

Changing Contexts and Dynamics of Herder-Farmer Conflicts across West Africa

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“Pastoralists have interacted with sedentary farmers for millennia, with established practices of trade and symbiotic production such as grazing of livestock on farmers’ fields before planting seasons. However, both population growth and increasing commodity production have led to the expansion of agriculture on formerly shared grazing lands, and have increased tension and conflicts between these groups in many parts of the world” (Fratkin 1997:246).

Fratkin’s observation also holds true for West Africa, where a growing number of reports in the academic literature and newspapers document violent and frequently fatal clashes between herders and farmers. The increase in the number of these reports underscores the urgency of coming to a better understanding of how and why these ‘ancient’ resource-related conflicts escalate and articulate with other religious, ethnic, and political conflicts.¹ Though we should be careful and heed the caution of Hussein et al., (2000) that it is difficult to substantiate increases in the number and intensity of violent conflicts, the reports of widespread violence between herders and farmers across West Africa, for example in Nigeria and Cote d’Ivoire, cannot be ignored. Nor should we ignore the testimonies of herders and farmers who clearly experience things as getting worse. Moreover, the articulation with religious and political conflicts has led to an increase in scale of herder-farmer conflicts, the 20,000 FulBe herders that fled Nigeria and sought refuge in Cameroon in 2004 are a case in point. Thus herder-farmer conflicts not only have a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of those involved in the conflicts, but they are also disrupting and threatening the sustainability of agricultural and pastoral production systems. And although we have not (yet) seen the same proliferation of firearms among pastoralists in West Africa that we see in East Africa and the Horn of Africa, there is a growing concern that these smaller, low-level herder-farmer conflicts over natural resources will increasingly articulate with other conflicts of interests and lead to intra- and inter-state wars (Bennett 1991; Kaplan 1994).²

¹ As I am writing this introduction I receive emails from different list-serves with newspaper articles reporting on a series of ongoing clashes between herders and farmers in Nigeria, which apparently began with the theft of a cow. It is reminiscent of earlier events, in which tensions between herders and farmers articulated with religious and ethnic conflicts in Plateau State in September 2001 costing the lives of an estimated 10,000 people. The ready availability of this information raises the question of the role of the internet (and new media) in the study of herder-farmer conflicts, as it makes the horrific facts more easily accessible when we are not in the field but not the complexities of these conflicts. The question is how that affects our understanding of the urgency of this issue?

² The articulation of local-level conflicts over natural resources with intra-state wars is not new in West Africa. In the Diffa Department in Niger, located at the borders of Lake Chad and close to Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad, conflicts between Tubu, Arab and FulBe herders over wells articulated with civil wars in Niger and Chad (Thébaud and Batterbury 2001). In the Senegal Valley, conflicts over natural resources between herders, farmers and fishers articulated with other conflicts and escalated into border conflict between Senegal and Mauritania (Homer-Dixon 1999:76-7; Schmitz 1999).

Scholars in the field of environmental security see causal links between environmental scarcity and violence (Bächler 1999; Homer-Dixon 1999). This Malthusian perspective on environmental scarcity and conflicts has been criticized by political ecologists who have rejected the “automatic, simplistic linkages” between environmental scarcity and violent conflicts, and the “crude, essentialized ways” in which environmental security scholars analyze “complex empirical realities” (Peluso and Watts 2001b:5, 15). Political ecologists like Peluso and Watts do not view the environment not as the source of conflict, but rather as “a theater in which conflicts or claims over property, assets, labor, and the politics of recognition play themselves out” (2001b:25). In this perspective, the environment is simply the arena in which social, political, and economic conflicts between different actors are played out.

The papers in this issue suggest that we have to be careful to ascribe direct causal links between environmental scarcity, imagined or real, and herder-farmer conflicts.³ Although herder-farmer conflicts across West Africa manifest themselves as competition over natural resources – e.g., as conflicts over crop damage, the occupation of campsites or the blockage of access to water – the underlying conflicts may not be primarily about resource scarcity, even when participants publicly express them as resource-related conflicts (see, Turner n.d.). Exploring the changing contexts and dynamics of herder-farmer conflicts across West Africa, the papers raise issues that have implications not only for herder-farmer conflicts in the region but also more generally for the management of natural resources in West Africa and elsewhere. The focus on the contexts and dynamics of herder-farmer conflicts allows us to examine why conflicts are more likely to occur in some contexts than others, how they evolve over time, and why some are relatively easily resolved and others escalate.⁴

The papers in this issue build on and complement the recent literature on herder-farmer conflicts in West Africa in several ways (Bassett 1988; Breusers, et al. 1998; Hussein, et al. 2000). Bassett (1988) examines herder-farmer conflicts as local struggles over resource use within the context of the larger political economy (455). Papers in this issue examine local conflicts within the context of the larger political economy of contemporary African states (Chabal and Daloz 1999) but take a more processual approach in their focus on the micro-politics of these conflicts. Breusers et al., (1998) showed that relations and conflicts between herders and farmers were more diverse and complex than is generally assumed, and papers in this issue continue this line of inquiry by considering more explicitly the interests of individuals within groups as well as the complexity of herder-farmer relations.

The papers examine herder-farmer conflicts that involve the largest ethnic and geographically most widespread pastoral group in Africa: the FulBe.⁵ This focus on one

³ This collection of papers came forth out of session on *Changing Contexts of Herder-Farmer Conflicts: FulBe Pastoralists across West Africa* at the ASA meetings in Washington D.C. in 2002 (papers by Dafinger & Pelican, and Moritz) and includes three invited papers (O’Bannon, Tonah, and Turner).

⁴ Or, to put it more poignantly, why and how conflicts over crop damage drive people to murder (cf., Bassett 1988:455).

⁵ The FulBe are also known under the name Fulani (a Hausa term) in the Anglophone literature or Peul in the Francophone literature. Some well known FulBe groups are the Tukolor and Haalpulaar’en in the Senegambia area, the RiimayBe, former slaves, in Mali, and the WoDaaBe in Niger, Nigeria, and Cameroon (de Bruin and Dijk 1995; Dupire 1962; Riesman 1977; Santoir 1994; Schmitz 1994; Stenning 1959).

pastoral group – though a very diverse group in many respects (see, Azarya, et al. 1999; Botte, et al. 1999; Botte and Schmitz 1994; Diallo and Schlee 2000; Dupire 1970; Eguchi and Azarya 1993) – from multiple theoretical and disciplinary perspectives and across multiple geographic and sociopolitical settings affords an in-depth and wide-ranging examination of herder-farmer conflicts in West Africa. In this introduction I will explore some common themes in the papers of this issue and in recent literature on herder-farmer conflicts and raise a number of questions that concern our understanding of herder-farmer conflicts in West Africa.

Competition

Competition over land features prominently in the study of herder-farmer conflicts as Africa has allegedly gone from an abundance to scarcity of land in one century (Berry 2002:630).⁶ In the semi-arid and sub-humid zones of West Africa, for example, where most herder-farmer conflicts occur, population densities are among the highest of the continent and consequently competition over land is often intense, not only between herders and farmers but also among farmers, and to a lesser extent among herders. It is therefore not surprising that herder-farmer conflicts have been characterized as conflicts over natural resources, i.e., green wars (Bennett 1991) or desert wars (Richards 2001).⁷ Scarcity of land and competition there over has been recognized as one of the main causes of herder-farmer conflicts (Bassett and Crummey 2003; Frantz 1975; Gallais 1979; Hjort 1982; Little 2003:164; Toulmin 1983).

However, one cannot assume that scarcity of land automatically leads to an increase and intensification of herder-farmer conflicts; it is important to examine whether and how competition for land and landed resources play out in practice.⁸ Agricultural and pastoral land uses are not necessarily mutually exclusive; herders and farmers frequently use the same lands during different seasons. Dafinger and Pelican (this issue) argue that this ‘sharing’ of land and landed resources is key in containing herder-farmer conflicts. They argue that sharing and low-level conflicts over sharing function as a form of communication between herders and farmers in which access to land and landed resources is negotiated (see also, Hendrickson, et al. 1998:190). Moreover, the direct competition over land between herders and farmers in the Sahel is limited to a three to four month period in the rainy and harvest season (Turner 2004).⁹ In the dry season, after the harvest, when there is no longer a risk of crop damage, herders often take their

⁶ I will not review the literature on competition over land in Africa, which has been done elsewhere more extensively (e.g., Berry 2002; Downs and Reyna 1988; Peters 2004; Shipton and Goheen 1992).

⁷ Richards (Richards 2001) makes a distinction between desert wars and forest wars, in which the former are conflicts fueled by a scarcity of land and the latter are fueled by an abundance of resources.

⁸ Landed resources are ‘part’ of the land, e.g., water holes, trees, plants (Dafinger & Pelican, this issue). Farmers often claim ownership over landed resources through property rights over land; herders on the other hand claim ownership over landed resources, in particular water holes, not through property rights over land, but through labor investment. For herders, land and landed resources are separate; property rights over one do not entail property rights over the other (personal communication, Andreas Dafinger).

⁹ Although this is not always the case – for example, off-season sorghum and irrigated rice are cultivated during the dry season in wetlands in different parts of West Africa – it is clear that there is not always a direct competition between herders and farmers.

animals to farmers' fields to feed on crop residues (but some of these arrangements have come under pressure as farmers increasingly raise cattle themselves). Although the *window of conflict*, the period of direct competition between herder and farmer groups, is limited to the growing season, it coincides with the "hunger period", which means that the stresses of hunger, intensive labor demands, and uncertainties about rains and yields increase the chances of herder-farmer conflicts escalating.

Because of the competition over land and to avoid conflicts in the more densely populated Sudan-Sahelian zone, many FulBe pastoralists are no longer staying in the Sudan-Sahelian zone and have descended further south (Bernardet 1999; Blench 1994; Boutrais 1990; Gallais 1972). No longer significantly constrained by the tsetse fly, the vector of trypanosomiasis or sleeping sickness, due to the availability of new medicines, pastoralists move increasingly southwards to the sub-humid and humid forest zones where growing seasons are longer (or there are two growing seasons). This means that not only the zone of conflicts has expanded, but also that the window of conflict and thus the potential for conflicts has increased. Unlike Sudan-Sahelian, where herders and farmers are more likely to 'share the land' (Dafinger & Pelican, this issue) and engage in mutually beneficial host-client relations, they are less likely to do so in the sub-humid zones (Tonah, this issue) because of a variety of sociocultural differences. As a result, herder-farmer conflicts in these zones of pastoral expansion are often more intense and escalate quicker.

An examination of the herder-farmer conflicts discussed in this special issue shows that not competition for land in general is responsible for herder-farmer conflicts, but the competition for specific key resources that are critical for the sustainability and/or development of pastoral and agricultural production systems, e.g., watering areas, wet lands, fertile lands. In most cases these resources are relatively easy to identify, e.g., shores and riverbeds of Lake Volta in Ghana (Tonah, this issue) or the inland Niger Delta (Turner, this issue) or the lowlands in Northwest Cameroon (Dafinger & Pelican, this issue). However, in some cases, the intensity of herder-farmer conflicts would suggest that it concerns competition over key resources, but it is not evident what these are (or whether the conflict is about access to natural resources at all).¹⁰

Although it is reasonable to assume that a declining resource base is an important factor in land-use conflicts between herders and farmers (Gallais 1979; Hjort 1982), it does not reliably predict or explain these conflicts (Bassett 1988; Peluso and Watts 2001a; Turner 2004). This is underscored by the fact that there are areas in the Sahel with scarce resources and less intense herder-farmer conflicts (Dafinger & Pelican, this issue) and sub-humid areas with a relative abundance of resources but many more conflicts (Bassett 1988:453). This suggests that other factors than resource scarcity play a role in explaining herder-farmer conflicts.

There are more reasons to be skeptical of claims that that herder-farmer conflicts are simply about competition over land. Most conflicts discussed in this issue are over relatively small plots of grazing lands, parts of transhumance routes, single campsites or fields. Although the conflicts are experienced by the parties as threatening, they do not immediately jeopardize the sustainability of their production systems. Moreover, farmers

¹⁰ The problem of identifying key resources stems in part from the fact that there are no absolute criteria; it depends on what herders and farmers themselves perceive as (scarce) key resources *and* whether they perceive alternatives.

generally 'win' the conflicts over land (Burnham 1980a) as their occupation or 'permanent' use of the land gives them an advantage; while herders have the option of moving elsewhere, even if that comes at a cost.¹¹ This raises the question why these conflicts seem to be about such high stakes when there are no immediate threats to production systems?¹² Why are individual herders and farmers so invested in these conflicts? Is the conflict about something else? Honor (Lund 1999; van Donge 1993)? Why do herders, for example, not leave and go elsewhere instead of investing valuable time and money in these conflicts (Moritz, Turner, O'Bannon, this issue)? The questions suggest that the stakes in herder-farmer conflicts are high because other factors – cultural, political, moral – are equally, if not more, important.

The competition between herders and farmers over access to land and landed resources can also be seen as a competition between two different land use or production systems: agriculture and pastoralism. In fact, the competition between production systems has been considered inherent to the co-existence of the two production systems (van den Brink, et al. 1995) and the ultimate cause of herder-farmer conflicts (Hussein, et al. 2000).

However, in West Africa agriculture and pastoralism have co-existed side-by-side for centuries and could also be considered as *one* integrated production system as the two systems have been integrated at multiple levels. At the community level they are integrated through host-client (or host-stranger) relations, often described as symbiotic and mutually beneficial relations between two interdependent communities of farmers and herders (Tonah, this issue, Bassett 1986; de Haan, et al. 1990; Diallo 2000). A classic example of a host-client relation is that between Mbororo (FulBe) herders and Gbaya farmers in the Adamaoua Province of Cameroon, which is institutionalized as a *soobaajo* relation (Burnham 1980b:197-201). Reciprocity forms the basis of this long-term 'symbiotic' relationship, which either party may initiate with small gifts of, for example, kola nuts.¹³ When the relationship is established, more substantive gifts and commodities are exchanged; Gbaya may give sacks of manioc and maize, while Mbororo may give one-year old calves and other items such as radios and bicycles. Both men and women in the respective households engage in reciprocal exchanges. Mbororo women first exchange milk for vegetables with their Gbaya female friends before they sell the remainder on the local market. Mbororo men take entrusted animals from their Gbaya friends with them on transhumance, while the Gbaya build wet season huts for their Mbororo friends on their fallow fields. These host-client relations are critical in the social integration of FulBe pastoralists in agricultural societies and the prevention and resolution of herder-farmer conflicts (Dafinger & Pelican, this issue, Breusers, et al. 1998). However, this is not only true for the host-client relationship. Economic interdependencies, whatever form they take, seem to have a similar effect. Tonah (this

¹¹ In general, agricultural systems are not under threat in this competition over land, save in countries that suffer insecurity and civil war and where pastoralists are the dominant group in power, e.g., Chad, Somalia and Mauritania. In those countries farmers are at a disadvantage as they cannot pack up their fields and go because they are vested in the land.

¹² But see O'Bannon (this issue) who suggests that farmers in Senegal experience herder-farmer conflicts as direct threats to survival given the declining productivity. One development agent long in the field told him that these conflicts are being transformed from ones about aggrandizement to ones about survival.

¹³ Symbiotic is used here ironically as Burnham (Burnham 1980b:201) argues that Mbororo primarily engage in these *soobaajo* relations, which is Fulfulde for 'friend', for political ends.

issue) describes how groups with economic ties to FulBe herders, such as landlords and cattle traders, are more supportive of their presence in Ghana than groups who do not benefit from the presence of FulBe herders.¹⁴

The two production systems are also integrated at a household level.¹⁵ It would be misleading to think of agriculture and pastoralism as two mutually exclusive systems; many pastoralists practice agriculture and as many agriculturalists keep livestock in West Africa. This means that herder-farmer conflicts are not limited to conflicts between people from different communities or ethnic groups. However, since inter-community conflicts are more widely advertised, one could assume that intra-community conflicts are more easily resolved (although there is no data to support this assumption). In the last decades, much has been written about an increasing conversion of the two production systems into different forms of agropastoralism. This *agropastoral conversion* is often supported by development programs, which assume that integration and diversification at the household level is preferable over integration and diversification at the community level (which entails specialization at the household level)(McIntire, et al. 1992; Williams, et al. 1999). In general, development programs are more concerned with improving the lives and livelihoods of sedentary, agricultural populations and thus emphasize the role of animals in increasing the productivity of agriculture through draught and manure, rather than those of mobile, pastoral populations by increasing the productivity of animals in pastoral production systems.

It is unclear whether and how the integration of the two systems affects herder-farmer conflicts. The trend towards 'de-specialization' or greater diversification within production systems means that herders become more like farmers and vice versa. This potentially can lead to an increase in inter- *and* intra-group competition for resources (Pelican, forthcoming). Some argue that the conversion of agropastoral systems has caused increasing competition for farming *and* grazing lands (Horowitz 1987:63; van den Brink, et al. 1995:391) and that the end of *gardiennage* relations in which farmers entrust their cattle to herders also signals the end of a more general mutual trust (de Haan, et al. 1990:58). Moreover, the diversification is often associated with a reduction in livestock mobility leading to increased presence of livestock in agricultural zones during the growing season, which in turn increases the potential for farmer-herder conflict (Turner 1999:647-8). Others argue that the integration of these different land use systems leads to a reduction of conflicts (Bassett 1993; Bassett and Zuéli 2003; Mortimore 1998) because it limits competition to agropastoralists who are members of the same (ethnic) group. However, the conversion of agropastoral systems is also held responsible for the demise of host-client relations as farmers with livestock use the harvest residues and fallow fields for their own animals (Thébaud and Batterbury 2001:70). This would end the economic interdependency of herders and farmers, which is considered critical in preventing conflicts between the two groups. The arguments do not preclude each other, and the conversion to agropastoral production systems could simultaneously increase and

¹⁴ In general economic interdependencies are a good indicator of good relations between herders and farmers, save in the case of cattle entrustment (see, Tonah, this issue). The entrustment relation between herders and farmers is fraught with tension and in many cases creates conflicts as both groups feel exploited by the other (Moritz 2003).

¹⁵ The integration of the two production systems also can also be seen at a regional level as agriculture spreads northwards while pastoralism spreads southwards (Bayer and Waters-Bayer 1989; Boutrais 1996).

decrease the potential of herder-farmer conflicts. It remains thus unclear what the overall effect is of the agropastoral conversion on herder-farmer conflicts.

Culture of Competition

The conflicts between herders and farmers in West Africa are not just simply the outcome of competition between two production systems; in many cases they also come forth out of competition between different sociocultural groups. When production systems are associated with specific sociocultural groups, as is the case in West Africa where herders and farmers generally belong to different ethnic groups, herder-farmer conflicts have greater potential to articulate with other tensions and conflicts. Although it is important not to reinforce ethnically divisive tendencies (Breusers, et al. 1998:359), we cannot dismiss the ethnic dimension of herder-farmer conflicts as ancient or primordial. The ethnic dimension of herder-farmer conflicts has to be studied within the context of the larger political economy because resource conflicts are often expressed as xenophobia, which can be exploited by local and national politicians (Bassett 1988:453-4; Bassett 1993:147; Bernardet 1999).

The association of production systems and sociocultural groups also means that there is a cultural dimension to herder-farmer conflicts. Mahamat Hissène in Bennett et al., (Bennett 1991) argues that many herder-farmer conflicts are caused in part by actions that are part of a cultural repertoire of competition between herders and farmers. In this *culture of competition*, challenges between herders and farmers are motivated in part by beliefs that reflect a deep-seated mistrust between these two groups. This mutual distrust and disdain of the other (and their production system) is an important factor in herder-farmer conflicts. The culture of competition is often rooted in historical events that shaped the relations between herders and farmers (Arditi 2003; Moritz, Turner, this issue). Wars and enslavement of people across the Sahel have resulted in deep-seated and mutual mistrust between herders and farmer groups. In northern Nigeria and Cameroon, for example, FulBe pastoralists participated in the Jihads at the beginning of the nineteenth century and subjected and enslaved non-Muslim populations when they established the Sokoto Caliphate and the Adamawa Emirates. In the Diamaré, part of the Adamawa Emirate in the Far North of Cameroon, this was followed in a hundred-year war between the FulBe and non-subjected groups, including Mundang and Tupuri. The resentment between these groups remains strong today and when conflicts occur the idioms of war and slavery are often used to describe the other group (Moritz, this issue).

The prominence of the culture of competition in herders and farmers strategies does not mean that herder-farmer conflicts can be reduced to an inherent or primordial competition between these two groups. But the history of competition is a resource that groups and individuals can draw strategically from in herder-farmer conflicts. Turner (this issue) notes that the relationships between FulBe herders and farmers in the inland Niger Delta of Mali are conditioned by the changing meanings and social work done by local common property institutions, limited enforcement power of the state, and significant shifts in political and economic power from herders to farmers. Under these conditions, Turner's host FulBe clan in the Delta, the HadankooBe, have adopted a highly confrontational and violent strategy in dealing with conflicts of interest they have

with farmers and other herders – a strategy that is costly both economically and politically. While this strategy can be explained in part by the HadankooBe's drastic decline in power and autonomy and the weakness of the state, the clan's history and intra-clan politics play important roles. While the clan as a whole suffers, certain subgroups within the clan benefit economically and politically from continual conflict as a result of their role as mediators. It is these members that routinely cite past losses of resources by the clan due to weakness and cooperation and argue for the need to maintain the clan's (past) reputation as powerful and independent.

Although mutual distrust and sentiments of disdain between herders and farmers are common across West Africa, tension between FulBe pastoralists and different agricultural groups often remains latent and does not always lead to open conflicts between the two groups. In Burkina Faso, for example, FulBe herders and Bisa farmers co-existed relatively peacefully, although there is some mutual disregard (Dafinger & Pelican, this issue). One of the big questions is how and when mutual distrust leads to open conflict between individual herders and farmers. Even in the 'symbiotic' herder-farmer friend relationship described by Burnham (Burnham 1980b:200), there is a subtext of ethnic tension as Mbororo herders see this relation as a master-servant bond reflecting former slavery relations, this time disguised as friendship. This underscores the fact that herder-farmer relations are multi-stranded in several different ways. Economic ties between different members of the two communities may also have political, social, and religious dimensions, some of which may be positively and others negatively valued. Moreover, these relations may change over time and latent hostility may develop into open conflict.

Interpreting Conflicts

The association of production systems with specific sociocultural groups makes it difficult to determine whether conflicts are indeed herder-farmers conflicts. Herder-farmer conflicts often articulate with other ethnic or religious conflicts. This means that herder-farmer conflicts can be interpreted as ethnic or religious conflicts and vice versa. In his analysis of a violent conflict between Gbaya and FulBe in the Adamaoua Province of Cameroon in 1991, Burnham (1996), emphasizes the cultural differences and the construction of identity in national and global political context, and not that the groups are associated with two different production systems. Conflicts between 'herders' and 'farmers' are thus not always 'herder-farmer' conflicts, although others might have interpreted the Gbaya-FulBe conflict as such.

Similarly one could interpret the jihads in northern Nigeria and Cameroon in the beginning of the nineteenth century as a conflict between herders and farmers. A number of scholars have indeed suggested that the jihad was for a number of FulBe pastoralists more about access to pastures rather than religious reform (Boutrais 1984; Seignobos 2000; Smith 1966). In fact, many of the FulBe revolts that led to the wars in northern Nigeria and Cameroon started as typical herder-farmer conflicts (Mohammadou 1988). For example, the war that resulted in the establishment of the Kalfou emirate started when a FulBe herder shot a Massa farmer who was taking a bath in the river near where his cattle were drinking (Mohammadou 1988:173).

Current conflicts in western Sudan, including the current genocide in Darfur in which Arab Muslim militia on horses supported by the Sudanese government murder, rape, mutilate, plunder, and displace black Sudanese (The economist 2004) as well as the enslavement of Dinka by Baggara militia in Bahr El-Gazal (Jok 2001) are in part perpetrated by pastoralists seeking to secure access to water and grazing areas for their animals. Some would suggest that increasing desertification is a motivating factor in this conflict, supporting the views of Homer-Dixon (Homer-Dixon 1999), but more important than desertification is the active role that the Sudanese government has played in this conflict as other areas that experience 'desertification' or increasing pressure on rangelands do not suffer war and genocide.

The re-interpretation of conflicts is not to suggest that herder-farmer conflicts can be explained by a single factor. On the contrary, multiple factors should be considered to come to an understanding of why some tensions between herders and farmers escalate but others do not. But the problem of re-interpretation raises the question of what makes a conflict a 'herder-farmer' conflict? Are only conflicts over natural resources 'herder-farmer' conflicts or are all conflicts in which the parties identify themselves or are identified by others as such herder-farmer conflicts? Also, how do we know if conflicts are about natural resources, if they are motivated by a 'culture of competition' or articulate with other religious or political conflicts? Could we define herder-farmer conflicts other than by saying they involve herders and farmers?

Herder-farmer conflicts are not explicitly defined in this issue, although most papers implicitly do so by focusing on low-level, small-scale conflicts between herders and farmers over access to grazing lands and campsites and crop damage. In these small-scale conflicts herder-farmer conflicts are relatively easily defined as conflicts between herders and farmers over access to natural resources – leaving aside for the moment the issue of defining 'herders' and 'farmers', which I will discuss later. Defining herder-farmer conflicts becomes more problematic when these small-scale conflicts between a relatively few number of people over natural resources escalate and articulate with other conflicts and tensions.

Methodological Issues

There are a number of methodological problems in the study of herder-farmer conflicts. One bias that affects the study of herder-farmer conflicts is that researchers are often affiliated with one of the parties involved in the conflict, which shapes the research process, e.g., what data is collected and how it is interpreted.¹⁶ The contributions in this issue are written by researchers who have worked primarily with FulBe herders (Moritz, Pelican, and Turner) and primarily with farmers (Dafinger and O'Bannon). Nevertheless, papers on herder-farmer conflicts (including those in this issue) are often written from the

¹⁶ In his book on research methods in anthropology, Bernard (Bernard 1994:100-101) gives the example of Camilla Harshbarger (Harshbarger 1995), who, in a comparative study of herders and farmers in the Northwest Province of Cameroon randomly selected 400 farmers but was unable to do the same with herders because they lived far out of town and her research assistants were unwilling to trek to the herders' camps. This would not be such a problem, were it not that Harshbarger's dissertation topic was herder-farmer conflicts!

herders' perspective, in part because pastoral systems in West Africa are increasingly under threat, but agricultural systems less so (but see O'Bannon, this issue).

Most importantly, the majority of conflicts cannot be observed first-hand and researchers thus have to rely on data from interviews and/or archives. The problem is that this 'secondary' data is often incomplete, contradictory, and reinterpreted.¹⁷ This is a problem with interview and archival data. Archival data only contains a subsection of herder-farmer conflicts; those that make it to court, but not those that are resolved by the parties themselves or never make it to court for other reasons. The problem of underreporting also plagues interview data. In a survey of herder-farmer conflicts in Burkina Faso, Brockhaus et al., (2003) found that farmers mentioned crop damage more often than herders did in the same community. Most likely, herders mention crop damage only when they had to compensate the farmer for damages. They are more concerned about access to grazing lands and water and theft of animals, which, in turn, is of little concern to farmers.¹⁸ The differences in the reporting raise some methodological concerns. One of the implications of Brockhaus et al.'s findings is that it is difficult to collect reliable data on even something as simple as the number of conflicts and assess whether the number of herder-farmer increased or not (Hussein, et al. 2000). However, it is equally challenging to document the more qualitative aspects of herder-farmer conflicts (and changes herein over time). First, one has to consider who's reporting on what, and secondly, one has to consider that perspectives change over time and may reflect people's past, present and future positions and roles in the conflict and/or the community (see Roy, 1994). In the end, many researchers writing about herder-farmer conflicts rely on drawing inferences from contradictory accounts, incomplete information, and partial observations. This is also reflected in the papers in this issue, many of which rely on case-studies to illustrate general patterns and changes in herder-farmer conflicts.

In general, more detailed empirical studies of the ecological contexts of herder-farmer conflicts are necessary to examine the role of environmental scarcity and evaluate the claim that competition over scarce resources is at the base of herder-farmer conflicts or the counter-claim that many conflicts might not be about damages to fields or blocking of cattle tracks but about other concerns (Turner 2004).¹⁹ Vayda and Walters (1999) have argued that it is important to document environmental changes, and not to assume them a priori. I too have long assumed that the expansion of agriculture, establishment of national parks, development of irrigation projects and other agricultural projects have resulted in an increase in grazing pressure in the Far North of Cameroon (Moritz, et al. 2002), although later analyses of the available but incomplete data suggested otherwise

¹⁷ Roy's discussion of her methodology in a study of a conflict between Hindus and Muslims in Bangladesh in 1954 is very insightful: "It is true that the stories I heard in that Bangladeshi village were not about "what happened" (itself a questionable concept). What I heard was how people *saw* what happened, or, rather, how people *remembered* what they saw, or, rather, how they *talked* about what they remembered, or, rather, how they talked *to me* about what they remembered—or, rather, what *I heard* people say to me about what they remembered [italics in the original text]"(Roy 1994)

¹⁸ Differences in reporting can also be noted with regard to the environmental impact of grazing. Whereas farmers hold overgrazing responsible for the expansion of the woody savanna, herders note that the expansion of crop land is in part responsible for the overgrazing (Bassett and Zuéli 1999).

¹⁹ Tom Bassett (in his role as discussant of the panel on herder-farmer conflicts at the ASA in 2002) stressed the need for empirical data, including ecological data, to evaluate whether and how (increasing) environmental scarcity is a factor in herder-farmer conflicts.

(Moritz 2003).²⁰ This does not necessarily mean that my earlier assumption was incorrect, only that without good empirical data we have to be cautious with reaching our conclusions. The lack of ecological data is a concern in the study of herder-farmer conflicts and it remains thus unclear whether there is a greater scarcity of grazing lands, and if so, whether this is due to an expansion of agriculture. When these empirical questions are not addressed, the study of herder-farmer conflicts risks being political ecology without ecology (Little 2003; Vayda and Walters 1999), even though it remains to be seen whether herder-conflicts are not more about politics than ecology (Turner 2004).²¹

A key problem of studying the ecology of herder-farmer conflicts is assessing the availability and scarcity of grazing lands. The difficulty lies in determining the grazing capacity, i.e., the number of animals that can be sustained on particular grazing lands for a determined period. New ecology studies of rangeland vegetation have shown that there is great variation in grazing capacities in time and space, with great fluctuation in rangeland productivity from year to year (Behnke Jr., et al. 1993; Coppock 1994; Little and Leslie 1999). In addition, pastoral systems are characterized by great mobility and flexibility, which makes it almost impossible to demarcate the grazing lands available to herders as they can always pack up and go elsewhere to find forage and water. The bottom line is that environmental scarcity can only be expressed as a relative loss and never as an absolute variable.²²

For comparative purposes it may be easier and more productive to collect data on the institutional context of herder-farmer conflicts. Understanding the institutional context is particularly important if we want to explain the dynamics of herder-farmer conflicts, e.g., why some small-scale conflicts over natural resources are peacefully resolved and others escalate. At the start herder-farmer conflicts are very similar – a limited number of local people involved in minor skirmishes over crops, animals, water, or land – but the papers in this issue show that these conflicts evolve differently depending in large part on the institutional context, which extends beyond the local site where the conflict takes place and includes the regional, national, and international. Dafinger & Pelican (this issue) argue, for example, that the different legal and historical conditions in Central Burkina Faso and Northwest Cameroon shape how local political

²⁰ The appropriation of land in the Far North Province of Cameroon by the state for wildlife conservation and agricultural development projects has diminished grazing lands by 237,500 hectares in barely three decades and this would suggest increasing pressure on the remaining grazing lands. Recent decades, however, have also shown a decline in cattle numbers from approximately 950,000 in 1970 to approximately 640,000 in 1990. Since it is unknown exactly how many square kilometers of grazing lands have disappeared due to agricultural expansion, it remains unclear whether grazing pressure has increased or not. In fact, the net combined effect of the state's appropriation of grazing lands and the decline in cattle numbers actually led to a reduction in grazing pressure at the provincial level from 28 animals per km² in 1970 to 20 animals per km² in 1990 (Moritz 2003).

²¹ Vayda and Walters (Vayda and Walters 1999) have argued that political ecologists pay more attention to politics than to ecology and do not consider the effects of politics on the environment or do not establish that there is actual environmental change. They call their alternative approach 'event ecology', i.e., start with an environmental event (or change) and then work outwards in space and time in order to construct a chain of cause and effect that explain these events or changes (Vayda and Walters 1999:167).

²² See also Homer-Dixon (Homer-Dixon 1999) who emphasizes relative scarcity and deprivation, although in Homer-Dixon's analysis scarcity is always real and never imagined.

systems manage herder-farmer conflicts and subsequently whether minor skirmishes are peacefully resolved or escalate into violent conflicts.

Herder-farmer conflicts range from conflicts of interest in Senegal (O'Bannon, this issue) to violent conflicts in Nigeria in which more than a hundred people lost their lives (Blench 2004). My goal here is not to classify herder-farmer conflicts, which can take many different forms: social tension, avoidance, political action, and violence (Hussein, et al. 2000; Turner 2003).²³ More important than classifying herder-farmer conflicts is the question why and how these conflicts evolve over time from conflicts of interest into violence? A diachronic study of herder-farmer conflicts as evolving and increasingly complex sociopolitical events within continuing changing contexts and shifting patterns of interactions will help us to understand why some conflicts escalate but others do not. Such a focus on the dynamics of herder-farmer conflicts requires a longitudinal approach and an in-depth study of a few case studies, an approach used by most authors in this issue.

The Instrumentalization of Disorder

In the analysis of herder-farmer conflicts, we not only have to consider the institutional context of formal and informal rules, often labeled as legal pluralism, but also the larger institutional context of the neo-patrimonial state, including the balance of power and the logic of the instrumentalization of disorder of the elite, that shape the outcomes of struggles over land between herders and farmers.

The institutional context of herder-farmer conflicts, in particular those directly related to land tenure systems, figures prominently in studies of natural resource management and land tenure systems in Africa (e.g., Benjaminsen and Lund 2001; Berry 2002; Downs and Reyna 1988; Juul and Lund 2002; Shipton and Goheen 1992). Most of the studies focus on agricultural societies, in part because the land tenure systems of pastoral societies are generally not as well defined, unless it concerns access to watering points (but for an exception, see Turner, this issue).²⁴ Pastoralists generally do not own the land and only have usufruct rights over landed resources such as grasses, trees and water. In practice, however, pastoralists' usufruct rights over land and landed resources only seem secure as long as there are no agricultural claims. Pastoral rights are generally trumped by agricultural rights, which is a reflection of contemporary power balance between farmers and herders in national laws, policies and governments.

²³ To determine whether (violent) conflicts between herders and farmers have increased in Africa, Hussein et al., (Hussein, et al. 2000) use a typology of conflicts (conflicts of interests, competition, and violent conflict), but because these types are not well defined or delineated, it is often difficult to distinguish between them. Another confounding factor is that conflicts of interest can evolve into violent conflict.

²⁴ It is important to make a distinction between the tenure systems of East African pastoral systems and that of FulBe in West Africa since the former have territorial sections in which grazing land is 'owned' by tribal sections or sub-sections and the latter do not (McCabe 1990). FulBe pastoralists in West Africa generally have only usufruct rights over grazing lands that are 'owned' by local agricultural communities, traditional authorities or the state. Most grazing lands in West Africa are best described as annual or seasonal grazing areas used by one or more pastoral groups in which land is not held in common and no action is undertaken against intruders (Casimir 1992; Niamir-Fuller 1999).

African states generally have favored the development of agriculture over pastoralism and this ‘farmers bias’ is reflected in their policies and legal systems (Bennett 1991).²⁵ Pastoral usufruct rights over pastures have generally not been recognized in state laws and ordinances as a legitimate form of land use. Under colonial rule, all the so-called ‘vacant and ownerless’ lands were considered public lands to be administered by the colonial government. Practically everywhere grazing lands were considered vacant and ownerless lands and were not protected by law from incursions by farmers.²⁶ These colonial laws and policies continued under independent African rule and today it is still the case in most of West Africa that a farmer who clears grazing lands or campsites has stronger rights over them than herders who have used the area for more than twenty years (Moritz, et al. 2002).²⁷

Development programs have also been biased against mobile pastoralists (Waters-Bayer 1994:34); “often only lip-service is paid to consulting pastoralists [as] consulting them and obtaining their agreement is very time-consuming” (Sandford 1983:260). This critique not only applies to the large-scale, technocratic development projects of the 1970s and 1980s but also to the local resource management programs of the 1990s, which have reinforced the alienation of mobile pastoralists by supporting village claims over territory (Marty 1993:329; Painter, et al. 1994; Turner 1999).

The ideological shift to more participatory approach in development is part of a general transition to more democratic forms of governance that aim at increasing people’s participation in the political process by giving them more control over local resources. This decentralization process, often intertwined with neo-liberal reforms of the economy, has led to widespread political reform across West Africa (see O’Bannon, this issue). It involves the introduction of multi-party democracies and elections and the transfer of decision-making power and control over resources from central government to local levels. And although it remains unclear to what degree there is real decentralization of power (Brockhaus, et al. 2003; O’Bannon, this issue), it has led to an increasing complexity of local land tenure systems in Africa.

Recent literature has focused on the increasingly complex and ambiguous institutional context of land tenure and emphasized the negotiation process over access and control of land (Benjaminsen and Lund 2001; Juul and Lund 2002). Even though

²⁵ Although states (or their agents) have not always supported farmers in their conflicts with herders (see Tonah, this issue), overall state policies have generally been detrimental to pastoral rights over land (Thébaud and Batterbury 2001). Exceptions are Mauritania and Chad, states in which pastoral peoples are represented in government. The government in Ivory Coast has also been supportive of pastoralists, and created a livestock-development agency (SODEPRA), primarily because they were interested in securing steady and cheap meat supply to urban consumers. However, this policy antagonized Senufo farmers in rural Ivory Coast and was in part responsible for the violent escalation herder-farmer conflicts (Bassett 1986; Bassett 1988; Bassett 1993). In Niger, the government aimed at protecting herders’ rights to grazing lands by legislating the designation of pastoral and agricultural zones by drawing a cultivation limit at latitude 15° 10’, but in practice the state did not enforce laws (Franke and Chasin 1980).

²⁶ However, it’s not that herders were expropriated when their grazing lands were classified as ‘vacant and ownerless’ and became national lands, as Van den Brink et al., (van den Brink, et al. 1995:389) suggest, since herders never ‘owned’ the land (and had only usufruct rights).

²⁷ However, one has to keep in mind that there always has been a gap between law and practice. In the Far North of Cameroon, FulBe pastoralists were able to ensure access to rainy season grazing lands through arrangements with traditional FulBe authorities, despite the fact that these lands were officially national lands (Moritz, et al. 2002).

scholars, like Mehta et al. (Mehta, et al. 1999), cover power differences in their discussion of institutions and uncertainty in natural resource management, there is the tendency to focus on the ‘negotiations’ and the ambiguity in rules, rather than on the outcomes (Bernstein and Woodhouse 2001; Peters 2002; Peters 2004). There are, for example, few explicit references to the exploitative side of negotiation, contestation, mediation, and bargaining in the recent literature on land rights in Africa (Benjaminsen and Lund 2001; Juul and Lund 2002). However, a number of scholars have pointed out that there is a pattern to the outcomes of these ‘negotiations’ over ambiguous, overlapping rights over land and landed resources; wealthy, powerful and better connected elite almost always win (Berry 1993; Peters 2002; Peters 2004). As Peters argues that “the positive aspects of ambiguity and indeterminacy in Africa’s ‘land question’ may be over-emphasized to the point of ignoring or deflecting research and policy away from growing inequity in access to and use of land”(Peters 2002:56). She adds “some people have more power to interpret, define, and claim rights” (Peters 2002:55-56).²⁸

The apparent ambiguity and the growing inequity in access to and use of land is the result of a consistent political pattern of the instrumentalization of disorder in the neo-patrimonial state (Chabal and Daloz 1999). Although there is considerable variation across Africa, Chabal and Daloz (1999) have argued “that what all African states share is a generalized system of patrimonialism and an acute degree of apparent disorder, as evidenced by a high level of government and administrative inefficiency, a lack of institutionalization, a general disregard for the rules of the formal political and economic sectors, and a universal resort to personal(ized) and vertical solutions to societal problems”. In their view the African state is an empty façade as the real business of politics is done informally through clientelistic networks. Through these informal politics politicians, bureaucrats and elite instrumentalize the apparent disorder to use the state and its public resources for personal enrichment and support for their clients. African states are called *neo*-patrimonial because in this mode of government, patrimonial practices coexist with modern bureaucracy of Weber’s legal-rational state. In fact, the patrimonial practices can only exist because there is a modern bureaucracy with budgets and laws; public goods that can be used for personal profit (van de Walle 2001:128). However, the fact that the state is ineffective and its formal policy and legislation partially implemented does not mean that the state is not important; the elites associated with the state derive power and resources from the state to pursue their personal goals.²⁹

Individuals in Context

Analysis of herder-farmer conflicts should involve greater analytical attention to what which individuals have to gain from competition over land and landed resources. Papers in this issue examine individual’s strategies, motivations and interests in herder-

²⁸ This shift in focus from rights to power differences in the study of land rights, suggests that it is more appropriate to write of a bundle of powers instead of a bundle of rights (Verdery 1998).

²⁹ Most violent outbreaks against Fulani herders in Ivory Coast occurred during elections in which candidates running for office exploited anti-herder sentiments to gain electoral support (Bassett 1993:147)

farmer conflicts and how these are embedded in particular institutional and historical settings (see also, Peters 2004:278).

O'Bannon and Moritz (this issue), demonstrate the value of an analytical approach that considers economic factors by examining economic aspects of herder-farmer conflicts, and although they do not use formal models, their in-depth case-studies demonstrate the potential of a more 'economic' approach that considers the gains and losses of the different parties in herder-farmer conflicts. Moritz (this issue), for example, argues that authorities purposefully made decisions that would ensure the continuation of herder-farmer conflicts as they had to gain more from the perpetuation of conflict than from its resolution. Moritz argues that similar economic analyses can be made of the actions of herders and farmers. Causing crop damage, for example, is a rational feeding strategy on the part of FulBe herders as sorghum and millet are excellent feed for animals. Farmers, on the other hand, try to maximize their gain or minimize their losses by seeking compensation and punitive damages based on the premise that herders "can afford more" and thus should pay more (Brockhaus, et al. 2003:29). Similarly, herders and farmer engage in mutually beneficial relationships and avoid conflict when it is in their best interest. Burnham (Burnham 1980b:200), for example, stresses the political dimension of the soobaajo relations between Mbororo herders and Gbaya farmers, arguing that Mbororo only engage in these 'symbiotic' relationships in areas where they are significantly outnumbered by the Gbaya. In these areas the soobaajo relationship diminishes claims for compensation for crop damages (Burnham 1980b:200). Another point to consider in these economic analyses of herder-farmer conflicts are changes in the relative value of the gains and losses due to market, institutional or ecological changes. O'Bannon (this issue) argues that declining production raised the value of crops grown, which consequently raised the stakes in conflicts over crop damage. Others have noted that commoditization of crops and production has a similar effect in that it intensifies the competition over land and conflicts there over (Bernstein and Woodhouse 2001).³⁰

Turner (this issue) examines individual actions within historical and institutional context of a leydi, a territory in the Niger Delta, and shows how FulBe herders' choice of a confrontational political strategy is informed by an earlier conflict in which they lost right of first use of flood plain grazing lands. He warns that not all strategies can be reduced to individual self-interest. Turner shows that, despite their impoverished situation, some of the strategies of FulBe herders work *against* their short-term economic interests. A glance at the narratives in Bennett et al., (Bennett 1991) suggest that many conflicts may indeed be motivated by spite and that not economic but political interests play an important role in individual actions. This also illustrates the point made by Peluso and Watts (2001b) that herder-farmer conflicts frequently function as the stage for other conflicts, which are only indirectly concerned with natural resources. Moreover, it also

³⁰ In herder-farmer conflicts, one man's loss is another man's gain (see also, Bassett, 1988:466). This becomes particularly salient when the herders and farmers represent different economic classes. In this context, the loss that a farmer suffers in crop damage is caused by the herder's wealth (Brockhaus, et al. 2003:28-9; Platteau 2000). In a peri-urban village in northern Cameroon where I conducted my dissertation research, most cattle were owned by a few wealthy pastoralists, while most farmers owned nothing, "not even a tail". Not surprisingly, crop damage was a divisive issue, not only because a farmer's loss was caused by a herder's wealth, but also because crop damage further increased the latter's wealth, as sorghum is an excellent feed for cattle. It may thus be fruitful to examine herder-farmer conflicts as embedded in class struggles.

shows that to understand individual actions it is imperative to consider the wider sociopolitical and historical context and changes therein. When political contexts change over time, individuals in competition for natural resources may well decide to change strategies and resort to open conflict if they expect that this may “pay off”, as was the case when Tubu herders in Eastern Niger decided to challenge FulBe herders (Thébaud and Batterbury 2001:76). Similarly, political contexts also change as pastoralists move across borders. Nomadic FulBe pastoralists who went on transhumance to Chad reported that crop damage was more prevalent in Chad than in Cameroon because the political climate in Chad was more favorable for herders than for farmers (see also, Arditì 2003; Moritz 2003), while the reverse was true in Cameroon. As a result, causing crop damage was a political statement of domination east of the Logone River (which forms the boundary between Chad and Cameroon in the Far North Province); while west of the river the same act is more aptly described as a weapon of the weak (Scott 1985). The focus on individual actors – whether they are herders, farmers or those charged with managing these conflicts – makes clear is that even though herder-farmer conflicts seem similar at first, they take on different meanings when one considers individuals’ actions and intentions in context.

Conflicting Interests

The labeling of people as ‘herders’ and ‘farmer’ makes it appear as if these categories are easily and clearly defined and mutually exclusive. The question is who or what do these categories represent? I will examine this question here, not with the goal to define herders and farmers, but to problematize these categories. Definitions will not necessarily increase our understanding of herder-farmer conflicts; in fact, their use may inhibit it. I believe it is more productive to examine the variation within and the overlap between these groups and how these affect the dynamics of herder-farmer conflicts.

The term ‘herder’ is often used to mean ‘pastoralist’ as “those who keep herd animals and who define themselves and are defined by others as pastoralists” (Chang and Koster 1994:9), but the term is also used to refer to the person in charge of the activity of herding, i.e., the person taking the animals to pasture. A similar distinction can be made for ‘farmer’; agriculturalists as those who live primarily off farming or the person cultivating a particular plot of land.³¹ These represent two different concepts of herders and farmers; one refers to people associated with a particular production *and* sociocultural system, the other refers to people involved in a specific economic activity at a particular time and place. Most studies use the two connotations interchangeably and assume that the people herding the animals and working the land are indeed associated with the respective sociocultural groups and production systems, and so terms like ‘herder’, ‘pastoralist’, and ‘FulBe’ are often considered synonymous. And although there is considerable overlap, this is not always the case. In reality it is often more difficult to determine who is a ‘herder’ and who a ‘farmer,’ for example, FulBe who identify as pastoralists may have no animals and make a living by farming, while young men from agricultural groups may work as salaried herders for FulBe pastoralists.

³¹ I prefer to use the term ‘farmer’ instead of ‘peasant’ (cf., Bassett 1988) as most herders can also be labeled as peasants or peasant pastoralists (Salzman 2004).

When we consider how herder-farmer conflicts start – for example, as conflicts over crop damage – it is easy to identify who is the ‘herder’ and the ‘farmer’. In these concrete situations, the herder is the one supervising the animals, while the farmer is the one whose crops have been eaten. But when one examines more closely who else is implicated in the conflict it becomes more difficult to distinguish between ‘herders’ and ‘farmers’. Animals in FulBe herds may be owned by agriculturalists from other ethnic groups, and in most of West Africa, the owner of the animals, rather than the herder, is held financially responsible for damages to crops. This does not automatically mean that agriculturalists who are responsible for the crop damage will take sides with the ‘herder’; they may have stronger social obligations to the ‘farmer’ (see, Breusers, et al. 1998). It is also possible that the ‘farmer’ whose crops have been eaten is a Pullo (singular of FulBe) and depending on his relationship with the ‘herder’ and the larger FulBe community, he may or may not opt to pursue financial compensation for crop damage. These hypothetical, but very real, examples highlight some of the conflicting individual interests within and between groups, and the potential for individuals to align with one or another party (or not at all). In many cases, who is a ‘herder’ or ‘farmer’ depends on with which party people ally themselves in a particular conflict and not on their economic interests or ethnic affiliation (see Tonah, this issue). Because of these conflicting interests, individual alliances can change over time and from conflict to conflict. To understand with which group people ally themselves – and whether they will get involved and ally themselves at all – it is critical to examine people’s interests, including their numerous, and at times conflicting, social obligations.

Breusers et al. (1998), have underscored the complexity of herder-farmer relations showing that relations between FulBe herders and Mossi farmers are multi-stranded and that there are conflicting interests within groups (e.g., not all Mossi farmers have cattle with the FulBe herders). Mossi farmers and FulBe herders do not represent homogenous groups and conflicting interests within these groups have their reverberations in herder-farmer conflicts. In fact, inter-group conflicts may be a way of diverting intra-group social tensions (Breusers, et al. 1998; Turner n.d.) or may result directly from intra-group tensions, e.g., social struggles over the labor process between salaried herders and herd owners in some cases led to an increase in herder-farmer conflicts as salaried herders discredit owners by causing crop damage for which the owner is responsible (Bassett 1994:167).³² It is thus critical to consider conflicting interests within groups to come to an understanding of the changing dynamics of herder-farmer conflicts.

Two papers in this issue discuss inter-generational differences within herder and farmer groups showing that older and younger generations interpret herder-farmer conflict in significantly different ways (Dafinger & Pelican, Tonah). In northwest Cameroon FulBe youth are pursuing more confrontational strategies of political activism

³² Some herders are more likely to be involved in conflicts over crop damage than others. Young, salaried herders working for absentee owners, for example, are often held responsible for crop damage, either because they are less diligent (Bonfiglioli 1985) or because tensions between owners and salaried herders interfere with ‘good’ (opportunistic) herding strategies (Bassett 1994). FulBe in the Far North of Cameroon made a distinction between herders with sticks and herders with families (*gaynaako bee sawru e gaynaako bee saare*). Herders with sticks (*waynaaBe bee cabbi*) are free-wheelers with little interest in their herds and who go from job to job (and patron to patron). Herders with families (*waynaaBe bee caalaaje*), on the other hand, have more responsibilities and are more likely to take good care of the herds than young herders who own nothing but their stick and the clothes on them.

under the slogan 'don't make pulaaku', which refers to the evasive strategies of the older generation (Dafinger & Pelican; Davis 1995). In central Ghana it is primarily farmer youths who are actively pursuing more confrontational and often violent strategies as they are trying to secure access to land competing with herders and commercial farmers (Tonah). Despite (or because) the fact that youth from herding and farming communities in central Ghana know each other much better than their parents do, they often went to school together, they have a more extreme views of the other. This bodes ill for the near future as disenfranchised young herders and farmers may pursue more confrontational and violent strategies than the preceding generation of herders and farmers.

Gender conflicts, particularly within farmer communities, also have their impact on herder-farmer conflicts (Dafinger & Pelican, Turner, this issue). Women practice shifting cultivation on lands near grazing areas and thus suffered more from crop damage because of the location of their fields than their male counterparts and thus had also higher stakes in herder-farmer conflicts (Boutrais 1996: 712-764) (Dafinger & Pelican, this issue). The situation was aggravated when traditional authorities sided with the herders against the women. Women in the grassfields of northwest Cameroon played a key role in mobilizing farmers in a conflict over crop damage that escalated and left eight dead (Harshbarger 1995:54-55). It shows that gender is an important dimension that should not be overlooked in the study of herder-farmer conflicts.

Analytical concern with conflicting interests within communities should also extend to the other parties involved in herder-farmer conflicts. A number of papers in this issue show that we also need to disaggregate 'the state', and not treat it as an abstract entity with a single interest (Moritz, O'Bannon, Tonah, this issue).

The papers in this issue examine herder-farmer conflicts in five countries across West Africa (Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Cameroon) in zones ranging from semi-arid to sub-humid. In addition to this great variety in ecological and institutional settings, the authors raise different theoretical and analytical issues that are critical for coming to a greater understanding of the changing contexts and dynamics of herder-farmer conflicts in West Africa.

Dafinger and Pelican argue that to understand why some herder-farmer relations are more conflictual than others we need to focus on land and landed resources, in particular property rights that shape relations between the two groups. In their comparative analysis of herder-farmer relations in central-south Burkina Faso and Northwest Cameroon, they show that social integration is closely associated with integrated uses of land (i.e., sharing of land), whereas social divisions are also reflected in division of land. The historical context partly explains the different legal systems that either facilitated sharing or dividing land. In Burkina Faso, FulBe herders and Bisa farmers migrated together to the central south approximately 400 years ago and thus are considered both autochthonous, whereas in Northwest Cameroon, Mbororo herders have arrived fairly recently, approximately 100 years ago, and are thus considered 'strangers'. Dafinger and Pelican show that land is not only an economic resource but also constitutive of social and political relations between herders and farmers. Key in the social and political integration of FulBe in Bisa society in Burkina Faso are overlapping rights, in space and time, over land. In Northwest Cameroon, on the other hand, land

rights are exclusive and division of land results in social and political divisions between FulBe and people from the Grassfields. Dafinger and Pelican also argue that the FulBe herders in the two locales follow different strategies of 'voice' and 'exit' in their conflicts with farmers (using Hirshmann's terminology, Hirschmann 1970), which in turn reaffirm the larger socio-political structures that govern land use and inter-group relations.

Tonah argues that one cannot assume herder and farmer groups to be homogenous and that one has to consider intra-group variation. Examining the wider context of herder-farmer conflicts in the Volta Basin in Central Ghana, Tonah shows that the 'farmer' population is a diverse group with conflicting interests. Some of these groups have good relations with recent FulBe migrants to the Volta Basin, while others do not. Stock-owning farmers, landowners, local chiefs, and livestock traders have generally been supportive of FulBe pastoralists in the Volta Basin, while commercial farmers, smallholders, and local government officials have been in favor of forcibly removing these pastoralists from the area. The different perspectives on the presence of FulBe herders depend to a large extent on economic ties. Those who benefit most from the presence of FulBe herders in the area are generally supportive of their presence, either actively or passively. Those who are competing with FulBe herders for land, rather see them go than come. Subsequently, the 'issue of the FulBe herders' also is a source of tension within the 'farmer' community. Although economic ties are critical to good social relations, Tonah points out that not all economic ties necessarily result in good social relations. Entrustment or labor relations between hired herders and stock-owning farmers are fraught with tensions. These relations have also become a contentious issue for the younger generation of herders and farmers who view the arrangements different from their parents. Herder and farmer youths, having grown up and attended school together, are questioning the status quo, as both groups feel that their parents are exploited and taken advantage of by the other. The sentiments of the farmer youths are fueling small-scale herder-farmer conflicts as well as regional campaigns to expel FulBe herders from Ghana.

Turner argues that management of natural resource and conflicts there over have to be studied as political conflicts. Focusing on common property management in the Maasina sub-region of the Inland Niger Delta, Turner shows how common property institutions of the Diina are the product of political struggles within and between different groups of users. In his detailed case-study of one leydi, a territory in the Niger Delta controlled by the FulBe HadankooBe clan, Turner shows that the politics shaping the institutions cannot be reduced to rational strategies of narrow economic self-interest and that historical and ideological factors are equally important in shaping herders' political strategies in Maasina. One pivotal event, in which the HadankooBe lost the rights of first-use to a path into the floodplain in 1962, continues to be experienced as shameful today and as such has a direct impact on their subsequent strategies, which have been labeled by other FulBe herders as confrontational. Historical analysis of the Diina system is important for another reason. When the leyde system was institutionalized only pastoral use of floodplain was regulated but not agricultural use because back then farmers were the FulBe slaves without power. Now this has changed and there is a more balanced power-field. But the lack of effective institutions to deal with conflicts resulting from the competition between agricultural and pastoral use of the floodplain means that there is a need for 'innovative' solutions, which, Turner argues, should come from the groups

themselves and not from outsiders. In a number of ways, Turner draws our attention to how the dynamics of intra-group competition over natural and political resources among herders affects inter-group competition between herders and farmers.

In his case studies of several villages in the Bakel area of the Upper Senegal River valley, O'Bannon shows that recent changes in the political system of the state, in particular decentralization and neo-liberal reforms, have drastically changed the institutional context of herder-farmer competition as well as raised its stakes. O'Bannon argues that the withdrawal of state subsidies, part of neo-liberal reforms, may lead to environmental scarcity at local levels. The withdrawal of financial and other resources from the agricultural sector leads to declining productivity, which in turn raises the value of crops and thus also the stakes of conflicts over crop damage. It is not just land, but, more precisely, the productivity of land that is critical to understanding herder-farmer competition. While neo-liberal reforms have increased the stakes of herder-farmer competition, O'Bannon shows that decentralization has simultaneously reduced the means to manage them and that this likely leads to an increase in conflicts in the near future.

Moritz proposes that in order to come to a better understanding of herder-farmer conflicts and institutional changes in land tenure in West Africa, analysts need to consider more explicitly that individuals are strategic actors who may have to gain from the conflicts. To illustrate his argument, he discusses a conflict between migrant Tupuri farmers and nomadic FulBe pastoralists over campsites in the Far North of Cameroon and shows how traditional and regional administrative authorities, using formal laws and policies of the bureaucratic state, purposefully and masterfully exploited the institutional ambiguity of the land tenure system to avoid conflict resolution as they had to gain more by perpetuation of the conflict than its resolution. Moritz suggests that the informal politics of the elites, politicians and civil servants emerge as the new institutional pattern of land tenure systems in Cameroon.

The literature on herder-farmer conflicts is growing steadily, in particular the 'grey' development literature concerned with conflict resolution and prevention. The intensity and scale of recent herder-farmer conflicts across West Africa underscore that this is an urgent issue indeed. The key to prevention and resolution of these conflicts is greater understanding of its changing contexts and dynamics. The papers in this issue further our understanding of the increasing complexity of herder-farmer conflicts. This introduction also makes clear that many questions concerning the changing contexts of these ancient resource conflicts remain unresolved.

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