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Author(s): Mark Moritz

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

Mark Moritz

Résumé

L'augmentation du nombre de comptes-rendus d'accrochages violents entre bergers et fermiers sur tout le territoire Ouest Africain dans la littérature universitaire et les journaux met en évidence l'urgence de mieux comprendre comment et pourquoi ces "vieux" conflits liés aux ressources s'intensifient maintenant et se rattachent à d'autres conflits d'ordre religieux, ethnique et politique. Bien que l'on n'ait pas observé la même prolifération d'armes à feu en Afrique de l'Ouest qu'en Afrique de l'Est et dans la corne de l'Afrique, on s'inquiète de plus en plus que ces conflits peu sérieux entre bergers et fermiers ne se rattachent à d'autres intérêts et ne se transforment en guerre dans et entre les états. Les érudits spécialisés dans la sécurité environnementale voient des liens de cause à effets entre la pauvreté de l'environnement et la violence. Mais cette perspective Malthusienne sur la pauvreté environnementale et les conflits a été critiquée par les écologistes politiques qui rejettent les "liens automatiques et simplistes" entre la pauvreté environnementale et les conflits violents, et "les façons sommaires et considérées comme fondamentales" dont les érudits de la sécurité environnementale analysent "des réalités empiriques complexes."

Les articles de ce numéro spécial montrent que nous devons faire bien

I would like to thank Thomas Bassett, the discussant for our panel at the ASA meetings in Washington, DC in 2002, for his insightful comments in which he stressed the dynamics and complexity of farmer-herder conflicts as well as the need for more detailed, empirical data. I also want to thank the audience at the Center for African Studies at Stanford with whom I discussed parts of this introduction. Finally, I want to thank the contributors of this issue and participants of the ASA panel for their stimulating papers, which in turn generated many of the questions and thoughts discussed in this introduction. I want to thank Brett O'Bannon, Michaela Pelican, and Matthew Turner for their insightful comments on an earlier version of the introduction.

attention à ne pas imputer des liens de causalité entre la pauvreté environnementale, imaginée ou réelle, et les conflits entre bergers et fermiers. Si les conflits entre bergers et fermiers sur tout le territoire Ouest Africain prennent la forme d'une concurrence ayant pour objet les ressources naturelles — par exemple, les conflits portant sur les dommages aux récoltes, l'occupation de sites de camping, l'obstruction de l'accès à l'eau, les vols d'animaux — le conflit sous-jacent peut très bien ne pas avoir pour origine les ressources naturelles, même quand les participants l'affirment publiquement. Les articles de ce numéro montrent également que si les conflits entre bergers et fermiers débutent de la même façon, — un nombre limité de personnes impliquées dans une dispute locale à propos de récoltes, d'animaux, d'eau ou de terrain — ils évoluent très différemment selon le contexte qui, lui, dépasse les problèmes locaux et englobe les problèmes régionaux, nationaux et internationaux. Dans leur examen du contexte socio-politique complexe faisant toile de fond aux conflits entre fermiers et bergers, les articles soulignent l'importance de se concentrer sur les différences à l'intérieur des groupes et les intérêts divergents des partis impliqués. Cette approche analytique aux conflits entre fermiers et bergers est indispensable si l'on veut comprendre pourquoi certains accrochages s'intensifient jusqu'à devenir conflit général violent et pourquoi d'autres sont résolus dans le calme. Les questions théoriques et analytiques soulevées dans ces articles ont également des implications sur la gestion d'autres ressources naturelles en Afrique et ailleurs.

Introduction

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).

Elliot 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 Although we

should be careful and heed the caution of Hussein, Sumberg and Seddon (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, such as 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 farmer-herder conflicts, the twenty thousand Fulße herders who fled Nigeria and sought refuge in Cameroon in 2004 are a case in point. Thus, farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder 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

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 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 articles in this special issue of the *Canadian Journal of African Studies* suggest that we have to be careful to ascribe direct causal links between environmental scarcity, imagined or real, and farmer-herder conflicts.³ Although farmer-herder conflicts across

West Africa manifest themselves as competition over natural resources — such 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 no date). Exploring the changing contexts and dynamics of farmer-herder conflicts across West Africa, the articles raise issues that have implications not only for farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder 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 articles in this issue build on and complement the recent literature on farmer-herder conflicts in West Africa (Bassett 1988; Breusers, Nederlof and van Rheenenet 1998; Hussein, Sumberg and Seddon 2000) in several ways. Thomas Bassett (1988, 455) examines farmer-herder conflicts as local struggles over resource use within the context of the larger political economy. Articles 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, Nederlof and van Rheenen (1998) showed that relations and conflicts between farmers and herders were more diverse and complex than is generally assumed, and articles in this issue continue this line of inquiry by considering more explicitly the interests of individuals within groups as well as the complexity of farmer-herder relations.

The articles examine farmer-herder conflicts that involve the largest ethnic and geographically most widespread pastoral group in Africa: the Fulße.⁵ This focus on one pastoral group — though a very diverse group in many respects (see Azarya *et al.* 1999; Botte, Boutrais et Schmitz 1999; Botte et Schmitz 1994; Diallo et 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 farmer-herder conflicts in West Africa. This introduction explores some common themes in the articles of this issue and in recent literature on farmer-herder conflicts and raise a number of questions that concern our understanding of farmer-herder conflicts in West Africa.

Competition

Competition over land features prominently in the study of farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder conflicts have been characterized as conflicts over natural resources, that is, as green wars (Richards 2001).⁷ Scarcity of land and competition has been recognized as one of the main causes of farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder 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. Andreas Dafinger and Michaela Pelican (this issue) argue that this "sharing" of land and landed resources is key in containing farmer-herder 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, Armon and Mearns 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

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 farmer-herder 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 that the zone of conflicts has expanded, but also that the window of conflict and thus the potential for conflicts has increased. In Sudan-Sahelian herders and farmers are more likely to "share the land" (Dafinger and Pelican in this issue) and engage in mutually beneficial host-client relations. However, Fulbe pastoralists are less likely to share in the sub-humid zones (Tonah in this issue) because of a variety of sociocultural differences. As a result, farmer-herder conflicts in these zones of pastoral expansion are often more intense and escalate quicker.

An examination of the farmer-herder conflicts discussed in this special issue shows that it is not competition for land in general that is responsible for farmer-herder conflicts, but the competition for specific key resources that are critical for the sustainability and/or development of pastoral and agricultural production systems, such as watering areas, wet lands, fertile lands. In most cases these resources are relatively easy to identify, such as shores and riverbeds of Lake Volta in Ghana (Tonah in this issue) or the inland Niger Delta (Turner in this issue) or the lowlands in Northwest Cameroon (Dafinger and Pelican in this issue). In some cases, the intensity of farmer-herder conflicts would suggest that they concern competi-

tion over key resources, but it is not evident what these resources 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), this fact 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 farmer-herder conflicts (Dafinger and Pelican in this issue) and sub-humid areas with a relative abundance of resources but many more conflicts (Bassett 1988, 453). This suggests that factors other than resource scarcity play a role in explaining farmer-herder conflicts.

There are more reasons to be skeptical of claims that that farmer-herder 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 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 as to 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, and O’ Bannon in this issue)? The questions suggest that the stakes in farmer-herder 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 produc-

tion systems (van den Brink, Bromley and Chavas 1995) and the ultimate cause of farmer-herder conflicts (Hussein, Sumberg and Seddon 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 in this issue; Bassett 1986; de Haan, van Driel and Kruithof 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 farmer-herder conflicts (Dafinger and Pelican in this issue; Breusers, Nederlof and van Rheenen 1998). However, this is not only true for the host-client relationship. Economic interdependencies, whatever form they take, seem to have a similar effect. Steve Tonah (this 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 farmer-herder 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, Bourzat and Pingali 1992; Williams, Hiernaux and Fernández-Rivera 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 farmer-herder conflicts. The trend towards “de-specialization” or greater diversification within production systems means that herders become more like farmers and vice versa. This can potentially lead to an increase in inter- and intra-group competition for resources (Pelican 2006). Some argue that the conversion of agropastoral systems has caused increasing competition for farming and grazing lands (Horowitz 1987, 63; van den Brink, Bromley and Chavas 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, van Driel and Kruithof 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, 647-48). 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). The demise of host-client relations 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 decrease the potential of farmer-herder conflicts. It remains thus unclear what the overall effect is of the agropastoral conversion on farmer-herder 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, farmer-herder conflicts have greater potential to articulate with other tensions and conflicts. Although it is important not to reinforce ethnically divisive tendencies (Breusers, Nederlof and van Rheenen 1998, 359), we cannot dismiss the ethnic dimension of farmer-herder conflicts as ancient or primordial. The ethnic dimension of farmer-herder 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, 453-54; Bassett 1993, 147; Bernardet 1999).

The association of production systems and sociocultural groups also means that there is a cultural dimension to farmer-herder conflicts. Mahamat Hissène (in Bennett 1991) argues that many farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder conflicts. The culture of competition is often rooted in historical events that have shaped the relations between herders and farmers (Arditi 2003; Moritz and Turner in 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, Fulße 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 by a hundred-year war between the Fulße 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 in this issue).

The prominence of the culture of competition in herders' and farmers' strategies does not mean that farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder conflicts. Matthew Turner (in this issue) notes that the relationships between Fulße 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 Fulße clan in the Delta, the Hadankooße, 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 Hadankooße'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. These members 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 Fulße 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, Fulße herders and Bisa farmers have co-existed relatively peacefully, although there is some mutual disregard (Dafinger and Pelican in 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" farmer-herder friend relationship described by Philip 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 farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder conflicts. Farmer-herder conflicts often articulate with other ethnic or religious conflicts. This means that farmer-herder conflicts can often be interpreted as ethnic or religious conflicts and vice versa. In his analysis of a violent conflict between Gbaya and Fulße in the Adamaoua Province of Cameroon in 1991, Burnham (1996), emphasizes the cultural differences and the construction of identity in a 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 “farmer-herder” conflicts, although others might have interpreted the Gbaya-Fulße 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 Fulße pastoralists more about access to pastures rather than religious reform (Boutrais 1984; Seignobos 2000; Smith 1966). In fact, many of the Fulße revolts that led to the wars in northern Nigeria and Cameroon started as typical farmer-herder conflicts. For example, the war that resulted in the establishment of the Kalfou emirate started when a Fulße 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 the Janjaweed militia on horses, supported by the Sudanese government, murder, rape, mutilate, plunder, and displace local populations (“Fleeing the Horsemen Who Kill...”), 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 Thomas Homer-Dixon (1999). More important than desertification though 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 farmer-herder 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: What makes a conflict a “farmer-herder” conflict? Are only conflicts over natural resources “farmer-herder” conflicts or are all conflicts in which the parties identify themselves or are identified by others as such farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder conflicts other than by saying they involve herders and farmers?

Farmer-herder conflicts are not explicitly defined in this issue, although most articles 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 farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder conflicts. One bias that affects the study of farmer-herder conflicts is that researchers are often affiliated with one of the parties involved in the conflict which in turn shapes the research process; for example, what data is collected and how it is interpreted.¹⁶ The contributions in this issue are written by researchers who have worked primarily with Fulße herders (Moritz, Dafinger and Pelican, and Turner) and farmers (Dafinger and O'Bannon). Nevertheless, studies of farmer-herder conflicts (including those in this issue) are often written from the herders' perspective. In part, this is because pastoral systems in West Africa are increasingly under threat, but agricultural systems less so (but see O'Bannon in 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 with this 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 farmer-herder 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 underre-

porting also plagues interview data. In a survey of farmer-herder conflicts in Burkina Faso, Brockhaus, Pickard and Rischkowsky (2003) find 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. Herders 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 the findings of Brockhaus, Pickard and Rischkowsky (2003) 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 farmer-herder conflicts increased or not (Hussein, Sumberg and Seddon 2000). However, it is equally challenging to document the more qualitative aspects of farmer-herder conflicts (and changes herein over time). First, one has to consider who is reporting on what; and second, 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 farmer-herder conflicts rely on drawing inferences from contradictory accounts, incomplete information, and partial observations. This is also reflected in the articles in this issue, many of which rely on case-studies to illustrate general patterns and changes in farmer-herder conflicts.

In general, more detailed empirical studies of the ecological contexts of farmer-herder conflicts are necessary to examine the role of environmental scarcity and evaluate the claim that competition over scarce resources is at the base of farmer-herder 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, Scholte and Kari 2002), although later analyses of the available (but incomplete) data

suggested otherwise (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 in reaching our conclusions. The lack of ecological data is a concern in the study of farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder conflicts risks being political ecology without ecology (Little 2003; Vayda and Walters 1999), even though it remains to be seen if herder-conflicts are not more about politics than they are about ecology (Turner 2004).²¹

A key problem in studying the ecology of farmer-herder 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., Scoones and Kerven 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 farmer-herder conflicts. Understanding the institutional context is particularly important if we want to explain the dynamics of farmer-herder conflicts, for example, why some small-scale conflicts over natural resources are peacefully resolved and why others escalate. At the start, farmer-herder conflicts are very similar — a limited number of local people involved in minor skirmishes over crops, animals, water, or land — but the articles 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 to regional, national, and international levels. Dafinger and

Pelican (in this issue) argue, for example, that the different legal and historical conditions in Central Burkina Faso and Northwest Cameroon shape how local political systems manage farmer-herder conflicts and subsequently whether minor skirmishes are peacefully resolved or escalate into violent conflicts.

Farmer-herder conflicts range from conflicts of interest in Senegal (O'Bannon in this issue) to violent conflicts in Nigeria in which more than a hundred people lose their lives (Blench 2004). My goal here is not to classify farmer-herder conflicts, which can take many different forms (social tension, avoidance, political action, and violence) (Hussein, Sumberg and Seddon 2000; Turner 2003).²³ More important than such classification is the question of why and how these conflicts evolve over time from conflicts of interest into violence. A diachronic study of farmer-herder conflicts as evolving and increasingly complex sociopolitical events within continually changing contexts and shifting patterns of interaction will help us to understand why some conflicts escalate but others do not. Such a focus on the dynamics of farmer-herder conflicts requires a longitudinal approach and the 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 farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder conflicts, in particular those directly related to land tenure systems, figures prominently in studies of natural resource management and land tenure systems in Africa (see 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 access to watering points is a concern (but for an exception,

see Turner in 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 the contemporary power balance between farmers and herders in national laws, policies, and governments.

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, Scholte and Kari 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, Sumberg and Price 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 in this issue). This reform 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. Although it remains unclear to what degree there is real decentralization of power (Brockhaus, Pickard and Rischkowsky 2003; O'Bannon in this issue), reform 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 scholars, like Mehta *et al.* (1999), cover power differences and uncertainty in natural resource management in their discussion of institutions, 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, 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, 2004). Pauline 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" (2002, 56). She also mentions that "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 have argued:

... 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 (1999, xix).

In their view, the African state is an empty façade and the real business of politics is done informally through clientelistic networks. Through these informal politics politicians, bureaucrats and elites 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 the 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 it to pursue their personal goals.²⁹

Individuals in Context

Analysis of farmer-herder conflicts should involve greater analytical attention to what individuals have to gain from competition over land and landed resources. Articles in this issue examine the strategies, motivations, and interests of individuals in farmer-herder conflicts and how these are embedded in particular institutional and historical settings (see also Peters 2004, 278).

Brett O'Bannon and I (in this issue) demonstrate the value of an analytical approach that considers economic factors by examining economic aspects of farmer-herder conflicts, and although they do not use formal models, their in-depth case-studies demonstrate the potential of an "economic" approach that considers the gains and losses of the different parties in farmer-herder conflicts. For example, I (in this issue) argue that authorities purposefully made decisions that would ensure the continuation of farmer-herder conflicts as they had to gain more from the perpetuation of conflict than from its

resolution. He 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 Fulße 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, Pickard and Rischkowsky 2003, 29). Similarly, herders and farmers often engage in mutually beneficial relationships and avoid conflict when it is in their best interest. 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. Another point to consider in these economic analyses of farmer-herder conflicts are changes in the relative value of the gains and losses due to market, institutional, or ecological changes. O'Bannon (in 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 (in this issue) examines individual actions within the historical and institutional context of a *leydi*, a territory in the Niger Delta, and shows how Fulße herders' choice of a confrontational political strategy is informed by an earlier conflict in which they lost the 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 Fulße herders work against their short-term economic interests. A glance at the narratives in Olivia Bennett's *Greenwar* (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 farmer-herder conflicts frequently function as the stage for other conflicts, which are only indirectly concerned with natural

resources. Moreover, 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 approach 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 Arditi 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). What the focus on individual actors — whether they are herders, farmers or those charged with managing these conflicts — makes clear is that even though farmer-herder 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 of defining herders and farmers, but to problematize these categories. Definitions will not necessarily increase our understanding of farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder conflicts.

The term “herder” is often used to mean “pastoralist”: “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,

that is, the person taking the animals to pasture. A similar distinction can be made for "farmer"; agriculturalists are 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 "Fulße" 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, Fulße 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 Fulße pastoralists.

When we consider how farmer-herder conflicts start — as conflicts over crop damage, for example — it is easy to identify who is the herder and who is 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 herder and farmer. Animals in Fulße 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, Nederlof and van Rheenen 1998). It is also possible that the farmer whose crops have been eaten is a Pullo (singular of Fulße) and depending on his relationship with the herder and the larger Fulße 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" and who is a "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 why people ally themselves with certain groups — and whether they will get involved and ally themselves at all — it is critical to examine their interests, including their numerous, and at times conflicting, social obligations.

Breusers, Nederlof and van Rheenen (1998), have underscored the complexity of farmer-herder relations and shown that relations between Fulße herders and Mossi farmers are multi-stranded and that there are conflicting interests within groups (for example, not all Mossi farmers have cattle with the Fulße herders). Mossi farmers and Fulße herders do not represent homogenous groups and conflicting interests within these groups have their reverberations in farmer-herder conflicts. In fact, inter-group conflicts may be a way of diverting intra-group social tensions (Breusers, Nederlof and van Rheenen 1998; Turner no date) or may result directly from intra-group tensions, such as social struggles over the labor process between salaried herders and herd owners in some cases leads to an increase in farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder conflicts.

Two articles in this issue discuss inter-generational differences within herder and farmer groups showing that older and younger generations interpret farmer-herder conflict in significantly different ways (Dafinger and Pelican and Tonah). In northwest Cameroon Fulße youth are pursuing more confrontational strategies of political activism under the slogan "don't make pulaaku," which refers to the evasive strategies of the older generation (Dafinger and Pelican; Davis 1995). In central Ghana, primarily farmer youths are actively pursuing more confrontational and often violent strategies as they are trying to secure access to land in competition with herders and commercial farmers (Tonah in this issue). Despite (or because of) the

fact that youth from herding and farming communities in central Ghana know each other much better than their parents do — they often attend school together — they often have a more extreme view 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 an impact on farmer-herder conflicts (Dafinger and Pelican and Turner in this issue). Women practice shifting cultivation on lands near grazing areas and thus suffer more from crop damage because of the location of their fields than their male counterparts and thus had also higher stakes in farmer-herder conflicts (Boutrais 1996, 712-64; Dafinger and Pelican in 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). This shows that gender is an important dimension that should not be overlooked in the study of farmer-herder conflicts.

Analytical concern with conflicting interests within communities should also extend to the other parties involved in farmer-herder 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, and Tonah in this issue).

Conclusion

The articles in this issue examine farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder conflicts in West Africa.

Dafinger and Pelican argue that to understand why some farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder relations in central-south Burkina Faso and Northwest Cameroon, they show that social integration is closely associated with integrated uses of land (that is, sharing of land), whereas social divisions are also reflected in the 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 four hundred years ago and thus are considered both autochthonous, whereas in Northwest Cameroon, Mbororo herders have arrived fairly recently, approximately one hundred 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 [1970] terminology), which in turn re-affirm 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 farmer-herder 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 Fulße herders for land, would rather see them go than come. Subsequently, the "issue of the Fulße herders" is also 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 differently 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 farmer-herder conflicts as well as regional campaigns to expel Fulße herders from Ghana.

Turner argues that management of natural resources 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 Fulße Hadankooße 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 Hadankooße 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 Fulße 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, at that time, farmers were the Fulße 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 flood-

plain 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 farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder competition. While neo-liberal reforms have increased the stakes of farmer-herder 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.

I (in this issue) propose that in order to come to a better understanding of farmer-herder 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 my argument, I discuss 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. I suggest 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 farmer-herder conflicts is growing steadily, in

particular the “grey” development literature concerned with conflict resolution and prevention. The intensity and scale of recent farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder conflicts. This introduction also makes clear that many questions concerning the changing contexts of these ancient resource conflicts remain unresolved.

Notes

¹ While writing this introduction, I received 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. This 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 ten thousand people. The ready availability of this information raises the question of the role of the internet (and new media) in the study of farmer-herder conflicts, as it serves to make the horrific facts more easily accessible when we are not in the field but not the complexities of these conflicts. The question is how this new technology 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 Fulße 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).

³ This collection of articles came forth out of session on “Changing Contexts of Herder-Farmer Conflicts: Fulße Pastoralists across West Africa” at the ASA meetings in Washington DC in 2002 (papers by Dafinger and 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 (see Bassett 1988, 455).

⁵ The Fulße are also known under the name Fulani (a Hausa term) in the Anglophone literature or Peul in the Francophone literature. Some well known Fulße 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).

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

⁷ 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, such as water holes, trees, plants (Dafinger and Pelican in 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.

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.

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, such as 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 (in this issue) who suggests that farmers in Senegal experience farmer-herder 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 (1980b, 201) argues that Mbororo primarily engage in these *soobaajo* relations, which is Fulfulde for "friend," for political ends.

¹⁴ In general, economic interdependencies are a good indicator of good relations between herders and farmers, save in the case of cattle entrustment (see in Tonah in 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 can also be seen at a

regional level as agriculture spreads northwards while pastoralism spreads southwards (Bayer and Waters-Bayer 1989; Boutrais 1996).

¹⁶ In his book on research methods in anthropology, Bernard (1994, 100-01) gives the example of Camilla Harshbarger (1995), who, in a comparative study of herders and farmers in the Northwest Province of Cameroon randomly selected four hundred 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 their camps. This would not be such a problem, were it not that Harshbarger's dissertation topic was farmer-herder conflicts!

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 [emphasis in the original] (1994, 5).

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 Thomas Bassett (in his role as discussant of the panel on farmer-herder 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 farmer-herder conflicts.

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 twenty-eight animals per square kilometer in 1970 to twenty animals per square kilometer in 1990 (Moritz 2003).

²¹ 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," that is, they

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 (1999) who emphasizes relative scarcity and deprivation. Although in his analysis scarcity is always real and never imagined.

²³ To determine whether (violent) conflicts between herders and farmers have increased in Africa, Hussein, Sumberg and Seddon (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 Fulße 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). Fulße 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).

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 of farmer-herder conflicts (Bassett 1986, 1988, 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'; in practice though, the state did not enforce laws (Franke and Chasin 1980).

²⁶ However, it is not that herders were expropriated when their grazing lands were classified as "vacant and ownerless" and became national lands, as Van den Brink, Bromley and Chavas (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, Fulße pastoralists were able to ensure access to rainy season grazing lands through arrangements with traditional Fulße authorities, despite the fact that these lands

were officially national lands (Moritz, Scholte and Kari 2002).

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)

³⁰ In farmer-herder 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, Pickard and Rischkowsky 2003, 28-29; 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 farmer-herder conflicts as embedded in class struggles.

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

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). Fulße 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 cabb*) 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 their backs.

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