significance of the study is that it unlocks a new avenue of research in the arena of preventing violent extremism, and invariably protecting from conflict, by focusing on time spent online and vulnerability to radicalization. In the context of Bangladesh, such a line of inquiry is novel. It ought to be mentioned that the scope of the entire project is also novel in the context of Bangladesh, as there are no known projects that address the issue of radicalization of university students and prevention thereof, by addressing the three areas of project intervention: civic values, internet safety, and emotional health.

Drawing from Groppi (2017), radicalization can be defined as the process by which an individual or a group adopts interpretations of an ideology or ideological tenets that conflict with mainstream society's core (liberal) values, which turn into the justification of violence and conflict and/or active engagement in actual acts of violence and conflict to subvert existing social and political (democratic) systems or achieve particular profound (illiberal) social and political goals<sup>1</sup>. Thus, with the advent of the internet and its penetration, particularly pertaining to the youth, time spent online and vulnerability to radicalization becomes an area to examine in order to address violent extremism and identifying the pathway(s) to conflict. Nevertheless, the study is limited in its scope because it exclusively sampled ULAB students. ULAB is a liberal arts college and the type of education the students receive can, additionally, allow for the research to compare students with others undergoing a similar curriculum. Furthermore, while translating the results of the research it can be expected, at times, that the youth that undergo a more conservative approach are more susceptible to radicalization given the research parameters. It is hoped that the study will generate interest and lead to

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1 Additionally, Della Porta and LaFree (2012) demonstrate that there remains various definitions of radicalization. Some existing definitions include: "a process leading towards increased use of political violence;" "the strategic use of physical force to influence several audiences;" and "an escalation process leading to violence." Nevertheless, what remains common among definitions of radicalization is that it is a process that in all cases can lead to violence and conflict.

further empirical research related to youth and online radicalization (in Bangladesh), among local and global academics and researchers. Additionally, identifying with the young middle-class, the research can offer measures required by relevant stakeholders to building adequate strategies to prevent violent extremism and addressing future conflict. *This research develops an original conceptual framework that maps out social influence, attributes of resilience and online safety; and investigates the relationship between high internet usage among university-going youth and radicalization through the lens of the framework.*

In the context of Bangladesh, studies that focus on the relation between youth's online behavior and radicalization and extremism, or the prevention thereof, are still relatively scarce in comparison to that of the West. The recent upsurge in youth radicalization and involvement in violent extremism and potentially conflict in Bangladesh has widened the need for drafting better strategies and policies to counter youth radicalization. Therefore, better comprehension of the existing radicalization mechanisms is required with a view to drafting effective local counter radicalization policies and strategies.

### **Insights from West**

Researchers, such as Conway (2017), have argued for more open approaches to the issue of online radicalization and conflict. Since a majority of the researchers are focusing only on religion-based violent extremism, Conway (ibid.) advocates a widening of the scope of research by focusing on the threat of extremism from different group of ideologies and activists. Although the author acknowledges the importance of addressing religion-based violence and extremism, she elaborates on the subject by identifying the role of competing and harmful ideologies vis-à-vis values that leads to extremism and radicalization. Conway (ibid.) further recommends the introduction of big data analysis since the scale and dimensions of this phenomena require more in-depth analytical approach, through multidisciplinary collaboration between researchers, academicians and the technical experts such as data and computer scientists. This remains a broad and varied field as the subject-matter addresses an overarching and systematic issue that affects the social environment, and society at large, through multifarious angles: let it be social, political, economic or even cultural.

There are instances where there have been successful collaborations between academic institutions and public and private sectors in combating and preventing violent extremism online and reduction of foreseeable conflict, particularly in Europe. To cite an example, the Cybercrime Centres of Excellence Network for Training, Research and Education (2CENTRE), launched in 2010, is a project funded by the European Commission with the aim of creating a network of Cybercrime Centres of Excellence for Training, Research and Education in Europe. These project centers were established in multiple countries of Europe. Each of these national centers were founded on a partnership among repre-

sentatives of law enforcement, industry and academia (UNODC, 2012). The involvement of such a diverse group of stakeholders, apart from being functional, is a testament to the growing concern of (online) radicalization, terrorism and, overall, conflict.

Moreover, delving further into the subject a study (Behr, Reding, Edwards, & Gribbon, 2013) conducted by RAND Europe unveils several important findings on the relationship between internet usage and radicalization. The study tested hypotheses from relevant literature on a sample of UK-based extremists focusing on their previous online behavior. The study supports the hypothesis that internet enhances the opportunities to become radicalized. Furthermore, it facilitates the process in a way that works as an “echo chamber” for confirming similar beliefs or ideologies (ibid., p. 18), and without adequate support that reinstates liberal and secular values such effects can make internet users more vulnerable to radicalization, and lead to acts of violence and conflict. This is further evident as the study also highlights that subjects were in continuous contact with like-minded individuals, often virtually, that facilitated their radicalization and social influence and integration can provide positive influence and bring about resilience towards extremist agenda. The study recommends relevant resource allocation to combat the security challenges related to new media and more public-private collaborations by arranging training and similar initiatives to enhance the social environment and create greater public consensus on this regard. Another study (Neumann, 2013) aims at preventing online radicalization in United States by discouraging reactionary preventive approaches that encroach upon online freedom of speech and remove potential threatening contents from internet. Instead it suggests proactive approaches, or constructive measures, that can prevent the online radicalization process by challenging the extremist narratives with counter narratives and promoting civic awareness and education of the young people. As evident, varied liberal measures that addresses emotional health, e.g. measures that do not infringe upon inalienable rights, with particular emphasis on society, civic values, and knowledge and critical thinking become viable strategies to countering radicalization and extremism, and to reduce conflict.

### **Insights from East**

In Saudi Arabia, the well-known “Sakinah” campaign was undertaken for several years at the turn of the century and stands as an example of an innovative counter radicalization campaign on the internet. This unique campaign utilized Islamic scholars to interact online with individuals looking for religious knowledge, with the aim of steering them away from extremist sources. Studies (Darden, 2019; Onuoha, 2014; M. A. Rahman, 2016) have shown that there is an inability of people to distinguish between accurate religious knowledge and radical or extremist teachings. Thus, proper religious knowledge and teachings (Islamic in this instance) with adequate emphasis on critical thinking can bring about feelings of inclusion pertaining to tolerance and

overall emotional health, and negate discriminatory and violent values. Therefore, this campaign targeted only those individuals who use the internet to seek out religious knowledge and aimed to prevent them from accepting extremist beliefs which eventually diminished their chances of getting recruited online via any online extremist group, and engage in conflict. Although it was officially a non-governmental project, the campaign was supported and encouraged in its work by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Interior belonging to Saudi government (Boucek, 2008). The campaign was also later adopted by other Gulf countries.

Meanwhile, in Kyrgyzstan, propaganda and conspiracy theories, which is an important ingredient to radicalization, was used to attract Kyrgyz youth to Syria, persuading them to join the fight against President Assad and participate in “holy” warfare. The propaganda was also deployed through family and friend recruitment networks, and it portrayed Islamic State (IS or Daesh henceforth) almost as an employer that provides decent wages, accommodation and access to a righteous Islamic lifestyle. Individuals who were struggling financially and sensitive to what they could be made to perceive as injustices i.e. suffering from financial and social exclusion leading to weakened emotional well-being, were particularly vulnerable to such recruitment efforts. To counter such recruitment efforts, Kyrgyz national police implemented an online campaign. In collaboration with university student volunteers, they identified and blocked YouTube videos and other online recruitment materials. Moreover, the counter-terrorism unit of the police also swapped recruitment videos by IS and other extremist groups with counter-messaging from Kyrgyz mufti denouncing violent extremism. This allowed for engagement within the broader societal network, reinstating values through knowledge creation and dissemination and contributed to the capacity to identify accurate content through reasoning and (digital) critical thinking. These initiatives have been widely appreciated and regarded as effective (Speckhard, Shajkovci, & Esengul, 2017).

In Malaysia, radicalization and recruitment processes to engage in violent activities and conflict were also facilitated by social media in general and Facebook in particular. Daesh had creatively utilized the popular social and digital media tools to allure and recruit new members. After the individuals showed deeper interest in Daesh’s online post and activities, they were then asked to move to other platforms which accorded more privacy<sup>2</sup>. Through such strategies, they could considerably shorten the time needed to radicalize and recruit an individual in Malaysia. With a view to counter Daesh’s narrative into

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2 Once potential recruits are diverted away from social media to more private avenues, a societal network or a healthy social environment constituting of family, community and other similar groups can have positive influences, even if the targets suffer from lack of qualities like sound emotional health, strong civic values and critical thinking that can render them resilient to radicalization. The concepts will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

the virtual world, Malaysia in collaboration with the United States, launched a regional digital counter messaging center which looks into monitoring the terrorist messaging, developing counter-narratives and disseminating the digital products to best reach and impact the audience (Samuel, 2016). This illustrates the importance of online engagement to counteract radicalization where influence of society – family, community and other groups – to reinstate its liberal and secular values can become shorthanded, and resilience to extremism can be developed with narratives that promote inclusion, universal ideals and values and critical thinking, albeit digital.

### **The Context of Bangladesh**

For a long period of time, the leading narrative regarding religious radicalization and conflict in Bangladesh was focused on politics, poverty and madrasa-based education systems. This tended to correlate the rise of Islamic radicalization in Bangladesh with political and lower income group focused madrasa education system, identifying mostly to economic exclusion bearing effects on their social and overall political being. However, the upsurge of violent extremist groups led by youth following the gruesome Holy Artisan bakery attack at Dhaka in 2016 challenged the validity of this conventional narrative as majority of those violent extremists belonged to well-educated middle-class segment of the society. Therefore, the question was raised as to why and how were the university students, never touched by traditional madrasas, being radicalized? In response, analysts posited that this was a new wave of radicalization likely driven by the spread of the internet and social media (Rashid, 2017), which can directly focus on social and political exclusion and impede emotional health<sup>3</sup>. However, this study (ibid.) opines that there is an inadequacy of sophisticated cyber monitoring and reporting systems in Bangladesh which is crippling the law enforcement authority in preventing and combating online radicalization. The study also proposes an anti-cyber radicalization model for Bangladesh that would involve both constructive and coercive measures. There are three strategic elements in this model and those are “Reducing the Supply”, which involves coercive measures, “Reducing the Demand”, which involves constructive measures, and relates to building resilience through digital critical thinking and reinstating values, and “an effective organization to coordinate and implement the actions”, which will be a dedicated entity coordinating all the necessary constructive and coercive measures.

Another study (Jubaer, 2017) in Bangladesh attempts to examine, anthropologically, how international politics, violation of human rights, youth unemployment, pessimistic

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3 Such methods of radicalization generally portray grand narratives of Muslim subjugation and Western domination aiming to alienate youths socially and politically affecting their religious, and to a certain extent existential, identity (I. Rahman, Amit, & Mannan, 2019).

outlook of the future and declining family integrity, which directly impacts emotional well-being and complimentary social values, may be contributing to the recent surge of extremism in Bangladesh. The respondents of this study are Bangladeshi youth who projected their views and remedies of violent terrorism, conflict and extremism in Bangladesh. One of the interesting finding of this study explores the dearth of content that encourages critical thinking in the education system, which in turn, renders Bangladeshi students vulnerable to extremist narratives available online and offline. A quote from one of the study respondents is illustrative:

*Our education system is based on memorization. Students are given books, lecture sheets which they try to memorize. They do not think critically whether those pieces of information are correct or not. The long-term impact of this system is terrible. When these students are convinced that their religion is in danger and they need to sacrifice their lives, they passively accept that call without thinking twice (ibid., p. 30).*

The threat of online radicalization is still alarming for Bangladesh as according to Sobhan (2017), despite the territorial defeat of IS in Iraq and Syria, it is likely to continue inspiring, supporting and instigating attacks by opening a virtual network, transcending state boundaries, to promote indoctrination and recruitment throughout the world. Another study (Kabir & Banik, 2017) reveals that Dhaka district is the most affected area in terms of number of extremist attacks from January 2013 to August 2016 followed by Chittagong, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, and Khulna. This is an indication that radicalization is creeping into the large urban centers of Bangladesh where the educated youth are mostly tech savvy and heavily engaged in the use of internet and social media. Concentrating on the urban centers and alluring urban youth, Islamist militants have been trying to spread their operational base throughout the country.

Thus, in totality, the literature review with insights from both the West and the East and the context of Bangladesh asserts the increasing importance of the internet in both the global and national radicalization process of the youth, and validates undertaking this research that aims to associate time spent online by university students with vulnerability to radicalization and conflict. Additionally, the review shows that social influence through the active engagement of family and community and the involvement of relevant stakeholders can act as effective counter-measures to (various and all forms of) radicalization. Furthermore, such influence can add to attributes of resilience through affecting emotional health, civic values and critical thinking. Such qualities, alone at times, inherent among students can act as barriers to radicalization; and the following section provides a conceptual framework that addresses influence and resilience in conjunction with online safety vis-à-vis radicalization.

## **Conceptual Framework: Influence, Resilience and Online Safety**

Family, community and influence of other groups<sup>4</sup> can directly, and indirectly through increasing resilience to radicalization, contribute to online safety and security. Doosje *et al.* (2016) identifies that people are social beings, and inability to be associated with the immediate social environment can lead to identifying oneself with radical groups/institutions/organizations through radical content and material, i.e. contributing to in-group mentality with the terrorist cells. Thus, a healthy social environment, where family, community and other groups like faculty members in this particular case can be considered to be (social) influencers, can provide direct support to a university-going youth through creating a sense of belongingness with the society that can negate and act as a direct countermeasure to subverting existing (liberal) systems and overall radicalization and conflict.

Furthermore, the social environment can provide countermeasures to radicalization by contributing to emotional health, civic values and (digital) critical thinking<sup>5</sup>. A significant portion of emotional health can be attributed to the social environment, where a healthy and active person or student can counter feelings of alienation, loss of identity and dignity, and mistreatment and social exclusion, which are all drivers of radicalization (UNDP, 2016). Additionally, when it is considered that “civicness” is practiced within the family and other social settings, students are more likely to identify themselves with similar behavior and attune to civility and existing values, and counteract civic moral disengagement (Caprara, Fida, Vecchione, Tramontano, & Barbaranelli, 2009, p. 508; Fox & Spector, 2005). Also, Astleitner (2002), through reviewing literature, identifies the importance of external influences, which resonates with the social environment, while thinking critically. This allows for identifying radical or extremist material and reasoning against them to be integral, and in such cases “values,” or understanding them thereof, to render oneself more resilient to radicalization that can inevitably lead to conflict.

Research and studies (e.g., Astleitner, 2002; Caprara *et al.*, 2009; European Commission, 2016; UNDP, 2016) have found that the three attributes – emotional health, civic values

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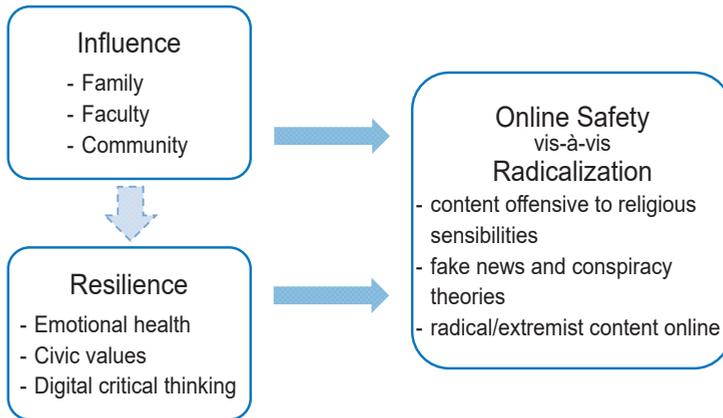
4 For this particular research, the faculty is considered as the other group of social influencers. The research deals with university students where faculty members fall under their near and immediate social hierarchy and periphery, and are considered to be viable influencers that allow the students to combat radicalization.

5 “Digital critical thinking” is an expression we have coined to refer to the ability to think critically when browsing the internet, in particular, in relation to distinguishing authentic from fake news, truth from propaganda, and so forth. Although the topic of critical thinking and its importance when browsing the internet has received scholarly attention (Astleitner, 2002), we have attempted to introduce a term for the sake of brevity and portability and also to increase focus on this important issue.

and digital critical thinking – have proved to be very effective to counter processes and contribute to increasing resilience to radicalization, terrorism and conflict, and provide greatly to online safety and security. A study by UNDP (2016) indicates that lack of emotional health can lead to feelings of social, political and economic rejection and exclusion, which along with factors of socialization as indicated above, contribute to radicalization. Bandura (1990, 1999) illustrates in his theory of moral disengagement that lack of moral agency is indistinguishably linked with (violent) terrorism. Understanding universal morals and norms, and conforming to societal values allows one to adhere to moral standards and avoid discomfort / reward self-worth. This ensures self-sanctions in matters consistent with harmfully alternative, extremist and radical understandings. Finally, digital critical thinking, which is based upon interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference (Astleitner, 2002), can allow for persons to assess content found online and identify material that are offensive and discriminatory, “fake” and conspiracies, and extremist and radical, i.e. content that takes advantage of individuals and all-in-all brings negative, conflictual and disharmonious effects within the existing social environment and society at large.

Thus, it is evident that social influence through family, community and faculty is imperative to attain online safety directly. Here social cohesion acts as a direct safeguard to the overarching thesis of radicalization that includes religious sensibilities, fake news and conspiracies and radical/extremist content that dissuades, in this case, the university students to act against liberal and secular arrangements. Although social influence can make students resilient through indirectly acting on emotional health, civic values and digital critical thinking, the three components in themselves remain inextricably linked. To illustrate, ideals and civic values remain at the forefront where emotional health, or lack thereof, can allow for students to shift to alternative ideologies. However, critical thinking, which refers to digital in this case, can allow students to identify false and harmful content and material online. This allows them to adhere to social norms and values that is beneficial at a personal, contributing to emotional health, as well as a societal level. The following schematic, Figure 1, summarizes the relationship between (social) influence, resilience and online safety vis-à-vis radicalization.

The finding discussed in this paper are based on a quantitative survey consisting of ULAB students as respondents. Stratified random sampling technique was used on a sample of 600 students. This sample corresponds to a less than 5% error margin and a confidence interval of 95%. A structured questionnaire was used as the data collection tool and a five-point Likert scale deployed in recording responses from students. In addition, key informant interviews of faculty members and counselors, and focus group discussions with family members of undergraduate students were conducted for the BRUP project, which assisted this particular research.



**Figure 1:** Influence, Resilience & Online Safety Framework

Descriptive demographic analysis of the data was conducted through pivot analysis. For the purposes of this research, “high internet users” (HIU) are those who use the internet at least 7 hours a day. The rationale behind labelling this user group as HIU is based on few global findings and benchmarks on youth online behavior. A 2017 report (Frith, 2017) by the UK-based think tank, Education Policy Institute, reveals that over a third of UK’s fifteen-year-old age group can be classed as “Extreme Internet Users” (6+ hours of use a day), which is markedly higher than the average of OECD countries. Moreover, according to data from the Center for Parenting Education (Clark, 2018), globally, young people between the ages of 8 to 28, spend about 44.5 hours each week<sup>6</sup> in front of digital screens. Furthermore, according to Statista (2018), the average time spent online by the millennials is about four hours a day. Therefore, based on such global findings on internet behavior, the HIU group has been identified as those students who use the internet at least 7 hours a day or 49 hours a week. The sample breakdown with regard to age, sex, and total versus HIU groups, are shown as follows in Table 1:

**Table 1:** Sample Breakdown

Total Respondents		High Internet Users	
Number of Respondents	600	Number of Respondents	151
Male	64.0%	Male	64.0%
Female	36.0%	Female	36.0%
Age (18-24 years)	85.0%	Age (18-24 years)	73.0%
Age (24+ years)	15.0%	Age (24+ years)	27.0%

<sup>6</sup> This averages over 6 hours per day.

In course of analyzing data from the survey, we have found it useful to develop a three-fold heuristic device based on the conceptual design, as follows:

- Influence Matrix
- Resilience Matrix
- Online Safety Matrix

In the influence matrix, we represent data from the questionnaires that allow us to consider how the role of three predominant influencers in university-attending student's lives – faculty, family and community members – are able to influence male and female students in both the HIU and non-HIU student respondent groups. The level of influence is recorded through self-assessment of influence by the respondents. Similarly, we have developed a resilience matrix to explore how the resilience of respondents vary for HIU and non-HIU groups. In this instance, “resilience” is used to refer to resilience to radicalization, and encompasses three attributes (captured with the questionnaire and self-assessed by students):

- Level of emotional health related awareness.
- Current level of knowledge and understanding of civic values.
- Current level of ability in exercising critical thinking on the internet to be able to distinguish between false information / propaganda and authentic information.

It should be noted that the core attributes indicated above, i.e., emotional health, civic values and “digital critical thinking”, once inculcated, have, in various researches and studies (Astleitner, 2002; Bandura, 1990, 1999; Caprara *et al.*, 2009; European Commission, 2016; UNDP, 2016), proved to be very effective in creating resilience to violence and conflict at large and in violent extremism in particular. Furthermore, it should also be noted that the questionnaire attempted to understand knowledge and awareness of emotional health and not actual emotional health status. This has pros and cons. The benefit is that it is easier to assess knowledge of emotional health rather than actual emotional health in a self-assessment survey. The disadvantage is that while there may be a correlation between knowledge of emotional health and actual emotional health, they are not one and the same thing. Furthermore, level of knowledge and understanding of civic values and level of ability in exercising critical thinking on the internet to be able to distinguish between false information / propaganda and authentic information is recorded through self-assessment. While self-assessment has limitations because often respondents are not able to effectively and in an unbiased manner attest to degrees of knowledge about themselves, this method in student surveys is still a practiced methodology (trendence UK, 2018). However, data on civic values and digital critical thinking will be verified, and cast further light, using proxy indicators: (a) availability of resources relating to civic values, and (b) availability of resources relating to digital critical thinking.

Lastly, we develop the “Online Safety Matrix”, which essentially tries to capture, through tabulated findings, how HIU students and non-HIU student sample at large fare with regard to the following attributes:

- Frequency of encountering content offensive to religious sensibilities.
- Frequency of encountering fake news and conspiracy theories.
- Frequency of encountering radical / extremist content online.

Through the above attributes, the online safety matrix attempts to assess how students fare with regard to how safe they are from radicalization when browsing the internet. This suggests that students are more prone to radicalization where frequency of such material is higher and, understandably, the vulnerability is higher where social influence and extremist resilience is lower.

### Influence Matrix

Considering the influence matrix, in Table 2, overall, among the three influencer groups, family has the greatest influence on both the HIU group and non-HIU students.

**Table 2:** Influence Matrix

Influencers	Non-HIU			HIU		
	High Influence			High Influence		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Family	64.8%	60.0%	73.6%	62.3%	58.3%	69.1%
Faculty	53.6%	50.0%	59.7%	35.1%	33.3%	38.2%
Community Members	43.4%	43.4%	43.4%	38.4%	40.6%	34.5%

It is interesting to note for the HIU group that the influence of faculty members is significantly<sup>7</sup> lower for this group than for other students. Around 35.1% of HIU group reported to faculty member influence on their views, compared to 53.6% of non-HIU students. Among the three groups of influencers, faculty members are best equipped to have the greatest influence with regard to their views on social issues and world affairs. Family and community members can be expected to have a high degree of influence on reinforcing civic values and better emotional health. This finding can be considered to be problematic as faculty members contribute highly to think critically, whether digitally or in understanding and attaining greater knowledge on norms, values or even emotional health. What is interesting to note is that the influence of faculty members for the entire sample is 48.8%, and the influence of community members is 42.2% (not

7 The expression “significantly higher” or “significantly lower” in the course of this paper has been used in a statistical sense, and is done so, only in case where the level of significance with regard to difference in response rates are 80-99%.

shown in table). The fact that less than half the sample report to being influenced by faculty members was surprising to many faculty members consulted with in the course of the study, alluding to greater vulnerability of the students towards radicalization and conflict through conspiracies, propaganda and other forms of religiously insensitive and extremist content online.

Within the HIU group, family tends to have a significantly higher influence on females rather than males. The research provides similar results for the non-HIU group, where females at 73.6% are significantly likelier to being influenced by family than males at 60.0%. This may be attributable to the social arrangement pertaining to gender norms and values in Bangladesh (and other similar societies), where women in all aspects – social, cultural, economic and political – are marginalized when compared to men. “Traditional” gender norms are expected to play a significant role for women, or female students in this case, as they tend to interact and remain in close relation to persons within their social proximity (Salway, Jesmin, & Rahman, 2005; World Bank, 2008). Here, family remains at the forefront and as they are students they tend to interact, and have the capacity to be influenced, by faculty members. Although, this setup can facilitate influence to render them resilient to radicalization, it should be noted that terror cells, particularly Islamist, do take conservative gender norms into account and provide strategies to “reclaim their position in stern patriarchal communities” (Groppi, 2017, p. 70). The research finds HIU groups to be more vulnerable than non-HIU groups, and the results do not fare well for women, at times, as lower influence by community members suggests exclusionary social structures and restrained mobility. In general, all three influencer groups, as per self-assessment by the student respondents, have less of an influence on the HIU group than the non-HIU group.

### **Resilience Matrix**

Moving on to the resilience matrix, as shown in Table 3, both groups of respondents, the HIU and non-HIU groups, fare better with regard to knowledge and understanding of civic values than with regard to the other parameters: emotional health awareness and digital critical thinking abilities. However, this may be different for different universities. It is possible that ULAB’s progressive orientation and an emphasis on extracurricular activities and programming for students related to current affairs and social issues are the reason why response rates are higher for this particular attribute of resilience to radicalization.

Also noteworthy from the above table is that among the non-HIU sample, female students have a higher likelihood of possessing emotional health awareness than male students: 66.0% to 56.9%. In fact, females also fare better with regard to their knowledge and understanding of civic values. These results are notably illuminating as such attributes of resilience can offset gender norms and social hierarchies. However, when

**Table 3:** Resilience Matrix

Indicators	Non-HIU			HIU		
	High Level			High Level		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Emotional Health Awareness	60.1%	56.9%	66.0%	66.9%	67.7%	65.5%
Knowledge and understanding of civic values	69.5%	66.6%	74.8%	68.9%	72.9%	61.8%
Digital Critical Thinking Abilities	53.2%	52.1%	55.3%	67.5%	75.0%	54.5%

one considers the HIU respondent group, males actually fare better. The important take-away from this table is that HIU females have significantly lower knowledge and understanding of civic values than the overall sample and HIU males fare better than HIU females on all three parameters of resilience and significantly so, for knowledge and understanding of civic values and digital critical thinking abilities. This indicates that although there may be greater social influence on women, albeit low by community members, women remain at a disadvantageous position as their resilience is recorded to be low leaving them prone to radicalization and engage in affairs pertaining to conflict that may be facilitated by inherent gender norms.

Although these are self-reported responses, for all three parameters this paper considers as constituents of resilience to radicalization, HIU males fare better than the non-HIU males. Also, substantial majority, about 75% of HIU males, reported to having high digital critical thinking abilities.<sup>8</sup> Student counselors and psychiatrists consulted opine that this may attest to a lack of self-knowledge and self-awareness. Other experts interviewed also opined that perhaps HIU males may find it more difficult to objectively assess their own emotional health and other abilities than the others. Thus, proxy indicators that look at the availability of such resources provide a better perspective into the subject-matter.

The important parameter related to resilience that has not been considered in the aforementioned “resilience matrix”, which is the availability of learning resources through the university and outside, can additionally reinforce student’s civic values, emotional health and digital critical thinking abilities, along with providing as proxies. The proxy indicators, as tabulated in Table 4, indeed reflects that HIU students, both male and female, are less resilient than non-HIU students. When we consider the values in conjunction with the influence matrix, the results suggest that the HIU students are indeed

8 Although not directly related to the study, the lower score for male students with regard to emotional health awareness is also noteworthy, for purposes of larger policy and practices intervention in tertiary education.

more vulnerable to radicalization and prone to conflict and violence. The data further indicates that female students, when compared to male, encounter more learning resources in relation to civic values and (digital) critical thinking, that can allow them to invest in such content to account for their inherent vulnerabilities promulgated by sociocultural factors.

**Table 4:** Availability of Learning Resources (Proxy Indicators)

Proxy Indicators	Non-HIU			HIU		
	High Availability			High Availability		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Civic Education Related Learning Resources	68.2%	67.2%	69.8%	55.0%	54.2%	56.4%
“Digital Critical Thinking” related Learning Resources	59.0%	59.3%	58.5%	51.0%	45.8%	60.0%

Looking more closely, the research data yields that HIU males report far lower availability compared to the overall sample: while 68.2% of non-HIU students find learning resources on civic education to be available, only 54.2% of HIU males do so. Similarly, while 59.0% of non-HIU students find learning resources on “digital critical thinking abilities” to be available, only 45.8% of HIU males do. Faculty members consulted with during this research opine that HIU students and, in addition to encountering material that can build resilience, males in particular are less engaged with real world learning opportunities and resources, whether at a university or available through external means, rendering them vulnerable to online radicalization and extremist propaganda.

### Online Safety Matrix

As noted earlier, the three frequency/availability indicators are incorporated in the study to understand how safe or unsafe students are on the internet with regard to potential radicalization, where higher values for the indicators denotes greater chances of being radicalized and more prone to violence and conflict, as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Online Safety Matrix

Indicators	Non-HIU			HIU		
	High Frequency/Availability			High Frequency/Availability		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Frequency of encountering content offensive to religious sensibilities	84.0%	83.4%	84.9%	90.7%	93.8%	85.5%
Frequency of encountering fake news and conspiracy theories	74.2%	74.5%	73.6%	90.0%	93.8%	83.6%
Availability of radical / extremist content online	78.0%	77.9%	78.0%	81.5%	79.2%	85.5%

The indicated table (Table 5) is very revealing as it shows that the HIU group is likelier than the non-HIU group to encounter content offensive to religious sensibilities; fake news and conspiracy theories; and radical/extremist content. Noteworthy that 93.8% of HIU males encounter conspiracy theories online compared to 74.2% non-HIU students. Similarly, 93.8% of HIU males find content online that is offensive to their religious sensibilities compared to 84.0% of non-HIU respondents. Thus, the HIU male group is more prone to radicalization than the others as they spend more time online where the frequency of encountering such radical/extremist content online is highest.

This, technically, fares well for the female students, particularly belonging to the HIU group, where previous vulnerabilities have been identified. The influence matrix has identified women to be at a safer position with respect to radicalization, despite commenting on socially constructed gender boundaries. Additionally, the research has also identified that content relevant to increasing resilience is more readily available to the female students. Even though they self-assessed that their knowledge and awareness of such content is lower than male, provided that they can harness their rationalization, reasoning and critical thinking abilities, they have the potential to be in a favorable position to garner social influence and become resilient to radicalization. However, the female group does not perform well with regards to availability of radical/extremist content, which is higher for HIU females. Nevertheless, given the frequency values, which is lower than HIU males' in both cases as seen in Table 5, if the influence and resilience of the female students can indeed break the gender norms, they may indeed be considered to be better equipped to counteract radicalization.

From the interpretation of findings, it is possible to not only establish that the students who use the internet for seven hours or more per day, are more exposed to radical content, but also surmise that they are more vulnerable to radicalization and arguably conflict. It is observed that HIU students are far less impressionable to their family, faculty and community members, and less open to the guidance thereof, than other students. Faculty members we consulted also confirm this understanding. Furthermore, HIU students are also less likely to find learning resources on civic values and digital critical thinking and ways to be safe online, than the total respondent group, either at their university or externally. Therefore, the research finds the safety mechanisms of influence and resilience to suffer for the HIU group, where, understandably, taking coercive measures can become a requirement as opposed to constructive ones as drawn out by the conceptual framework.

## **Conclusion**

The research finds that the group of students who spend a significantly higher amount of time on the internet has their online safety challenged, and there indeed needs to be mechanisms that can allow them to withstand radicalization and make them resilient

to engaging in conflict and terrorism. This research, with an original theoretical framework, identifies social influence, emotional well-being, civic values and critical thinking to negate and counteract the online radicalization process. Even if the mechanisms provided by the framework may not seem exhaustive, radicalization and extremism is a process that remains deeply entrenched in ideology and ideological differences<sup>9</sup>, which speaks to the core of human identity. "Subjects" can deviate from the basic constructs that hold societies together, but society itself and a clear and well-trained mind remains the strongest of forces that can contribute to a better emotional health with well-established values. Thus far, the research finds that the HIU group is not only directly more prone to radicalization through greater frequency and availability of radical and extremist content, but they also lack the aforementioned mechanisms that can increase online safety and reduce the chances of being radicalized that ultimately leads to terrorism, violence and conflict.

In sum, in light of the increased propensity to find radical and religiously offensive material online; lower influence of family members, faculty and community members; and lower access to learning resources that can render them resilient, HIU students, are more vulnerable to online radicalization than others, and, at times, males more likely than females. However, one must not fail to identify the marginalized position of women bound by patriarchal social norms that can make them vulnerable to the radicalization process. In the course of the BRUP Project, it has also been evidenced that students respond quite positively to learning on civic values, emotional health and digital critical thinking. Students exposed to such learning resources picked up the topics well and displayed increased appreciation for such learning in relation to rendering them more resilient to and aware of how radicalization works.

Consequently, the conceptual approach that alludes to constructive measures as opposed to coercive ones remains extremely viable to tackle radicalization and terrorism. Therefore, this research recommends endeavors at the level of university administration, regulators, and civil society stakeholders, to initiate more training on civic values, digital critical thinking and emotional health, to prevent the pathways to violent extremism and conflict. There needs to be emphasis on these constructive measures highlighted by the original framework developed in this paper as preventing violent extremism (PVE) proactively is of course more desirable than countering violent extremism (CVE). Given Bangladesh's significant demographic dividend, in which over a third of students are below the university-going age, it is incumbent on universities which usually have reasonable resources at their disposal, to revisit their goals and objectives with regard to youth development in the context of Bangladesh. They need to address

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9 This is well evident from the definition of radicalization that has been further exemplified by the framework and the analysis.

existing and future challenges to not just economic growth, but development of a just, tolerant and pluralistic society.

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# Nigeria: Conflict Victims' Assessment and Narratives on the Reportage of Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict

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**Abstract:** Nigeria has witnessed many violent clashes caused by herdsmen-farmers conflict. While past research has focused on media coverage of the conflict, conflict victims have seldom become the subject of investigation. This study attempts to understand the conflict victims' assessment and narratives on the reportage of herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. Sixty (60) participants were interviewed from three (3) large communities in the North Central region of Nigeria. There is a prevailing view that the herdsmen and farmers conflict has not been given prominence by conventional media in Nigeria and the reportage of the conflict often disappear once the clashes subdue. This study considers conflict victims' assessment on the objectivity, depth and outcome of media coverage of the conflict. It was found that Nigerian media do not report actual narratives of conflict victims, as reporters often rely on second hand stories and do not present themselves at the locations to gather news. Conflict victims, hence, claim that the Nigerian media suffers from lack of objectivity and high sensationalism. They also found that excessive use of negative language, which often indicate blame game, contributes to the escalation of the conflict. This calls for an urgent need for socially responsible journalists in Nigeria who promote messages of reconciliation, negotiation and diplomacy when reporting the herdsmen and farmers conflict.

**Keywords:** Conflict, conflict reporting, conflict victims, herdsmen-farmers conflict, media coverage, Nigeria.

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## Introduction

Conflict constitutes one of the greatest challenges to social, political and economic development of any society (Shehu, 2017). Since 1999, Nigeria has been a theatre of violence conflict in which between 1999 to 2002, witnessed over forty ethno-religious and communal conflict (Odunlami, 2017). These conflicts have been exacerbated with the raging battle between Fulani herdsmen and farmers of Nigeria's North Central region, though the problem remains spread across different parts of the country (Ciboh, 2015). Studies report that these violent clashes, apart from the human casualties, have cost the nation over 14 billion dollars between 2012 and 2015. In 2014 alone, 1,229 people were killed, 63 deaths were recorded in 2013, 500 deaths by July 2016, and about 73 were given mass burials in Benue state of Nigeria, and yet there is no sign of these occurrences stopping (Beetseh *et al.*, 2018; Odunlami, 2017). The conflict as documented in other research, has uprooted more than 100,000 people in Benue and Enugu states, and many are staying with relatives or in makeshift internally displaced person's camps. The bursts of violence have displaced 400,000 people in the last five years while many are still struggling to rebuild their lives (Idowu, 2017).

The Fulani herdsmen or Fulani pastoralists are nomadic or semi nomadic herders whose primary occupation is raising livestock. The pure Fulani pastoralist engages in random movement of cattle while the semi-nomadic makes transhumance migration and return to their camps or homes (Okello *et al.*, 2014). Consequently, the perennial clash between farmers and herdsmen has been mostly traced to resource scarcity where both herders and farmers rely on for their livelihood (Shehu, 2017; Gever & Essien, 2019). Other factors that contribute largely to the notoriety of the herdsmen attacks across the country has been attributed to political, religious, ethnic, economic, land tenure system and historical feuds (Adamu, 2017b). It is a known fact that the herdsmen-farmers conflict has a negative implication for the economy growth of Nigeria and thus press coverage which has been described as the amount of media attention given to a particular issue as well as the manner in which such issues are reported is very essential (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017).

Accordingly, it has been shown that the media are by far the most important source of information about conflicts for most people, which grants them a considerable influence over citizens' perceptions, opinions and behaviour (Shehu, 2017). By reporting on some conflicts, but not on others, and by representing conflicts in particular ways, the media strongly influence the dynamics and outcomes of conflicts, and thus also shape the prospects of success of conflict parties (Vladislavjević, 2015). Specifically, in Nigeria, there is evidence to show that some media only facilitate the escalation of conflicts and this problem has cast doubts in the minds of both Christians and Muslims on the proper role of media reportage during ethno-religious conflicts (Barde, 2016). Undoubtedly, the media are saddled with the responsibility of bringing to people issues

they have to be informed about in which the herdsmen-farmers conflict is one of such (Udeze & Chukwuma, 2016). However, the manner of their reportage of these issues may either escalate or deescalate the conflict (Vladisavljević, 2015). Intrinsically, reporting ethno-religious conflict is one of the delicate and sensitive areas in journalism, which requires professionalism, objectivity and patriotism (Barde, 2016).

Despite the considerable articles written about the crisis on herdsmen and farmers and the role mass media have played, surprisingly, there is a dearth of research on people's perception as regards the media coverage of herdsmen and farmers conflict in Nigeria (Adamu, 2017a). Though commendable, most studies on the media coverage of herdsmen and farmers, conflict have been examined through the lens of a content analysis, that is critiquing content and it has been shown that one limitation inherent in all content analyses is the inability to explain the impact of the media messages on the consumers (Flynn *et al.*, 2016). Additionally, there are studies that have also attempted to explore the phenomenon historically, as well as exploring the causes and implication of the conflict to the society. Nevertheless, since the way the conflict is reported goes a long way in either assuaging or provoking the parties involved (Adamu, 2017a, 2017b, Akpan *et al.*, 2013), there is an urgent need to explore the way, such reportage and coverage are perceived by the conflict victims and actors beyond merely critiquing the content of the media (Beetseh *et al.*, 2018).

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap, by appraising the conflict victims' perception and attitude toward mass media reportage of farmers and herdsmen conflict in Nigeria. This study will bring to our understanding evidences from the rural communities that face the issues of these conflicts, if the media in Nigeria are one sided in its coverage of the conflict, if its reportage escalate or deescalate the conflict as well as know if it really gives prominence and depth in coverage. The result will be an addition to the literature on people's perception of conflict as reported by the mass media, especially in rural areas of developing countries. The findings will also assist government and policy makers to initiate policies that will ensure effective mass media reportage of conflict so as to minimize the escalation of conflict.

### **Aim and objectives of the study**

The main aim of this research is to understand the conflict victims' assessment and narratives on the reportage of herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. This aim is achieved via the following objectives:

- To find out from the conflict victims' if the media give prominence to the conflict.
- To determine the conflict victims' view on the coverage of the issue based on when the conflict was ongoing and when it is subsided.
- To know the conflict victims' perception of the objectivity and factuality of media coverage of the herdsmen -farmers Conflict.

- To realize the conflict victims' views on whether the coverage of the herdsmen and farmers conflict escalate or deescalate the conflict.
- To determine from the conflict victims' if the media report the suffering faced by them.

### **An overview of farmers and herdsmen conflict in Nigeria**

The conflicts between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria has been very frequent, and most predominantly in the North Central, resulting in serious consequences to include loss of property worth billions, displacement of people from their residents, killing of cattle's, and many more (Beetseh *et al.*, 2018). Most times, the farmers are overpowered, injured and killed, while others are evicted from their homes. Sometimes, the herdsmen are accused of taking these opportunities to steal, rape, raze houses and kill innocent members of the communities they pass through (Akinkuolie, 2018; Beetseh *et al.*, 2018). There are six states that formed the North Central Nigeria and this include Benue, Niger, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kogi and Kwara and these states have experienced conflicts at different points (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017). These conflicts have also extended to the Nigerian middle states such as Taraba (Oladimeji *et al.*, 2015).

Although the herdsmen have been known to carry out attacks on certain communities in Nigeria, the rate at which such atrocities are committed now has escalated. For example, in February 2018, more than 40 people were killed, about 2,000 displaced and not less than 100 sustained serious injury (Gever & Essien, 2019). More recently, about 92 Nigerians were killed by the suspected Fulani herdsmen in Benue state (Beetseh *et al.*, 2018), demonstrating the complexities of these conflicts in Nigeria (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017). This corroborates evidence which shows that in 2014 alone, 1,229 people were killed, 63 deaths were noted in 2013, 500 deaths by July 2016, and about 73 were massacred in Benue State of Nigeria (Beetseh *et al.*, 2018). This conflict has displaced more than 100,000 people in Benue and Enugu states (Odunlami, 2017). The bursts of violence have also displaced about 400,000 people in the last five years (Idowu, 2017). In December 2015, it was reported that more than 22 people were killed by the suspected herdsmen in Jos, and 300 persons were attacked and killed in Benue as at February 2016. Similar attacks have also been reported in Kaduna, Zamfara, Nasarawa and this has been increasing on a daily basis (Shehu, 2017).

Ojewunmi (2013) noted that there was a violent outbreak between the Fulani and Tarok in Wase Local Government Area which resulted in 20 people dead. It is not surprising that the Global terrorism index regarded the herdsmen as the fourth deadliest militant group in the world with a documented killing of about 1229 people in 2014 alone (Gever & Essien, 2019). Prior research has also shown that Kwara and Kogi states have witnessed farmers/herdsmen conflict. For example, Marietu and Olarewaju (2009) described Kogi conflict as one of the factors responsible for the unsustainable usage of

land and water resources. The authors added that this conflict has resulted in loss of crop yields, loss of economic plants, water pollution, loss of soil fertility and loss of fishes.

As regards the causes of farmers and herdsmen clashes, Adisa and Adekunle (2010) sampled both farmers and herdsmen, and found that inadequate knowledge of stock routes, depleting soil fertility and the need to expand the scale of operation by both groups increases the conflicts. In the same survey, farmers and herdsmen accused themselves of destroying their farm lands and cultivating on farmland that is not meant for farming respectively. More recent studies have shown that the perennial clash between farmers and herdsmen are mostly traced to resource scarcity, political, religious, ethnic, economic, land tenure system and historical feuds (Shehu, 2017; Geveer & Essien, 2019; Adamu, 2017b).

Thus, the general implication of the conflict holds a critical and negative implication for the growth of Nigeria and its citizens (Geveer & Essien, 2019). The claim of the natives (farmers) to the exclusive right of land ownership is contrary to the constitutional provision of inclusive citizenship, which suggests that every citizen of Nigeria has the right of settlement in any part of the country. Geveer and Essien (2019) conclude that the extent of crisis and violence that has characterized the conflict, is an enemy of sustainable development both in the affected communities and Nigeria as a whole.

### **Relationship between media and conflict reporting**

The stories reported in the media constitute a pertinent source of information for citizens about certain events in the society and this contributes to the societal structure of reality (Ross, 2007). As such, the content of the media not only provides the unknown to the audience, but extends to the confirmation or disconfirmation of reality about what is already known and witnessed (Dauda & Omar, 2015; Sundin, 2015). Conflict is a major news value to the media and, as such, remains foremost fodder for media (Himelfarb & Chabalowski, 2008). No doubt there is an association between media and conflict and over the last decade, reporting of farmer-herder violence has increased exponentially in the media, and this calls for social responsibility. Social responsibility is the obligation of the media to act for the benefit of the society at large. Thus, the rationale for reporting conflict has been shown to include the creation of awareness of a conflict to avoid escalation, in turn, helping religion and community leaders resolves conflicts; generating ideas on how best to reduce conflict; exposing the perpetrators and sponsors of conflict; de-escalating rather than to increase the conflict; to attract humanitarian responses through publicizing yearning of aspirations of victims; and to provide early warning to law enforcement agencies and stakeholders so as to halt an incoming conflict (Pate, 2002). All these suggest that conflict reporting requires professionalism, because unprofessional reporting of conflict might increase the likelihood of conflict.

According to Vladislavljević (2015), the media strongly influence the outcomes of conflict, in turn, shaping the prospects of success of the conflict parties. This implies that the media could stay detached by simply presenting issues with facts objectively or take sides, thereby affecting the salience of conflicts, public opinion and public policy at large (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002). Studies on the role of media in constructing conflicts reports that the media rarely cover conflicts with neutrality, and conflicts could be promoted through negative coverage that promote hate speech, incendiary rumors, deliberate underreporting and misreporting, over reporting and sensationalism, while it could be reduced by reporting stories that centers on peace and security which in turn could change attitudes and behaviors of actors of the conflict (Pate & Dauda, 2015; Zeng *et al.*, 2014).

Gilboa (2009) stressed the essence of professionalism in conflict reporting, urging media practitioners to gather information and report them responsibly, because the media play a critical role in the prevention and management of conflict as well as deliberately promotes conflict. According to Udeze and Chukwuma (2016), “amongst the core responsibilities of the mass media, surveillance function takes a critical role”, suggesting that media are saddled with the responsibilities of letting the public know about in coming dangers through covering, analysing and reporting impending dangers that pose threat to the livelihood and lives of people in general. Does the Nigerian media adhere to these suggestions? This forms part of what this current study seeks to determine.

### **Media and conflict reporting in Nigeria**

Research evidence has shown that, in Nigeria, media reporting of especially inter-group conflicts has been associated with unprofessional acts of sensationalism, considerations of context, inaccuracy and unfairness, imbalance and incompleteness, as well as less integrity and responsibility (Ciboh, 2015). This implies that many press reports on issues, particularly ethnic conflicts, are distorted and coloured with ethnic prejudice which now divides the Nigerian press into a north-south press. This is consistent with Geverand Essien’s (2019) study that examined newspaper coverage of farmers and herdsmen conflict in Benue state and found that the sampled newspapers, mostly reported straight news and only covered the conflict when it happens with little attention given to the conflict when it subsides.

Similarly, Shehu (2017) found that newspapers in Nigeria framed the Fulani herdsmen in a demonizing manner, suggesting that, Fulani herdsmen are portrayed as stubborn and unforgiving and the demonization of the Fulani as a tribe may not help in extenuating the conflict. Rather, it will spread the hatred of the tribe to all parts of Nigeria, thereby escalating the conflict and pushing the country further into the danger spot. This corroborates another content analysis on the Punch, Vanguard, Daily Trust and Leadership Newspapers which found that reports on herdsmen-farmers conflicts are

more violent, specific and narrowed featuring words like 'killers' herdsmen', 'gun-carrying herdsmen', 'Jihadist herdsmen', 'greedy farmers', 'intolerable farmers' and so on (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017). These words are more typical of war-oriented journalism than peace-oriented journalism that favours non-violent approach to conflict. What then are the audience view as regards the coverage of herdsmen and farmers conflict constituted the basis of this current research since it has been seen from this review that most of the studies on media coverage of herdsmen and farmers have dwelled on critiquing media content.

### **Theoretical underpinning**

This current study is anchored on agenda setting and social responsibility theory. Agenda setting which was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shawn in 1972 has been described as the ability of the news media to influence and ascribe importance a topic in the society (Reynolds & McCombs, 2002). This infers that if the news media cover an issue frequently and with prominence the public will view that issue as important (Apuke, 2018; Dauda & Omar, 2015). According to Folarin (1998), the media predetermine what issues to consider and media do this through factors like frequency of reports, the prominence given to the reports through headline display, pictures, and layout in newspapers, magazines, films, graphics or timing on radio and television.

On the other hand, the social responsibility theory was proposed in 1947 by the Hutchins Commission of Inquiry. Based on the theory, the media have freedom to publicize but must put into cognizance responsibility to the society at large (McQuail, 2010). Relating these two theories to the study, it could be said that journalists are mandated to give an accurate account of the farmers and herdsmen's conflict as well as give prominence and adequate frequency to the stories so that people will be on guard. The reports of the media should not be one sided, but instead contribute in resolving the conflicts than escalating it.

### **Methods**

#### ***Study design***

This study made use of the qualitative research design following the phenomenological approach described by (Stake, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2013). Interviews were conducted among 60 conveniently selected participants. The interview technique was used because it allows for sufficient freedom and depth of probing. This method has been shown to permit participants to describe their feelings in their own words and new themes could be followed up as they emerged. It was also felt necessary to develop a context-based understanding as regards media coverage of herdsmen and farmers conflict in Nigeria. In keeping with the general practice of qualitative research, the participants were assured anonymity along with their communities, in order to encourage them to

discuss pertinent issues in depth and in detail (Kontagora *et al.*, 2018). For example, the participants were coded as participant 1, 2 3...60.

### ***Participants and sampling***

Of the six states in north central Nigeria, we purposefully selected three states, namely Benue, Plateau and Nasarawa, that were highly affected by the conflict in recent years. After states selection, we zoomed into their local governments to reach out to the sample of the study. All local state governments (LGA) under the three states were identified; Benue has 23 (LGA), Plateau has 17 (LGA), and Nasarawa has 13 (LGA). A random selection was conducted by numbering all the (LGA) and placing the numbers in three different boxes and later randomly picked one (LGA) from each box. At the end, three (LGA) were selected; Eggonfor Nasarawa, Bokkos North for Plateau, and Gboko for Benue. From each selected (LGA), we recruited twenty participants who volunteered to participate in the interview. These communities have witness's series of conflict between herdsmen and farmers, so it is believed that responses from the selected communities will provide a richer insight into the problem being investigated. Overall, it has been shown that the North Central region of the country appears to be the hotbed of these conflicts (Ciboh, 2015).

In this study, conflict victims and survivors are defined as those who stated they have continuously experienced the clashes that has happened between the herdsmen and farmers. They could also be called eyewitness who are present at an event and can therefore describe it. They have been harmed, injured, or lost loved ones as a result of the communal clash. They feel helpless and passive in the face of misfortune. These victims cut across both the farmers and the Fulani's. In a nutshell, two criteria were set for inclusion; participants must be regularly exposed to the media (e.g., radio, television and newspapers) and participants must have experienced the conflict to a large extent. Based on these criteria, 60 participants, 20 each were recruited from the three communities. Participation was voluntary, therefore, those who were readily available were used. Of the 60 participants, it was observed that male ( $n=40$ ) were more than the female ( $n=20$ ). More than half of the participants were between 30 and above ( $n=40$ ) and the rest were between the ages of 18-29 ( $n=20$ ). A large number of the respondents had formal education ( $n=45$ ) while only a few indicated that they had no formal education ( $n=15$ ) but could still communicate in English. So, the researchers used simple English in the interview session.

### ***Data collection procedure***

Data were collected through Face-to-face semi-structured interviews, and all interviews were recorded. The Interviews were conducted in the early months of 2019 and lasted for approximately 8 weeks to finish. The interviews were semi-structured to ensure

consistency while also allowing particular experiences and matters to be explored in larger detail. To ensure the validity of the interview script, the interview questions were pretested on four ( $n=4$ ) participants outside the initial sampled participants. For further scrutiny and review of the questions, the researchers consulted two experts in the field of communication and conflict management. The individual interviews were facilitated by three experienced research assistants who were trained in qualitative research methodology. Before the interview started, the participants signed a consent form. In addition, approval was also obtained from the community leaders.

Each interview lasted for about 20-60 minutes to complete and were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researchers also took notes which enabled the documentation of the participant's facial expressions such as a frown, head nodding and sighing. The main points were also summarized at the end of each interview in order to ensure its accuracy and fairness and to give participants the opportunity to add to or correct the notes (Kontagora *et al.*, 2018). The participants were asked their view on the objectivity of media coverage of herdsmen and farmers Conflict, whether the coverage of the herdsmen and farmers conflict escalate or deescalate the conflict, if the media report the suffering faced by victims of the conflict, if the media give prominence to the conflict. They were further asked their view on the coverage of the issue based on when the conflict was ongoing and when it subsided.

### ***Data analysis***

To examine the qualitative data received from the interview sessions. The six thematic data analysis steps identified by Braun and Clarke (2013:175) were employed. These entail the researchers transcribing the recorded interviews; rereading the transcriptions to identify emerging themes from the recorded data; reviewing the themes; defining the themes; naming the themes, and lastly writes the outcomes. The assistants recruited for this investigation, paid extensive attention to each step, beginning with the careful arranging of the taped interviews. Thenceforth, the transcriptions were attentively reread to identify emerging themes from the recorded information. The findings were then discussed and interpreted thematically along with the results of the existing literature. This technique is consistent with prior studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Parajuli & Doneys, 2017).

### **Results and discussion**

This section presents the findings adopting 'realistic' style of reporting, according to the themes that emerged (Gorman *et al.*, 2005). Since the aim of this research was to understand the public's view, the findings from the three sampled communities were not presented separately.

### ***Low prominence given to herdsman-farmers conflict in media***

The respondents were asked to comment on the Nigerian media allocation of prominence to the issue of herdsman and farmers conflict. The entire respondents claim that the Nigerian conventional media do not allocate much prominence to the issue of herdsman and farmers conflict. They questioned the depth of coverage of the issues relating to the conflict and that only a few seconds are mostly allocated for TV and Radio, while for print the issue of conflict are sparingly reported on the front pages of the newspapers. In this regard, one of the sampled community dwellers said:

I am always glued to my radio sets, and I have come to realize that there are more stories on politics than the issue of farmers and herdsman conflict that is destroying our means of livelihood. I remember, there was a time when we were attacked in our farms and the national Television NTA did not air such attack. (Participant 1)

An overwhelming number of the interviewed rural dwellers commented that the private media in Nigeria to an extent cover the issues relating to the conflict more than the government own media and Radio was ranked as the first media that covers the issue of the conflict more than any other conventional media outlet in Nigeria. In line with this claim, one of the participants commented that:

I am exposed to Radio, TV and Newspapers in Nigeria and I will boldly say that since we started experiencing the farmers and herdsman conflict, Radio stations have been more vibrant in the reportage. Newspapers are also trying their best. (Participant 5)

Many of the respondents recognized and acknowledge that the new media such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc., which has given rise to citizen journalism seem to cover the issues of the conflict more than the conventional media in Nigeria. They emphasized that the conventional media are more into political news than the conflict which is ravaging most communities in the North central Nigeria. They noted that the use of blogs and other forms of new media outlet to cover the issues of conflict is made more possible because the new media is a shift from the hypodermic needle assumption of one-way communication. Thus, they use blogs, Facebook and Twitter deliver news almost at the velocity of light, unlike the broadcast media. In line with this claim, one of the respondents commented that:

Through blogs, Twitter and Facebook news spreads like wild Harmattan fire in split seconds, because the word does not need to wait for any editor to process it, and feedback is prompt. The public receives the chance to respond to the news instantly, and even contribute to the content. This is helpful in the reportage of herdsman and farmers conflict which go a long way of informing the people. (Participant 10)

The whole respondents had the strong conviction that due to the new media content source and distribution which could even permit them who are conflict victims post their issues, it is believed that it gives more advantage than the mainstream media in Nigeria. They also acknowledge that blogs, Twitter and Facebook promote non-commercial journalism that propagates the interests and yearning of those excluded from the mainstream. They listed some blogs in Nigeria that have been helpful in the coverage of their issues to include Naijapals.com, Naija.com, Sahara reporters, and Naija Community among many others. According to a respondent:

Blogs, Twitter and Facebook are independent of corporate control, and therefore reporting stories has been made easier, I believe that the conflict stories in its factual state may be more disseminated to the public. (Participant 60)

Although the respondent also expressed their disapproval on some stories posted on blogs and other forms of the new media, nevertheless, they strongly had the notion that these platforms are doing far better than the conventional media in Nigeria and should be promoted and encouraged.

Based on the above comments, it could be deduced that the Nigerian media are yet to give prominence to the issue of herdsmen and farmers conflict. However, the private media seem to allocate more prominence than the government media stations and overall, among the conventional media, radio stations according to the respondents give more prominence to the issues of herdsmen and farmers conflict in Nigeria. This result validates the claim which suggests that the mass media in Nigeria have not been timely in their reportage of conflicts and insurgencies (Afolabi, 2010). In addition, this finding extends prior studies that have mostly examined the issues of herdsmen and farmers conflict through Newspaper coverage, as it demonstrates that Radio as stated by the respondents play a huge role in the reportage of the conflict in Nigeria. Drawing from the agenda setting premise, if the news media cover an issue frequently and with prominence the public will view that issue as important (Apuke, 2018). Amazingly, the comments above also pointed out that the new media such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc., which has given rise to citizen journalism seem to cover the issues of the conflict more than the conventional media in Nigeria.

### ***Episodic reporting of herdsmen-farmers conflict based on ongoing clashes***

Most of the respondents testified that the media mostly cover the conflict when it is on but, as soon as the conflict is over, little or no attention is paid to other issues on the conflicts. They remarked that the conventional media in Nigeria reports base on episodes than thematically. In this regard, a respondent commented that:

I have noticed that media in Nigeria are more after politics than reporting of conflict, they report conflict when its ongoing, however, when the conflict has

subsided, they don't do follow up stories that will enable the public know the rationale for the conflict, I believe that if the media do a follow up investigation and report they will be able to expose those who reportedly collect money from the herders, those who are truly causing the conflict, those who sponsor the conflict, as well as the allegations of cattle rustling and farm encroachment. (Participant 15)

This suggests that Nigerian media have less interest in the coverage of conflict which is contrary to the social responsibility of the press. This result validates the research of Gever and Essien (2019) who examined newspaper coverage of farmers and herdsmen conflict in Benue state and found that the newspaper mostly reported straight news and only covered the conflict when it happens with little attention given to the conflict when it subsides.

### ***Lack of objectivity and low factuality in media coverage of herdsmen-farmers conflict***

The entire respondents specified that the conventional media in Nigeria do not cover the issues of herdsmen and farmers in an objective manner. They remarked that journalists most times do not even come to their community to cover stories, yet, they are surprised to hear some conflicts reported in the media. They believe that the journalists get second hand stories from security agencies and this affects their reportage, because they are supposed to be on the spot after a clash so as to interview the victims and get an accurate account of stories. A large number of the respondents alleged that the actual narratives of conflict victims are not covered by the media in Nigeria. Suggesting a lack of investigative reporting. The respondents also observed that media practitioners in Nigeria mostly interview either the farmers or herdsmen without hearing from both sides and this has resulted in sensationalized reporting. While rating the media in Nigeria in terms of objectivity, the respondents stated that the newspapers in Nigeria seem to be more objective in reporting the conflict than the Radio and TV. In this regard, a respondent stated that:

The media in Nigeria is characterised by one sided reporting and lack objectivity in their reportage. They are more after blaming than proffering solution and this goes a long way to affect the outcome of the conflict. (Participant 8)

Supporting this notion another respondent who was a Fulani remarked that:

There are no neutrality and factuality in the Nigerian media reportage of farmers and herdsmen conflict in Nigeria. The stories are mostly taking sides of the farmers against the herdsmen, that is why most of the headlines describe the herdsmen as evil and deadly. (Participant 42)

The respondents further expressed that the conventional media most especially, the government media do not cover the issues of the conflict objectively in order not to implicate those in power. Indeed, portraying the issues of the conflict in a more truthful manner would inform the public on the extent at which the government is intervening, and in turn will demonstrate the competence or incompetence of the government. Sadly, the government-owned mainstream media are mostly sceptical when it comes to criticism of the government in power, while the private media who rely mostly on profit through various funders, advertisers and special interest groups would not be far from unbiased reporting. According to one respondent:

The actual stories of the conflict are not adequately covered and disseminated and are usually lost in statistics and reports of humanitarian responses. As such, Nigerian media are characterized by manipulation and distortion to suit the ideology or political agenda of the nation, as well as the media house or prominent individuals. (Participant 30)

The participants also mentioned the issue of factuality. They remarked that the media in Nigeria do not report the actual number of death rates when a clash occurs and sometimes, they blow the number of death rate out of proportion. Accordingly, one participant stated that:

In the early months of last year our village was attacked and many lives and properties were lost, but the media reported the death rate to be 16, while the death rate was more than 50. This shows that the media are not factual in reporting the issues of the conflict. (Participant 31)

Another respondent remarked that:

Our village was attacked and the media reported it as unknown gunmen while it was herdsmen that perpetrated such evil. This goes to show how lazy the Nigerian media could be in their watch dog and surveillance function. (Participant 6)

These comments suggest that the Nigerian media are lacking in objective and factual reporting as well as not carrying out their surveillance and watchdog function. This supports studies on the role of media in constructing conflicts which reports that the media rarely cover conflicts with neutrality (Pate & Dauda, 2015; Zeng *et al.*, 2014) and that media mostly resort to the allocation of blame which result to the building of enmity among groups of people (Ozuhu-Sulaiman, 2013). According to Vladislavljević (2015), the media strongly influence the outcomes of conflict, in turn, shaping the prospects of success of the conflict parties (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002). This calls for the media to stay detached by simply presenting issues with facts objectively, sadly, as reported by the sampled participants in this current study, this is not the case in Nigeria. The above comments also suggest that newspapers in Nigeria tend to be more objective

in reporting the conflict more than the Radio and TV. This is contrary to one content analysis, which conclude that newspapers in Nigeria, report inter-group conflicts with unprofessional acts of sensationalism, considerations of context, inaccuracy, unfairness, imbalance, incompleteness, less integrity and responsibility (Ciboh, 2015).

***Media in Nigeria contribute to the escalation of the herdsmen and farmers conflict***

According to the respondents, the sensationalism, lack of objectivity, factuality and negative usage of the language of reportage characterized by the Nigeria media is contributing to the escalation of the conflict rather than making it better. They stated that the Nigerian media is full of blame game than peace journalism. As far as this crop of respondents are concerned, Nigerian media most especially the private media are tools in the hands of the owners used to fight the government of the day. While the government media keeps beating drum for the ruling class. For example, they stated the case of Benue state and Taraba in which many media houses in Nigeria kept blaming the governors for the Anti open grazing, instead of looking for a better way to resolve the conflict. The respondents also mentioned that the manner in which media outlets frame the issue of the herdsmen-farmers in Nigeria contribute to the escalation of the conflict. For instance, words like crooked 'Fulani herdsmen attack unarmed farmers', 'farmers attack Fulani herdsmen wives and stole cattle's', 'terrorists-herdsmen', 'Fulani mercenaries', 'innocent farmers', 'defenseless farmers', 'bloodbath', 'drums of war', etc. All these words and several others do help in escalating the conflict rather than deescalating it. One respondent expressed that:

The way and manner the Nigerian media frame the issues of farmers and herdsmen in contribute in escalating the conflict rather than deescalating. It is full of sensational themes which could tear the country apart if care is not taken. (Participant 55)

In line with this another respondent stated that:

The negative use of language of reportage in the Nigeria media is contributing to the escalation of the conflict rather resolving it. The media ought to be a channel for conflict resolution, but that is not the case with the Nigerian media. (Participant 20)

These comments suggest that the Nigerian media manner of reportage constitute a factor that is contributing to the conflicts in Nigeria. Their reports are full of insightful words that could trigger conflict instead of manage it. According to Adisa (2012), the media's lack of carefulness in language could contribute to conflicts, and in media coverage of conflicts, words such as 'vicious', 'fundamentalists', 'Islamists', 'extremists', 'fanatics', 'barbaric', 'militants', 'rogues', 'terrorists', etc. should be avoided. Howard

(2003) recommends that journalists should be very careful in their language use when reporting conflicts so as not to fuel it. This is not the case in Nigeria as some sections of the media in Nigeria only facilitates the escalation of the conflict through their horror use of language that incite more violence. As shown in prior study, this problem has cast doubts in the minds of both Christians and Muslims on the proper role of media reportage during ethno-religious conflicts (Barde, 2016). Thus, the rationale for reporting conflict has been shown to include the creation of awareness of a conflict to avoid escalation, in turn, helping religion and community leaders resolves conflicts; generating ideas on how best to reduce conflict; exposing the perpetrators and sponsors of conflict; de-escalating rather than to increase the conflict; to attract humanitarian responses through publicising yearning of aspirations of victims; and to provide early warning to law enforcement agencies and stakeholders so as to halt an incoming conflict (Pate, 2002). This is totally different from the case of Nigerian press as far as the sampled public is concerned.

### ***In-depth reporting of conflict victims' suffering is still lacking***

The respondents were asked to comment on the Nigerian media reporting of their suffering after a conflict occurs. The entire respondents commented that the media does not report their yearning, aspiration and suffering. The media only report in a surface manner without in-depth reporting of the conflict and as earlier mentioned they do not report the event again after the conflict has subsided. One respondent expressed that:

The Nigerian media be it radio, TV and print have less interest in reporting our suffering after a conflict occurs. They only report the issue the day it happens without further investigation of the properties lost. I believe if the media reports on our suffering it will attract humanitarian responses. (Participant 41)

Drawing from the above remarks, it could be deduced that the Nigerian media do not have much interest in the reporting of the suffering of the conflict victims and only report the issues the moment it happens without further investigations. It has been shown that the reason for conflict reporting should be to attract humanitarian responses through publicizing yearning and aspirations of victims (Pate, 2002). Relating these findings to the two theories used in this study, it could be said that journalists are mandated to give an accurate account of the farmers and herdsmen's conflict as well as give prominence and adequate frequency to the stories so that people will be on guard as well as attract assistance from the public. However, the way the Nigerian media are handling the case of the conflict shows a high level of unprofessionalism and negligence.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

This study is necessitated by the fact that despite the considerable articles written about the crisis on herdsmen and farmers and the role mass media have played, surprisingly, there is a dearth of research on people's perception as regards the media coverage of

herdsmen and farmers conflict in Nigeria. Thus, this study filled the gap and it is based on the findings drawn from the perspective of the sampled conflict victims from three large conflict-prone communities in the North central of Nigeria. Overall, it provides another dimension of research finding beyond the predominant content analysis carried out in prior studies. This study applies the agenda and the social responsibility premise, which calls on journalists to give an accurate account of the farmers and herdsmen's conflict as well as give prominence, adequate frequency, and guard against the use of language that will insight more conflict.

Results obtained from this study, however, suggest a lack of prominence to the issue of herdsmen and farmers conflict in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the private media seem to allocate more prominence than the government media stations and overall, among the conventional media, radio stations, give more prominence to the issues of herdsmen and farmers conflict in Nigeria. Astonishingly, the new media such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc., which has given rise to citizen journalism was said to cover the issues of the conflict more than the conventional media in Nigeria. Thus, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, provide an avenue for the public to create, frame and disseminate news content on the conflict, which in turn may attract more humanitarian responses.

Findings further indicate that Nigerian journalists do not integrate the premise of agenda setting in their practice. This implies that the media engage more on episodic reporting of herdsmen-farmers conflict. Evidence from the conflict victims indicate that the media cover the conflict when it is on but, as soon as the conflict is over, little or no attention is paid to other issues on the conflicts. Findings also showed a lack of objectivity and low factuality in the media coverage of herdsmen-farmers conflict in Nigeria. The conflict victims emphasized that the conventional media in Nigeria do not cover the issues of herdsmen and farmers conflict in an objective and factual manner. They stressed that journalists are mostly not present at the conflict-affected communities to cover stories, yet, they report such conflicts in the media, relying solely on the information obtained from security agencies.

Further results showed that in-depth reporting of the conflict victims' suffering is still lacking as their yearning, aspiration and grief are less covered. This suggests a lack of investigative reporting and social responsibility. This lack of social responsibility is further shown as most media practitioners in Nigeria interview either the farmers or herdsmen without hearing from both sides, resulting in sensationalised and unneutral reporting which contributes to the escalation of the conflict. The conflict victims also observed that the excessive use of negative language, which often indicate blame game, contributes to the escalation of the conflict.

Based on the outcome of this study, there is an urgent need to encourage journalists in Nigeria to be socially responsible to write and report for the benefit of the society and the country. Conflict reporting in Nigeria should be based on peace journalism, which

entails propagating the message of reconciliation, negotiation and diplomacy. We therefore call on media practitioners such as editors and reporters to demonstrate a vital role in writing conflict stories without inciting more violence, but rather uncover the causes of conflict and discover the actual goal of all parties involved as well as safeguard the plight of the victims. They should provide multiple viewpoints on the issues of herds-men and farmers conflict and demonstrate a desire towards solving than intensifying the conflict. Derogatory languages should be completely avoided, but rather provide contextual and background information to assist the public grasp the story in full.

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# South Sudan: Ethnicity and Statehood. Perceptions and the Way Forward

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of ethnic conflicts on the statehood of South Sudan and to proffer remedial solution to end the conflicts. The study set-out to realize two objectives: to investigate the causes of ethnic conflict in South Sudan and to determine

the strategic remedies to end ethnic conflict in South Sudan. The study adopted descriptive cross-sectional research design. A sample of 399 respondents were selected from a target population of 5,734,057 using Slovene's formula. Data were collected through questionnaire. Validity and Reliability of the questionnaire were established using Content Validity Index (CVI) and Cronbach's alpha respectively. Results of the analyses on the first objective shows that the major causes of ethnic conflict in South Sudan are: unfair allocation of political positions, corruption and nepotism within the government system and power struggles among the elites. On the second objective, the study reveals that the remedies to ethnic conflict in South are, but not limited to: respect for minority rights and interest, fair allocation of state powers and national resources, a restructure of the modalities of coexistence through ethnic dialogue. Other remedial measures include: respect for ethnic communities' boundary, restructuring of state administrative organs into units that spread across the different regions and states, as well the labor force in these administrative units

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should fairly represent the different ethnic affiliations within the country, full implementation of the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement (RPA) – particularly, the chapter two of the security arrangements that emphasizes Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR).

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Ethnic conflict, Ethnic division, South Sudan, Statehood.

## **Introduction**

South Sudan is as of present the world's youngest state. As a new country, it is faced with the task of managing its numerous ethnic groups, uniting them to forge ahead as one nation (. However, this anticipated reality did not materialize, instead the country slipped into a violent conflict that has manifested adverse consequences on the country's functionality as an independent state. Since December 2013, barely two years after gaining independence from the Republic of Sudan, violent conflict erupted in South Sudan (Sandu, 2014b). According to the New York Times, an estimated 383,000 people have died as a result of the conflict (Specia, 2018). A similar report published by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine indicates that about half of the casualties resulted from fighting between ethnic rivals as the conflict spread across the country, and the other half died from disease, hunger and other causes exacerbated by the ongoing civil war (Checchi, Testa, Warsame, Quach, & Burns, 2018).

The impact of the conflict can be felt from all spheres of the economy. Since about 98% of government revenue comes from oil (Cust and Harding, 2013; Shankleman, 2011, Sandu, 2012, 2014a), the decline in oil production resulting from the war has affected the overall economic situation in the country, coupled with the decrease in the global oil price. The economy has been ravaged by inflation as South Sudanese Pound lost around 90% of its value following the 2015 liberalization of exchange rates that saw the country lose ground against other global currencies (Sudan Tribune, 2017). In 2016 inflation surpassed the 550% increase rate leaving the government with over \$1.1 billion deficit in the 2016-2017 financial year (IMF, 2017). Also, wages were significantly reduced while the prices of even the most basic products skyrocketed – inflicting more suffering on the people. For example, the price of flour, sorghum and rice had increased by about 400% since the beginning of the conflict (Famine Early Warning Systems Network, 2016).

In 2018, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned that if the war prolongs, it will lead to a complete collapse of the South Sudanese economy because it will acutely impact on economic imbalances and will definitely exhaust economic buffers and consequently collapse the economy (Sudan Tribune, 2016). Despite all the negative assessments of the conflict, its main cause(s) still remain an issue of debate, however the most profound reason advanced by scholars such as (Nyadera, 2018; Radon and Logan, 2014;

Schomerus and Mareike, 2017) is that the conflict is caused by ethnic divisions within the South Sudanese society.

Observably, South Sudanese are yet to embrace national identity; people cling more to their ethnic identities than the national identity. In fact, there is no one collective definition that unites the heterogeneous people of South Sudan, each and every one prefers to identify him/herself with the ethnic group he/she belongs and this perhaps presents a challenge to national unity and statehood. Another considerable issue is common language. The country's constitution specified English as the first language and Arabic as the second language, however, due to high illiteracy level, a huge proportion of the citizens are unable to communicate in these languages. According to UNESCO (2019) report, South Sudan has 27% literacy rate, which implies that 73% of the population are illiterate – unable to read and write. Consequently, a significant portion of the population communicates in their local language and thus, relate only with people of their ethnicity and shared language. It is estimated that the 60 ethnic groups in South Sudan speak different local languages, making it difficult for people of different ethnic backgrounds to relate and identify as one. The implication being that in South Sudan people minimally relate with people from a different ethnic group other than theirs, which seem to present a challenge to the country's statehood.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided by Elite Manipulation Theory. The theory is part of the “classic” elite theories that were formulated at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century based on Max Weber's ideas, especially concerning the centrality of political power and charismatic leadership. The theory contends that the elites utilize ethnic violence as a purposeful and rational strategy to acquire or maintain political power. In doing this, the elites intentionally instigate ethnic violence as a way of gaining political support (Fearon and Laitin, 2000; Gagnon, 1994).

According to Snyder (2001), one of the key reasons for the increased risk of nationalist conflict during democratization is the systematic use of ethnic divisions for political gain. In societies with strong ethnic identities, ethnic entrepreneurs or elites usually capitalize on already existing ethnic divisions within the society to pursue personal political gain and private interests (Sambanis, 2001). In some cases, the elites construct ethnic identities in order to have large enough voting blocs or “minimum winning coalitions” (Bates, 1983; Munene, 2010; Lynch, 2011). The theory argues that political power is held by a relatively small and wealthy group of people sharing similar values and interests. Furthermore, it holds that ethnic conflicts are elite driven clashes and controversies, while it stresses the role of political elites and their ability to incite the masses to violence.

The theory clearly fits into the present situation in South Sudan, particularly the ongoing civil war that is fought along ethnic lines. The civil war in South Sudan is fought along ethnic lines of the Dinka and Nuer, however the conflict emanated from a personal discord between the leaders. A personal misunderstanding between President Salva Kiir and his former vice Riek Marchar is at the root of the conflict. These two elites, however managed to manipulate personal grievances to escalate tribal sentiments and conflict. Thus, the political interest and survival of these two elites is at the core of a civil war that has devastated the entire country, with an attendant impact on the neighboring countries. Thus, the theory offers a multidimensional and substantial framework to analyze key issues related to ethnicity and ethnic conflicts. According to Elite Manipulation Theory, the concern of the elites is to define the interest of the collective in a way that coincides with their own power interests. In doing so, they express their interests in the language of the collective interest, drawing support and sympathy from unsuspecting public.

**Methodology**

The study adopted descriptive cross-sectional research design. Data collection involved the use of survey questionnaire. The target population consisted of the adult population (people above the age of 18) of South Sudan, which is 5,734,057 from the three regions of Equatoria, Bahr el Gazal and Upper Nile Region. The sample size of the study was 399 respondents determined using Slovene’s formula as shown below.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(\alpha)^2}$$

Where: *n* = the required sample size,  
*N* = the known population size,  
*α* = the level of significance, which is fixed at = 0.05.

$$n = \frac{5,734,057}{1 + 5,734,057(0.05)^2} = 399$$

**Table1:** Sample Size of the Study

Region	Population	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
Greater Bahr el Gazal	1,856,400	135	Simple Random Sampling
Greater Upper Nile	2,179,285	152	Simple Random Sampling
Greater Equatoria	1,698,372	112	Simple Random Sampling
<b>Total</b>	5,734,057	399	

Source: Author’s primary data, 2018

**Validity**

Brown (1996) defines validity as the degree to which an instrument measures what it claims, or purports, to be measuring. Validity of the instrument involved two processes: face validity and content validity. Face validity involved the expert scoring relevance of questions in the instrument in relation to the study variables, while content validity involved calculating the Content Validity Index (CVI) as shown below. CVI of more than 0.7 implies that the instrument is valid.

$$CVI = \frac{\text{Number of Items declared Valid by the judges}}{\text{Total number of items in the instrument}}$$

$$CVI = \frac{30}{30} = 0.94$$

Since the Content Validity Index was  $0.94 > 0.7$  then it means that the instrument (questionnaire) is valid to measure what it was intended to.

**Reliability**

The test-retest and Cronbach’s alpha methods were adopted to evaluate reliability of the research instrument. The test-retest reliability method examines the extent to which a measure, procedure or instrument yields the same result on repeated trials (Ebuoh, 2017). This was done by administering the research instrument twice on the same set of respondents at different times. The questionnaire was given to 40 respondents at the outset, and the same instrument was re-administered to the same respondents after two weeks. Data collected from the two intervals were correlated. The result of Pearson’s linear correlation coefficients (PLCCr) shows a reliability coefficient of 0.81. This indicates that the instrument was reliable for the study. An instrument is considered reliable when it has a coefficient ranging from 0.60-0.99.

The Cronbach’s Where:  $\alpha$  = Alpha coefficient

$K$  = Number of items in the instrument

$\sum$  = Sum

$SD_i^2$  = Individual item variance

$SD_t^2$  = Variance of total score

Alpha Coefficient was used to estimate the reliability of the instruments using SPSS 20.0. Upon performing the test, the values that were 0.7 and above were regarded as reliable. In the case of psychometric tests, they must fall within the range of 0.7 and above for the test to be reliable (Creswell, 2009). The formula below was applied to test the reliability of instruments:

$$\alpha = \frac{K}{K-1} \left( \frac{1 - \sum SD_i^2}{SD_t^2} \right)$$

**Table 2:** Results of the Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability Coefficient for Likert-type Scale test for Questionnaire

Variable	Number of items	Alpha
Causes of ethnic conflicts in South Sudan	22	0.843
Strategies to end ethnic conflicts in South Sudan	10	0.773
<b>Average</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>0.808</b>

As can be seen in the results of the reliability tests presented in Table 2, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is 0.81, and indicates that the instrument is very reliable. Hence, both the test retest and Cronbach’s alpha tests show that the instrument is very reliable.

**Mean Range and Standard Error Analysis**

Descriptive statistics (mean scores and standard deviation) were used to answer the following research questions: what are the causes of ethnic conflict in South Sudan? and what are the strategic remedies to end the ethnic conflict in South Sudan? The researcher employed the weights attached to the scale to compute the mean scores for the items as well as for all the items of the questionnaire. For the research questions, real limit of numbers displayed in Table 3, were used in analyzing the data and answering the research questions. Any items with a mean of 3.00 – 3.99 and above was considered accepted, otherwise it was considered rejected. The Standard Error (SE) coefficient was used to verify the reliability of descriptive statistics. The decision rule is to accept descriptive analysis as better and more reliable if the SE coefficient is close to zero (0).

**Table 3:** Mean Range Analysis

Mean Range	Respondents	Interpretation
4.0 – 5.00	Agree	Accepted
3.0 – 3.99	Strongly Agree	Totally accepted
2.5 – 2.99	Undecided	No opinion
1.5 – 2.49	Disagree	Rejected
1.00 – 1.49	Strongly disagree	Totally rejected

**Preliminary Analysis for Empirical Results**

**Response Rate**

The response rate is the percentage of people who responded to the study, and was calculated using the formula:

$$\frac{\text{Actual number of responses}}{\text{Total expected responses}} \times 100\% = 91.75\%$$

If the response rate is 50% or less, it shows that the data is inadequate for analysis, but if the response rate is 60%, it indicates that the data is good for analysis. If the rate is 70% and above, then the data is very good for analysis. The researcher should use all means to increase the response rate in order to have a representative sample for meaningful generalization (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). Out of the 399 distributed questionnaires, a total of 385 were retrieved, 13 were partially filled, while 5 were vaguely filled, hence, the study relied on 367 completely filled questionnaires for analysis and reaching conclusions on findings. The response rate is good enough and in line with Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) who argues that response rates of 60 percent or more are regarded acceptable for social science studies. Based on these assertions, this implies that the response rate for this research was adequate for analysis.

### **Objective-based Analyses**

Analysis is presented according to the study objectives, which are: Causes of ethnic conflict in South Sudan and the strategic remedies to end ethnic conflict in South Sudan.

#### ***Causes of ethnic conflicts in South Sudan***

This section presents the results of the mean ratings and standard deviations of the responses obtained from respondents using questionnaires. The section aims at providing answer to research question one: what the causes of ethnic conflict in South Sudan? The summary of the responses is presented in Table 4. below.

Table 4. above presents results of the mean ratings and standard deviations of responses from the respondents. Notice that the mean ratings of responses from the respondents for items 1 to 22 are: 4.1 (0.06), 4.3 (0.03), 4.1 (0.04), 4.4 (0.06), 4.3 (0.06), 3.8 (0.04), 3.8 (0.04), 4.2 (0.04), 4.2 (0.04), 4.2 (0.03), 4.2 (0.04), 4.0 (0.05), 3.8 (0.05), 3.9 (0.04), 4.0 (0.04), 3.7 (0.05), 4.1 (0.04), 4.0 (0.05), 4.0 (0.04), 4.2 (0.04), and 4.1 (0.04); with corresponding standard deviations of 1.19, 0.66, 0.85, 0.70, 1.21, 1.15, 0.79, 0.79, 0.81, 0.78, 0.75, 0.86, 1.11, 0.98, 0.91, 0.94, 1.09, 0.84, 1.00, 0.87, and 0.94.

Based on the cut-off point of 4.00, the respondents rated items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22 totally accepted. These indicate that the respondents totally accepted that unequal distribution of the money that come from the sale of oil, corruption and nepotism within the government system, poverty, unfair allocation of political positions and power struggles among the elites are among the causes of ethnic conflict in South Sudan. The respondents also totally accepted that primitivism and ignorance among the ethnic groups, lack of awareness about the negative consequences of conflicts, bureaucratic leadership style practiced by the leaders, lack of competent leaders to deal with the situation, selfishness and ethnocentric policies and competition over the scare resources is among the causes of ethnic conflict in South Sudan. The respondents further totally accepted that ethnic groupings such as its history, traditions,

**Table 4:** Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations on Causes of Ethnic Conflict in South Sudan

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>				
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>		<b>Std. Deviation</b>
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
An unequal distribution of the money that come from the sale of oil	367	4.1935	.06218	1.19111
Corruption and nepotism within the government system	367	4.3597	.03478	.66637
Poverty as a major cause of the conflict	367	4.1662	.04474	.85708
Unfair allocation of political positions	367	4.4251	.03698	.70844
Power struggles among the elites	367	4.3297	.04112	.78772
Differences in Religion religions and beliefs	367	3.8529	.06364	1.21922
Different tribes that are living in South Sudan are the problem	367	3.8392	.06037	1.15649
Primitivism and ignorance among the ethnic groups	367	4.2098	.04128	.79073
Lack of awareness about the negative consequences of conflicts	367	4.2125	.04151	.79517
Bureaucratic leadership style practiced by the leaders	367	4.2125	.04240	.81217
Lack of competent leaders to deal with the situation	367	4.2752	.04095	.78442
Selfishness and ethnocentric policies	367	4.2507	.03963	.75917
Competition over the Scare resources	367	4.0981	.04537	.86913
Conflicts caused by the colonial regimes	367	3.8965	.05801	1.11137
Main cause lies on cultural beliefs	367	3.9482	.05134	.98349
Ethnic groupings such as its history, traditions, and customs	367	4.0954	.04786	.91685
Meeting and getting to know people from ethnic groups other than their own	367	3.9619	.04907	.94010
Would be better if different ethnic groups didn't try to mix together	367	3.7766	.05734	1.09853
Having alot of pride in their ethnic group and its accomplishments	367	4.1826	.04389	.84084
Association with people from other ethnic groups can be suspicious	367	4.0518	.05234	1.00275
Feeling good about their cultural or ethnic background	367	4.2207	.04559	.87329
Having a strong commitment to improve life in their ethnic community	367	4.1172	.04926	.94372
Valid N (listwise)	367			
<b>Average</b>		<b>4.1216</b>	<b>0.0477</b>	<b>0.9140</b>

and customs, pride in their ethnic group and its accomplishments, cultural or ethnic background and strong commitment to improve life in their ethnic community are among the causes of ethnic conflict in South Sudan. Observe however, that the respondents rated item 4 as the highest cause of ethnic conflicts in South Sudan, followed by items 2 and 5. These ratings suggest that the highest causes of ethnic conflict in South Sudan are unfair allocation of political positions, corruption and nepotism within the government system and power struggles among the elites.

Based on the cut-off point of 3.00-3.99, the respondents rated items 6, 7, 14, 15, and 17 acceptable. These indicate that the respondents accepted that differences in religion and belief, differences in tribe, conflicts caused by the colonial regimes and absence of viable ethnic interaction groups other than their own are the causes of ethnic conflict in South Sudan. Although, all the respondents rated the items as acceptable, item 17 is the least cause of ethnic conflict in South Sudan. Thus, absence of viable ethnic interaction groups other than their own is the least causes of ethnic conflict in South Sudan.

The cluster or average mean rating of responses of the respondents on the causes of ethnic conflict in South Sudan is 4.12 with an average standard deviation of 0.91. This implies that the causes outlined above are among the major causes of ethnic conflicts in South Sudan. The standard errors for all the 22 mean ratings are within the conventional significance levels in humanities and social sciences. More so, the standard error for the cluster of average mean is 0.04, which is less than the 5% significance level. This indicates that the descriptive analysis is very reliable for policy-making purposes.

### ***Strategic Remedies to end Ethnic Conflict in South Sudan***

This section displays the results of the mean ratings and standard deviations of the responses obtained from respondents on the strategic remedies to end of ethnic conflict in South Sudan. The summary of the responses is presented in Table 5. below.

Notice from Table 5. that the mean ratings of responses from the respondents for items 1 to 10 are: 4.6 (0.03), 4.3 (0.03), 4.4 (0.03), 4.4 (0.03), 4.4 (0.03), 4.4 (0.03), 4.1 (0.04), 4.3 (0.03), 4.3 (0.04), and 4.2 (0.05); with corresponding standard deviations of 0.58, 0.63, 0.58, 0.67, 0.65, 0.67, 0.88, 0.70, 0.77, and 0.97.

Based on the cut-off point of 4.00, the respondents rated items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 totally accepted. These suggest that the respondents totally acceptable that respect each other's sovereignty and take the overall situation and their long-term interests into consideration, political stability and accepted form of governance by all South Sudanese, respect for ethnic communities' boundary, fair allocation of national resources, and carrying out friendly cooperation, are among the possible solutions to ethnic conflict in South Sudan. The respondents also totally accepted that dialogue among the ethnic communities, re-division of South Sudan into new administrative units on new basis,

**Table 5:** Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of Responses on Strategic Remedies to End Ethnic Conflict in South Sudan

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>				
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>		<b>Std. Deviation</b>
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Respect for ethnic nationalities' rights and consideration of their long-term interests in the South Sudan state	367	4.6076	.03057	.58557
Political stability and accepted form of governance by all South Sudanese	367	4.3079	.03299	.63204
Respect ethnic communities' boundary	367	4.4005	.03040	.58234
Fair allocation of national resources	367	4.4850	.03512	.67279
Carrying out friendly cooperation	367	4.4142	.03419	.65505
Enhancing communities dialogue can be good tool to resolve the local conflicts	367	4.3924	.03531	.67650
Redivision of South Sudan into new administration units on new basis	367	4.1008	.04641	.88902
Full implementation of the 2015 peace agreement	367	4.3134	.03670	.70316
Elimination of the culture of impunity	367	4.3106	.04052	.77634
Control of Information technology as a mechanism for the spread of conflict to all parts of South Sudan	367	4.2480	.05093	.97571
Valid N (listwise)	367			
<b>Average</b>		<b>4.3580</b>	<b>0.0373</b>	<b>0.7148</b>

full implementation of the 2015 revitalized peace agreement, elimination of the culture of impunity and control of information technology as a mechanism for the spread of conflict to all parts of South Sudan as possible solutions to end ethnic conflict in South Sudan. Notice also from Table 5, that the respondents rated item 1 as the highest possible remedial measure to end ethnic conflicts in South Sudan, followed by items 4 and 6. These ratings suggest that the most likely possible solution to end ethnic conflict in South Sudan are respect for ethnic nationalities' rights and consideration of their long-term interests in the South Sudan state affairs, fair allocation of national resources and enhancing communities dialogue can be a good tool to resolve the local conflicts which will result into resolution of the national conflict. However, the respondents rated item 7 the least possible solution to end ethnic conflict in South Sudan. Thus, re-division of South Sudan into new administration units on new basis is the least possible solution to end ethnic conflict in South Sudan.

The cluster or average mean rating of responses of the respondents on the possible solution to end ethnic conflict in South Sudan is 4.35 with an average standard deviation of 0.71. This indicates that the possible solutions end ethnic conflicts in South Sudan are among those presented in Table 5. The standard errors for all the 10 mean ratings are within the conventional significance levels in humanities and social sciences. More so, the standard error for the cluster of average mean is 0.03, which is also less than the 5% significance level. This indicates that the descriptive analysis is reliable for policy-making purposes.

## **Conclusions**

The study concludes that ethnicity does not pose any direct challenge to statehood in South Sudan, rather ethnic loyalty presents some challenges. When people are more concerned with the welfare and ideology of their ethnic affiliation against the interest of other ethnic nationalities in a multi-ethnic society, the consequent denial of access to resources and other forms of marginalization endured by the other ethnic groups often result in violent engagement and eventually lead to Protracted Social Conflict. Thus, the study disagrees with the assumption that multi-ethnicity is a source of violent conflict. Although, it is a fact that when inter-ethnic division, sentiment and hatred are inflamed, they may lead to violent confrontation, but that does not mean that violent conflict is inevitable in multi-ethnic settings. In fact, the study holds that inter-ethnic conflicts can be avoided through respect for human rights, effective legislation that protects minority rights and interest, and a democratic and representative political system that acknowledges diversity, can increase the chances of a peaceful multi-ethnic coexistence.

## **Recommendations**

The study provided recommendation on the key objectives that guided the study. On the first objective, causes of ethnic conflict in South Sudan, the study recommends that the government of South Sudan should establish a Justice and Reconciliation Panel (JRP) with the goal of enhancing justice, forgiveness, healing and reintegration of the offenders and the offended. This is very important considering the magnitude of atrocities committed against the population since the beginning of the ongoing civil war. The recommended panel will constitute of South Sudan citizens of different social-economic status. Thus, the JRP is expected to adopt the model of the Gacaca Court in Rwanda, where the judges and facilitators of justice and reconciliation comprised of ordinary and everyday Rwandese, even those without formal legal education. The JRP will address the atrocities committed against the citizens of South Sudan since the beginning of the civil war with a focus on providing an environment for acceptance of guilt, punishment, forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. Thus, the panel will emphasize restorative, rather than retributive justice.

Secondly, there should be a full restructuring of the governance system. The recommendation here is government of South Sudan must create affirmative action packages for disadvantaged (minority) groups, which will emphasize the “management of diversity”. Accordingly, the structure of governance should be constitutionally reviewed to make way for a government of national unity through power sharing mechanisms that appreciates proportionality rather than “survival of the fittest”. Fair ethnic representation in state affairs is therefore the key to dowsing discontent and grievances. The study believes that a genuine South Sudan that will be appreciated by its citizens would likely emerge through an “all-inclusive” government.

Thirdly, there is need for decentralization and restructuring of the governance process in South Sudan. The dynamics of the ongoing civil war shows that there is need to decentralize governance and restructure the governance system. In doing so, the starting point is to limit the powers and responsibilities of the federal government through regional decentralization. In this case, the three existing regions should be formally constituted as regional governments with part of the powers and recourses currently held by the federal government conceded to them. The regional governments, will then develop their own constitution, albeit deriving terms of reference from the national constitution, but will be accorded powers to decide how and through what structures to deliver governance at the local level. With regional governments in place, conflicts will be likely curtailed at regional levels with less possibility to attain the status of a national crisis in terms of spreading to engulf the entire nation. The logic here is that as long as the pockets of instability do not occur simultaneously within the regions, they will constitute little or no overall threat to national peace and stability.

On the second objective, the strategic remedies to end ethnic conflict in South Sudan the study recommends first that the government should initiate a mass ‘national youth skill acquisition program’, where the government will facilitate training of youths on skill acquisition and thereafter provide business start capital for the trainees. It is believed that engaging the youths in gainful businesses and other economic activities will definitely douse their attraction to violence, as their economic status improves.

Another, factor that sustains ethnic loyalty is illiteracy, therefore the study recommends that the government of South Sudan should make education a priority. The country occupies an unenviable position on world education ranking and therefore the government should pursue a mass education policy that will address the educational needs of both the young and older generations. It is important to note that the government merely pursuing a mass free education program will not be a solution, instead education should be made attractive to the population particularly to parents. One way of doing this is to provide free education that will include free educational materials for pupils. Then, the government through the district/ local council should establish a reward package for parents whose child(ren) are registered in school. For example, parents can be

rewarded with a goat or cow if their child(ren) did not miss school for the whole term or academic year. That alone will be enough encouragement for parents to ensure that their children attend school regularly. Also, there could be provision for stipend for parents to cover the income their children would have brought home if they chose to go to work or hunt instead of going to school. The logic here is that a significant improvement in the literacy level, particularly among the youths of South Sudan, will liberate them from the shackles and grip of manipulation by the elites, which apparently fuels ethnic sentiment and loyalty.

Finally, the government of South Sudan should convene a “Sovereign National Conference of Ethnic Nationalities”, where all the ethnic groups will be fairly represented and with a mandate to develop a blueprint on how best the country can move forward peacefully. The idea here is that a National Conference will provide a forum where all ethnic groups and nationalities can express their grievances and offer ideas on how to restructure the country. This forum will provide the opportunity for different ethnic groups to seat together and reach a consensus on resources allocation, power sharing, how rights will be protected and how a peaceful and democratic South Sudan can be attained.

Finally, it is important to note that although the above recommendations are limited to internal actions and capacity, it does not mean that inputs from regional and international actors cannot help South Sudan to move forward, instead the consideration here is that foreigners cannot determine the pace and shape of urgent measures to work on a constitutional review, land ownership and boundary demarcation, resources management, forgiveness and healing. The argument is that South Sudan’s present challenge can only be resolved through a national dialogue and consensus agreement that emanates from the people, and which takes into consideration the interest and concerns of the different ethnic nationalities in the country.

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# Romania: The role of Roma women in intra-community conflict management

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**Abstract:** The following article argues that, despite the traditional challenges Roma women faced, they are able to contribute significantly to the resolution of intra-community conflicts and earned, in time, a position of respect for this reason. Major barriers remain, but, in the same time, the evolution of the community is starting to give the Roma women empowerment over the conflict resolution mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Kris, women, conflict management, gossip, curse, oath, tradition.

The following article is part of a personal research inside the Roma Kalderash community in Romania, specifically in two areas of the country. The aim of the research was to find out and analyze the mechanisms used by this remote community for the intra-community conflicts. Besides the fact that the research found out that this community has its own way of dealing conflicts, other than the formal justice, it showed that the Roma women have their specific place inside this mechanisms and the following pages will discuss about the Roma women as conflict managers.

After hundreds of hours of interaction with the Roma community from Vâlcea and Gorj, we have come to the conclusion that it is very difficult to give a correct and unitary definition of what traditional Roma mean. The reason is partly due to self-isolation from the rest of the society and the stereotypes of the majority of the society. In some places we find them defined by their Indian origin, sometimes by the trades practiced

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and, unfortunately, very often by the negative mass-media titles. Moreover, beyond the historical theories and the traditional trades, their personal way of self-identification makes it very difficult to define them by an outsider.

As mentioned above, I searched a lot for a definition of traditional Roma and I found one that would serve the purpose of this research. In my opinion, traditional Roma are those who define themselves as Roma who still respect the moral code of the community, who have a preference for a (semi)nomadic lifestyle or have had such a lifestyle, but they have stopped to travel, either temporarily or permanently, for various reasons (legislation, age or health status).

Of all the Roma nations, for the purpose of this research, I chose to focus on the group of Kalderash. The main reason for this decision is that they still maintain the rules and customs specific to the traditional lifestyle, being recognized by the rest of the Roma (but also by the rest of the society) as the most traditional Roma today, the only ones who still respect the “traditions and values of the community”. In the following, I will give a brief presentation of the Kalderash Roma.

The Roma Kalderash are spread especially in the area of Oltenia, especially in the counties of Valcea, Dolj, Olt, Gorj and Mehedinți. Important groups can also be found in Transilvania but Oltenia is recognized as the area that encompasses most of this subgroup. The name of this group comes from its basic task, the manufacture of boilers. They also spoil these boilers with mower. They also make household goods from aluminum, which they sell through markets or fairs.

As with other Roma groups, the family occupies a special place. The bigger it is, the more it is respected. The head of the family is the man, being responsible for the financial part, while the woman is responsible for the domestic affairs. Regarding the education of the children, each parent is responsible for the education of the same-sex children. The mother teaches the girls the skills necessary for household chores (sewing, washing, cooking), and the boys learn how to make boilers as well as how to be the future head of the family. Being responsible for the education of the children, from childhood until marriage, she has an important educational role to ensure the survival of the group. For this reason, the woman is the conservative element in the social group because she is able to make the traditions reproduce but, at the same time, it can itself be an element of change. As far as the home is concerned, the Kalderash kept their nomadic lifestyle. It should be mentioned here that, although they still declare themselves nomads, we are actually talking about a semi-nomadic lifestyle, characterized more by its economic side and less by tradition.

Being a traditional Roma sub-group, the Kaderash community is a patriarchal one. Due to this, women are often powerless to prevent conflicts, they are excluded from the negotiating tables when it comes to their resolution and marginalized in the post-

conflict reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. More specifically, they are excluded from formal decision-making processes.

This situation is not an isolated one. For example, Bangalie (2011) present the situation of women in Sierra Leone before and after the civil war, arguing that their role changed from not being a part of the decision-making process to a position of respect. Achieng (2015) argues that the Kenyan government failed to address the role of women in conflict management, even if they are directly involved in the conflict. As the case in Sierra Leone, Achieng argues that the inclusion of women in the decision-making process, especially regarding conflicts, increases their efficiency. A conference report of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Women Waging Peace (2002) present the situation of women in Asia, Central America and Africa in the same light like the above mentioned authors, mentioning that women can help a lot the resolution of conflicts both in large-scale conflicts (war) or small-scale ones (community or family conflicts). Closely related with the present study is the study of Ragandang and Ponce (2019) regarding the role of bae (women members of the tribal council) in the Philippines traditional system of conflict resolution despite the patriarchal nature of the tribes.

The Kalderash Roma community has its own way of dealing internal conflicts. Based on the community's code of conduct, Romanipen, it is based around the notion of honor and shame. Being a very close community, its members having strong ties, the conflict resolution process involves everyone. One of the most known practices is the Kris (or Kris Romani), meaning *judgment*.

One dimension of this court of traditional Roma is the role of gender. Until 20-30 years ago, women played a minor, almost insignificant role. More concretely, being a strongly patriarchal community, Roma women could not claim the Kris, regardless of the severity of the cause or the damage/injury. Their families were responsible for seeking judgment. In this situation, the main role was played by the husband, who was the one who went in front of the community and requested the judgment on behalf of the wife. The reason behind this is the fact that, according to the Roma rules, the man is a supporter and defender of the prestige of the family, he acts in the public space and is responsible for the interaction with the outside world. He is also the head of the family and, in this capacity, only he has the authority and decision-making power. More specifically, the husband is the one who runs the family and he is held responsible for all the problems caused in the family. Having such a big responsibility, he has full power of decision over his wife and children. If the request was accepted, the wife played a secondary role, accompanying her husband in the hearings stage and intervening only if the judges requested it. If the woman was a widow, her father played the main role, this being the one who would have seek judgment. In the situation in which she also fathered, the girl's uncle was the one with this responsibility, followed by her brothers.

*Let me tell you how it is, I am old and I know what I say ... the man is the head, he decides, this is how it used to be. In court, we were not allowed, now from the Revolution, things have changed. If anything, you went home to the man, you told him what happened to you and he decided, he would go to them and settle the problem directly or go to the judges. Whatever he did, we weren't allowed to go because this is the law, it's up to the men. Further to the Revolution, it was a little easier for the judges to call us, and then to intervene to convince men that I do not know what, but they do the law, it is up to the man, we are with the children, with the house, we don't really get into it (personal communication, Kalderash woman, 14.06.2017).*

In recent years, women have been allowed to participate more actively at the Kris. More, according to one of the interviewed Roma judges, they played an important role in facilitating the agreement. According to him, it is well known that "Roma women are like fire" and can influence their husbands to accept the verdict given after the Kris or the offer of the other party. For this reason, in many cases, judges rely on the wives of the parties to the dispute to facilitate an agreement or to ensure that they accept and respect the verdict:

*Oh, that there have been cases when women are more involved than the men, there are also cases when in a clan, in a family, I smell, I feel like a judge and I see who is more influential in the family, I get in touch with the woman to help me because I know it's hell in it and can tell a man "Come on, Roma! Let's make peace!" and what the woman says I know the man listens to (personal communication, krisinitor, Tg. Jiu, 06.09.2017).*

Moreover, although the traditional Roma community remains a patriarchal one, women also play an important role in Kris Romani, with some women becoming even judges, with the risk of provoking controversy and opposition from more conservative members:

*Oh, God, we made a judges organization, set up about 7-8 years ago and I told them so, if you go with tradition you will be great. There was a meeting in Bucharest from all the counties, and when I saw that women were in the status, I took and left, and I told the organizer Where have you ever seen a woman judge, to be a judge? The biggest shame for a judge is when you say what judges you are, women judge better than you, a big shame, there is no such thing as women being judges (personal communication, krisinitor, 06.09.2017).*

The Roma woman has also a mystical role inside the community and its conflict resolution methods. More specifically, if the community is not satisfied with the Kris verdict (the reasons may be different, the community knows that the parties are lying or the judges are corrupt, the Kris procedures are not respected and the verdict is delayed), an

old woman can deflect the judgment by “raising her dress in the head “. Such situations derive from two things. First of all, in the tradition of the community according to which the elderly woman is responsible for the curse of anybody, being endowed with this ability, she acquires a very important status as advisor and possessor of many magical, premonitory, reparative and protective values (Grigore, 2008, pp. 79-80). Moreover, older women enjoy the respect of the whole community, an example being that they can smoke in front of men, which is completely forbidden to younger women. Secondly, this ritual is based on the principle of impurity in Romanipen. By showing the lower part of the body (or just simulating this by raising a corner of the skirt), the part considered dirty or impure (maximally), the woman in question transfers this impurity to the entire assembly, the dirt actually meaning contempt and mockery of the community. As a short parenthesis, according to the Roman faith, if a woman passes in front of a man, he will become dirty and unlucky. In conclusion, the judgment (the verdict) is annulled and the one who requested the trial is required to request a new Kris with other judges:

*Only once did it happen, but my great-grandfather used to tell us that it happened quite often ... I was judging some powerful people, no matter why, I gave the verdict, it were five of us, we all thought and judged the same, they didn't agreed and they brought a woman from them, an old woman, and we explained where and how and we see the woman take her skirts and pick them up and pretend we want to hurt the family ... said in our grace look here, judge the bastards again ... and she's gone. I was right, I told you, we were five and we all took the verdict, but we had to close the trial and we left and we left the parties to find someone else because we couldn't anymore (personal communication, krisinitor, Tg. Jiu, 06.12.2017).*

At the heart of Kris's proceedings, from the beginning to the end, is the oath (solax) that the parties and witnesses must take before, during and / or at the end of the trial. Performed in front of the audience, this is a sacred character for the Roma community and has the role of confirming the statements made because, as one of the participants in this study tells us, the gypsies who swore must always tell the truth, because the oath is holy. Due to the fact that the Roma women have mystical powers, the oath is made in the presence of a woman, specifically an elderly one, so that she can curse the one who take the oath in order to prevent a false one.

The need for the oath arises when the judges consider that the statements of the parties are contradictory or there is a suspicion that they lie or hide the truth (lie by omission). In this way, the oath has the role of forcing the Romani Kalderash not to lie because, in their opinion, a crooked oath has only two results, both negative – either a curse that affects the luck and the health of the person concerned, or the shame of it and the whole its families because that is considered maxrime (dirty). More concretely, if a Roma takes a vow and lies or does not respect his oath, the community will punish

him by marginalization and even denigration, both because of the lies and the curse that can affect the entire community.

*Over time we have heard a lot of curses and we are afraid of them, we are afraid ... we have all kinds of ways, may the Devil find you; may God beat you; not to be lucky in life, snakes will eat you ... you know. We are afraid because if he swears badly or the curse is thrown, the sin falls on children, grandchildren and the worst thing for gypsies is the disease of children, ie epilepsy. And it is said that the curse will fall on the children or the one who swore badly and will get sick with epilepsy, and many are scared of this thing, better acknowledge, pay financially (interview, krisinitor, Tg. Jiu, 06.12.2017).*

Coming from the same archaic background as the oaths, the curse (arman) can be considered a form of social control or a method of making the culprit to acknowledge their guilt. As with oaths, curses contain references to things important to the Kalderash community, such as divinity, good fortune or family. According to our sources, the cursed person is considered exposed to a major and permanent evil, both he and his family and, in conclusion, will recognize or tell the truth so that the curse thrown away will no longer have any effect. In this case, as in the case of oaths, the superstitions and beliefs of the community function as a factor of intimidation and prevention of possible deviations or false testimonies. As with the oaths, it's the job of the women to throw the curse on someone because they are the only one who have the mystical powers inside the community.

Gossip is another strategy used by the members of the community to informally manage deviant behavior:

*... when there is a conflict, the women come out first and that one screams at that, that one screams at the other, from both sides and then the community is informed and they have to remove the respective shame, that is to make gypsy fund to it turns out that what is said and heard by the community must highlight the shame ... to prove. ... a suspicion that is or is shouting ... many times the parties that came to trial were not guilty, but if two women were disputed, that one shouted at her, the other shouted at her and had to remove the truth because the community was informed and she said that the other was wrong, she was wrong with this or that and it is a shame for me and she had to highlight the truth, because the community was informed because of a shout that was made by a gypsy woman.*

According to the person quoted above, gossip is all the more important for the Kalderash Roma, as they are part of small communities where the news circulates very fast, especially the bad ones. Being a small community with strong ties between its members, gossip is the equivalent of shame that leads to losing respect in front of other members.

Being started by women, gossip has two functions. First, it functions as a local newsletter, informing the community of a problem in the community. In this case, gossip practically triggers Kris's procedures because the information needs to be proven, and Kris is the most appropriate procedure for this. The second function is to discourage deviation from community rules or conflicts because members are afraid of the situation in which they would become the subject of these rumors, which is considered shameful for them.

## **Conclusion**

As in any traditional community, the Kalderash have their own way of dealing intra-community conflicts. As in any traditional community, this is considered a job only for the men. As professionals in this field, we all know that community conflict management is a process that requires all the members to join and design the best resolution, including women and even children. In our case, the Kalderash are able to see beyond the patriarchal nature of the community and empowered the women with a very important role in this mechanism of justice. Even if it's based on mysticism, it should be judged by its role in conflict prevention and conflict resolution. Being able to curse, needed for oaths and being able to stop a trial (the Kris), we can argue that the Roma women have even more power than the men. Also, based on our sources, they can start a conflict through gossip, the women being the ones who are responsible with spreading the news inside the community. In the same time, the Roma judges started to use their charms and role for more efficient negotiations between the parties involved in a conflict.

I think that the Kalderash woman has another important role in the conflict resolution mechanisms used by the community to solve its internal conflicts. She imposes inherited norms and sanctions, maintains discipline in the family, issues specific expectations about the behavior of the children, referring to the formal orientations that were imposed on her when she was a child, organize the household and, most importantly, is responsible for the childcare. In this light, we can conclude that the following Roma generations will see a growth regarding the role of women at least in matters concerning conflict management because today's women will transfer their experiences and knowledge to the younger generation. If 10-20 years ago, the Roma women was not able to be present at the Kris gathering, now she is able to be a judge which is a very big step forward for this traditional community.

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