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The Politics of Exclusion: the expulsion of Fulbe pastoralists from Ghana in 1999/2000

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Abstract

This paper discusses the expulsion of Fulbe nomadic pastoralists from Ghana in 1999 and 2000. The migration of the Fulbe from the savanna region to the fringes of the humid-tropical zone and its implications for pastoral livelihood is examined. The interests of individuals and groups in the host communities and how these interests have influenced their predisposition to the presence of the Fulbe in their localities are also discussed. The paper also examines the relationship between the state and nomadic pastoralists at both the national and the local levels. Finally, the paper takes a critical look at the rationale for the expulsion action and assesses the success of the action and the consequences for both the Fulbe and their hosts.

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Introduction

Fulbe pastoralists have had a rather chequered relationship with post-colonial governments in many West African countries. Governments in the sub-region have, on the one hand, provided pastoralists with infrastructural facilities, including wells, mobile schools, clinics, veterinary facilities and literacy projects; a fact that has endeared the governments to many pastoralists in the region. On the other hand, attempts by some post-colonial governments to bring pastoral groups under a centralised political administration have created animosities between the pastoralists and governments in the sub-region. Furthermore, the various governments' quest to strictly monitor the movement of pastoralists across national borders, the introduction of livestock taxes and forced sedentarisation of pastoral groups have also contributed to an estranged relationship between pastoralists and governments in West Africa (Berg 1975; Frantz 1990: 317-8). In countries where permanent pastoral settlements are a more recent phenomenon (dating back only to the early 20th century), the relationship between pastoralists and governments are even more strained. This is the case in Ghana where, despite the growing Fulbe presence in the northern parts of the country, the rationale for nomadic pastoralism is little appreciated and understood by both the government and large sections of the population (Schlee 1997: 10-12).

The policy of forcibly expelling immigrants to their supposed countries of origin is widely applied in many countries in West Africa. Such expulsion actions have often occurred in times of economic difficulties in the host country or as a result of conflict between migrants and the host communities. In 1969 the Ghanaian government enacted a law (the "Alien Compliance Order") mandating all aliens to regularise their stay in the country. Those without residence permits were ordered to leave the country within fourteen days. Nationals of several West African countries, many of whom had come to look for greener pastures in post-independence Ghana were expelled from the country. Similarly, in 1983 the Nigerian government expelled all foreigners in the country, forcing millions of West Africans to flee to neighbouring countries. Such expulsion actions have also been carried out in Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Mauritania and the warring countries of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. To justify such expulsions, governments have typically labelled these migrants as "aliens" or "foreigners" (Hagberg 2000: 170-1; Oppong 2002: 20-27).

Virtually all of these expulsions (whether carried out under government orders or through the

illegal actions of specific groups) have occurred in periods during which the countries were facing severe economic problems, rising crime waves and high unemployment. The typical pattern has been for countries to actively recruit migrants (including many trained and untrained professionals) during periods of economic boom, blame part of the migrant community for any economic downturn and the accompanying social upheavals and then organise the expulsion of such migrants, usually to appease pressure groups within the country (Brydon 1985; Peil 1974: 367-8).

Pastoralists in West Africa have been victims of such erratic government policies and have often not been spared the ordeal of such expulsion actions. Fulbe migrants from Guinea were welcomed to neighbouring Sierra Leone in periods of economic prosperity at the beginning of the 20th century. However, when economic depression set in during the 1920s and 30s, the government decided to curtail their immigration and sent them back to Guinea. In 1988/89, Fulbe pastoralists in Ghana were expelled from the country following repeated clashes between the pastoralists and parts of the farming population. The Senegalese government also expelled Fulbe pastoralists in 1989 as a result of conflicts between the Fulbe and the local farming population (Kposowa 2000: 303-4; Schmitz 1999: 329-30).

This study analyses the expulsion of Fulbe pastoralists from the Atebubu District, in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana in 1999 and 2000. It begins by tracing the migration of Fulbe pastoralists from the Sahelian region to the Sudan savanna areas of Ghana during the early 20th century and examines their gradual penetration into the Guinea savanna zone and the fringes of the tropical forest. The relationship between the pastoral Fulbe and their mainly agricultural and agro-pastoral hosts is examined and factors accounting for the increasing animosity between the two groups are also analysed. Finally, the paper takes a critical look at the rationale for expelling the Fulbe and assesses the effectiveness of the expulsion actions and the consequences for both the Fulbe and the indigenous population.

Research Methodology

In June 1999 the Ghanaian government expelled Fulbe pastoralists from the country. This was the second time within a decade that the Fulbe had been ordered out of the country. The first expulsion action was carried out in 1988.² The implementation of the current expulsion action was left however to the discretion of the various regional and district administrations. The district administrations were mandated “to examine their local situation and adopt effective and efficient measures to curb the menace of nomadic pastoralism” in their area. In the Atebubu District, the expulsion action commenced in July 1999 and was carried out intermittently until September 2000. Research work for this paper was carried out between June and September 2000 in Atebubu, Prang and Yeji in the Atebubu District/Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana. Further follow-up research work was carried out in the same area in June and July 2001 to review the impact of the expulsion action on the Fulbe.

The primary method of inquiry utilised was participant observation. The author spent three months observing Fulbe pastoral activities along the banks of Lake Volta in the area between Prang and Yeji. The assistance of the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture was instrumental in establishing a rapport with Fulbe pastoralists and the executives of the District Livestock Association. The executive members of the Livestock Association later introduced the author to some opinion leaders in the district. These included cattle dealers, local stockowners, traders and other key players in the livestock business. 35 Fulbe households consisting of 15 recent migrants and 20 well-established households were closely observed in their settlement camps, at the main market centres and during their seasonal migratory movements. The activities of the security taskforce sent to the district to enforce the expulsion order were regularly monitored. Interviews were held with the staff of the Agricultural Extension Office, officials of the District Administration, security personnel and development workers in the district. Focus group discussions were also held with the executives and members of the Livestock Farmers Association in Yeji, Prang and Atebubu.

² See Tonah (1993: 127-136) for a detailed assessment of the expulsion of the Fulbe from Ghana in 1988/89.

The Study Area

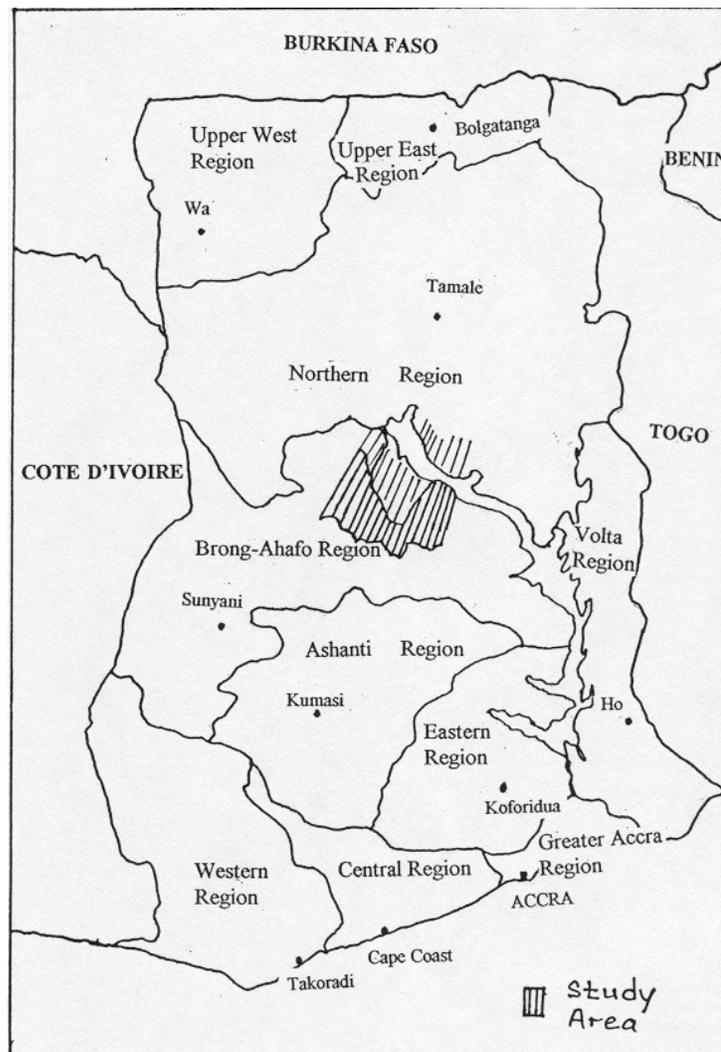
The Atebubu District is located in the middle of Ghana and is, in administrative terms, of the Brong Ahafo Region (see map below). The district has a surface area of about 5,990 square kilometres and lies in the transitional zone between the savanna in the north and the humid tropical forest in the south of the country. The area has a wooded savanna type of vegetation with narrow bands of forest areas along the banks of the major rivers, in the valleys and hill summits while the slopes are almost everywhere covered with grass. A combination of savanna and forest flora predominates: primarily elephant grass (*Pennisetum purpureum*) and trees, such as baobab (*Adansonia digitata*), acacia (*Acacia albida*) and shea trees (*Butryospermum parkii*) and pockets of shrubs and thorn bushes.

The district experiences two main rainy seasons. The wet season has two peaks of rainfall (in May and September) with an annual mean of about 1300mm, while the dry season (October to April) is characterised by strong, dry harmattan winds. The mean monthly temperature ranges from 30°C in March to 24°C in August. In terms of topography, the Atebubu District falls within the Volta basin. It is part of a plain (60-300 meters above sea-level) that is widely interspersed with several sluggishly flowing rivers. The alluvial banks of Lake Volta and the rivers flowing into it are ideal for farming activities and livestock herding (Atebubu District Assembly 1996: 1-8).

The district has a population of 140,000 inhabitants with 60 percent of the inhabitants living in rural areas. The relatively low population density (23.3 per sq.km) and the availability of vast stretches of farm and grazing lands have made the district a major destination for migrants from Northern Ghana and the neighbouring West African countries. It is estimated that about 50 percent of the population (that is, 70,000 individuals) are recent migrants who have moved in since the 1950s and 60s. This includes about 7,000 Fulbe herdsman and their families. Fulbe pastoral settlements predominate in the northeastern parts of the district, especially in the Yeji area. The major towns in the district, including Atebubu (the District Capital), Yeji, Amanten and Prambo, are all located on the main Yeji-Kumasi trunk road. Farming, involving the cultivation of maize, yams, cassava and vegetables is the dominant economic activity. Livestock kept include poultry, goats, sheep, swine and cattle. Cattle are mainly of the West African Shorthorn breed, although the *Ndama* and the crossbreed *Sanga* are quite common in the eastern parts of the

district. The bulk of the cattle are owned by the indigenous population but are mainly under the management of hired Fulbe pastoralists, while the indigenous population concentrate on raising small stock (German Technical Cooperation 1998: 2-7; Zchekel and Mathias 1999: 1-5; Ministry of Food and Agriculture 1999).

Map of Ghana showing the study area (Tonah 2002)



The Fulbe in Atebubu District

The Atebubu District has an ethnically diverse population. The indigenous inhabitants are the Akan-speaking Brongs who make up about 50 percent of the population. The rest of the population consists of migrants from the forest regions (mainly Ashantis) and from Northern Ghana (predominantly the Dagari, Wala, Dagomba, Konkomba, Sissala and Mamprusi). Many of the migrants who came in the 19th and early 20th centuries cannot be easily identified as they have almost completely merged with the indigenous population in the course of frequent inter-ethnic marriages. More recent migrants however tend to segregate themselves from the host community by settling within a particular section of a town or settlement.

The Fulbe constitute a unique group amongst the migrants. Unlike other migrant groups who are predominantly sedentary agriculturalists, they are semi-sedentary pastoralists who herd cattle, small stock and poultry and are engaged in small-scale crop production (mainly maize and vegetables) on a seasonal basis (Atebubu District Assembly 1996: 21). The Fulbe also differ from other migrant groups in that they are not only seen as “strangers” by the indigenous population but are also referred to as “foreigners” or “aliens” due to their non-Ghanaian origin. In contrast, migrant farmers from Northern Ghana may be regarded as strangers but they are by no means “aliens”. These are, of course, distinctions used frequently by public and government officials and have found their way into the local vocabulary.

Irrespective of their place of birth, length of stay in the country or social and cultural background, the Ghanaian governments, media and the populace refer to the pastoral Fulbe as “alien herdsmen”. However, this designation is rather problematic and anachronistic. While the Fulbe as an ethnic group are recent migrants (when compared to other ethnic groups) to Ghana, many of those currently living in the country are second or third generation descendants of migrants. Many of them consider themselves to be “Ghanaian Fulbe” rather than foreigners since they were born in Ghana, have married there and have little knowledge of their so-called sahelian homeland. While the Fulbe would not deny their cultural uniqueness when compared to other ethnic groups in Ghana, they consider themselves to be a highly differentiated group with different categories of persons experiencing being Fulbe differently. This includes groups that are engaged in the pastoral sector and those that are highly urbanised and work in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. In the urban centres, the Fulbe are sometimes organised along

the various West African nationalities; that is, “Ghanaian Fulbe”, “Nigerian Fulbe”, “Burkinabe Fulbe” etc. (Oppong 2002: 161-182). In the Atebubu District, the indigenous Brongs themselves do not make any distinction between Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian migrants. They only distinguish between migrants from Northern Ghana, who are mainly farmers and the Fulbe, who mainly herd cattle (cf. Hagberg 2000: 159-180; Tonah 2002a).³

Fulbe settlements are spread throughout the district but are concentrated along the banks of Lake Volta in the northeast. Although Fulbe presence in the area dates back to the pre-colonial era, the majority are recent migrants who moved into the district during the 1960s and 70s. Fulbe settlements and kraals are usually located at the outskirts of the village while remaining an integral part of that host village. This becomes evident in their use of available infrastructural facilities like schools, markets, wells, health posts, etc. which are located in the centre of the settlement.

The social unit of the Fulbe is the *Wuro*, a homestead consisting of several mud-houses with thatched roofs, cooking and resting huts, the fire-place and the kraals. The *Wuro* is a patrilineal, extended family of up to three generations. Each homestead constitutes a largely independent unit of residence, production and reproduction. Several such homesteads, on the average about ten, form a *Gure*, a hamlet that is essentially a string of homesteads. At the head of each such homestead is a *Jewuro*, a household head who would typically make decisions affecting the cohesion and economic viability of the household. The *Jewuro* is responsible for the household’s herd but would usually leave the day-to-day management of the herd to his adult children (cf. Awogbade 1983; Hill 1970: 53-7; Stenning 1959).⁴ Many of the Fulbe initially came to the area as impoverished pastoralists looking for opportunities to work as hired herdsmen for the indigenous population. Today, in addition to their own cattle, the Fulbe manage cattle belonging

³ Throughout the text I shall make a distinction between the Brongs, who have been living in the area for more than 400 years and are, as a result, the autochthonous population (that has the traditional authority and has the allodial title to land) and other ethnic groups (Ashanti, Konkomba, Gonja, Dagari, Ewe etc), referred to collectively as migrant groups or “strangers”. Some of the ethnic groups (eg. Ashanti, Gonja) have been living amongst the Brongs since the 19th century, while others (eg. Fulbe, Ewe) have have done so since the 1950s. People belonging to the latter category are referred to as “recent migrants”.

⁴ Some authors argue against the notion of the *Wuro* being the basic social unit amongst certain groups of Fulbe in the West African sub-region. De Bruijn and Van Dijk (1995: 302-5) in their study of the largely impoverished Fulbe of Mali identified the *Fayannde* (that is, the mother-children unit) and not the *Wuro* as the basic social unit of the Fulbe. This follows the increasing organisation of work by each woman and her children within a polygynous household. However, among the Fulbe of Northern Ghana, the *Wuro* has remained the main unit for the organisation of labour.

to their landlords (Maigida), livestock traders or farmers within the host community.

Fulbe Penetration into the Humid Savanna Region

Fulbe migration to Northern Ghana began in the early 1920s and 30s. Many of them had originally set out from their homelands in neighbouring Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso as long-distance cattle-drivers, cattle traders, labourers and market carriers in search of pasture, water and better economic prospects in Ghana. In this period, cross-border movements of livestock were seasonal in nature. During the dry season, when pasture conditions were poor and water unavailable in their Sahelian homeland, the Fulbe would move their herds to the better-endowed southern savanna areas of West Africa until the wet season, when conditions in their home region improved. Fulbe pastoralists were also encouraged by the colonial government to settle in the savanna areas of Northern Ghana as part of a policy aiming at developing the livestock sector and improving local animal husbandry methods. The colonial veterinary officials were quick in acknowledging the superior skills of the Fulbe in contrast to those of the indigenous population. They therefore expanded the number of livestock stations in Northern Ghana and employed Fulbe herdsmen to manage these Native Administration Farms.⁵

It was not until the 1950s and 60s that Fulbe pastoralists began their gradual movement southwards from the savanna areas to the fringes of the humid forest zone of Ghana. Initially, pastoralists sent stock into the transitional zone in search of pasture and water points in a more or less exploratory fashion. They then negotiated with local landlords for a permanent abode in the area. This exploratory pattern of gradual descent of Fulbe pastoralists from the savanna into the fringes of the humid forest zone usually took several months and involved moving from one area to the next until a decision to settle was finally made (Rabbe 1998: 148-9). In the 1960s and 70s several Fulbe households moved from the Bawku District in the northern savanna region through Nakpanduri and Yendi into the southern savanna zone before settling permanently in the Atebubu District. Other Fulbe pastoralists fleeing recurrent drought and harsh environmental conditions in the Sahel and savanna zones during this period, came directly from the Tenkodogo Region in

⁵ See Public Records and Archives Department (PRAD) Tamale, file no. NRG/18/6 on “Livestock Improvement in the Northern Territories” for detailed information on colonial livestock policy and the recruitment of Fulbe herdsmen to manage the government livestock farms in Northern Ghana.

Burkina Faso. To enable them to obtain easy access to land and cattle among the indigenous population, many of them are reported to have denied coming directly from Burkina Faso but insisted rather that they had lived in the Bawku District for several years before moving to the Atebubu District.⁶

As the number of migrants in Yeji increased, some pastoralists moved to the outskirts of the town and established their own settlements. Indigenous farmers and livestock owners began to employ the migrant Fulbe and entrust their cattle to them after they had discovered their skill in cattle management and their superior herding practices (Hill 1970: 70). A similar process of migratory drift and settlement has been observed amongst the Fulbe in Nigeria, Benin and the Côte d'Ivoire (see Adebayo 1997: 102-7; Bernardet 1999: 416-9; Diallo 1997: 88; Schneider 1997: 141)

Conflict and Cooperation

Relations between the pastoral Fulbe and neighbouring agricultural groups vary throughout the district. In the northeast (around Yeji) where the first migrants settled, the Fulbe have developed symbiotic relations with their neighbours and both groups cooperate for their mutual benefit. The indigenous stockowners are very much aware of the prowess of the Fulbe in cattle production and herd management and have utilised these experiences to their advantage. Most cattle owners have crossed their local cattle breed (mainly the West African Shorthorn) with the more prolific and productive Fulbe breed (the *Sokoto* or *Ndama*). The Fulbe, on the other hand, have acquired the more disease-resistant crossbred cattle. This has resulted in a marked increase in the cattle population and an improvement in herd management practices in the area. Generally, Fulbe pastoralists have little difficulty obtaining pasture for their stock. They have developed an effective network of contact throughout the district, whose responsibility it is to liaise with chiefs, landowners and district administration officials. Upon the payment of specific fees and the

⁶ Many livestock traders are known to have recruited Fulbe herdsmen from Northeastern Ghana, especially the Bawku District, to manage their expanding cattle herds. However, according to information provided by the Chairman of the Livestock Farmers Association in Yeji, almost all of the Fulbe who arrived in Yeji during the 1960s and 70s claimed to originate from Bawku District. Many of them could not however indicate the villages from which they were coming. This raised the suspicion amongst members of the association that most of the Fulbe were instead refugees from neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger. Ghanaian nationality would mean that the Fulbe were not "aliens" and this could be advantageous in the search for land and pasture.

performance of the necessary religious rituals, local landowners would typically allocate a piece of land for the exclusive use of the Fulbe as pastureland.

The Fulbe manage the livestock of the indigenous and migrant farmers as well as those of livestock traders stationed in the markets of Yeji, Prang, Parambo and Atebubu. They report on the state of livestock entrusted to them on a weekly basis, usually during market days when they go to the rural towns to socialise and purchase provisions for household needs (cf. Basset 1994: 147-173; Hill 1970: 69). Fulbe who work as hired pastoralists often have close, albeit sometimes tense relationships with “their landlords”, that is, farmers who have entrusted cattle to them. Misunderstandings frequently arise from the different perspectives on how hired pastoralists should be catered for and compensated. While pastoralists would like “their landlords” to provide them with materials and equipment (such as boots, raincoats, sticks to construct kraals, bullock traction facilities etc.) and part of the income from the sale of livestock under their care, farmers contend that the milk produce and the expansion of Fulbe herds are adequate compensation for their services.

In the western parts of the Atebubu District, relations between the indigenous farmers and the migrant Fulbe pastoralists are contentious. The main sources of conflict between the two groups are the destruction of crops by cattle and increased competition for the use of the most fertile agricultural lands. Farmers increasingly occupy the riversides and the banks of Lake Volta, which serve as the main source of fresh pasture for pastoral herds during the peak dry season. The last decade has witnessed an expansion in the cultivation of cash crops such as tomatoes, green pepper and vegetables along the riverside and the Volta plain during the dry season. Furthermore, the riversides and plain areas have become dotted with large commercial farms, making it difficult for pastoralists to access grazing areas without damaging crops. The increasing compartmentalisation of the best agricultural lands means that pastoralists have to move their herds from one pasture area to another. In the absence of well-demarcated cattle trails, cattle frequently wander onto farms, thereby destroying crops. In parts of the district, commercial farmers have encroached upon areas reserved for dry season livestock grazing, forcing Fulbe pastoralists to wander through farms in search of pasture.

This conflicting situation has been exacerbated by the steady rise in the farming population in the Atebubu District during the last two decades and the consequent expansion of the area under cultivation. According to Zchekel and Mathias (1999) the population density in the area rose by

32 percent between 1984 and 1994. The average household size also increased from 5.1 in 1984 to 9.4 in 1992. Consequently, there has been a decrease in fallow periods from ten years to below six years, an indication of the increasing pressures on available land. Whilst the Fulbe pastoralists attribute the frequent incidence of crop destruction by cattle to the expansion in farming activities, the indigenous farmers contend that Fulbe cattle herds have been expanding rapidly and are usually too large for the pasture areas allocated to them. The over-concentration of cattle on a small piece of land has compelled many pastoralists to graze their animals during the day and at night, a practice that has not only resulted in localised overgrazing but also stress on the resources of the area.

While the Fulbe concede that livestock occasionally destroy farms and crops, they argue that local farmers often exaggerate the frequency and the scale of such destruction in order to acquire unjustifiable compensations. Fulbe pastoralists also resent the double standards applied by indigenous farmers on matters concerning the destruction of crops by livestock. They maintain that while they are forced to pay compensation claims almost immediately, local stockowners either refuse to pay for any damages or do so after several months.⁷

There are divergent opinions within the indigenous population over the appropriate response to the activities of Fulbe pastoralists and, in particular, to farmer-herder disputes. The initial response of individual farmers to the destruction of their farms by Fulbe pastoralists has been to compel them to pay for the damages and then expel them from their lands. However, the Fulbe often resist attempts by farmers to forcibly expel them from grazing lands for which they have made payments to chiefs and local landowners. Generally, the acceptance of the Fulbe by the local population and their integration into a particular locality depend on the level of social and economic exchanges existing between the two groups. Parts of the indigenous population benefiting directly from the presence of the Fulbe (such as the chiefs, landowners, stockowners, etc.) welcome them to their community while others (mainly the youth, environmental activists, local government officials, etc.) vehemently oppose their presence. It is usually activists from the latter group who mobilise public opinion against the Fulbe and incite the youth to attack them.

There is intense competition amongst landowners in the district to become business partners

⁷ There have appeared a considerable number of publications on the issue of farmer-pastoralist conflict in West Africa in the last decade. This is probably due to the increasing migration of pastoralists into the humid savanna and the forest zones. Recent publications on the issue include those of Breusers et. al. (1998), Diallo (2001), Diallo & Schlee (2000), and Hagberg (2000).

and hosts of newly-arrived pastoralists. Most chiefs and landowners prefer to lease portions of their land to pastoralists and migrant farmers rather than to indigenes because the former can make substantial payments in cash and in kind as rent while indigenes only make token payment for the use of land. Rent paid by migrant pastoralists for the use of pastureland has become a major source of income for many impoverished landowners in the district. Fulbe pastoralists may offer landowners in the district one or two mature cattle every two years for the use of pastureland but indigenous farmers would reluctantly offer them a bottle of schnapps for the use of the same piece of land. Besides, renting out land to migrant pastoralists often means that landowners can begin accumulating cattle herds of their own with very little investment of their own time and labour. The landowner could leave the care and management of any livestock acquired to the Fulbe herdsman and members of his household (Tonah 2002b).

However, the existence of such lucrative economic opportunities for chiefs and landowners has also been the bane of pastoral livelihood in the Atebubu District. Intense rivalry amongst the chiefs and landowners has been a contributory factor to rising farmer-herder clashes. It is widely believed that landowners who lose out in the stiff competition to attract migrant Fulbe pastoralists to their areas frequently instigate parts of the community against the Fulbe. In May 2000, the youth of Dromankese, a farming community in central Ghana, attacked Fulbe pastoralists, seized their properties and killed large numbers of cattle. The Fulbe took refuge in a neighbouring village, where they were offered protection after the payment of an agreed to fee to the chief. It is widely believed that the youth were provoked by the local chief to attack the Fulbe as part of attempts to deprive neighbouring communities from benefiting from the presence of the Fulbe.

According to an Agricultural Extension Officer, rivalry amongst the chiefs in the district has become a major reason for the increasing attacks on the Fulbe. He commented further:

The chiefs in the area mistrust each other. Chiefs unable to rent land to the Fulani are jealous of their colleagues who have Fulani herdsmen. This is because they feel that others are benefiting while they are not. They therefore try to create a scenario out of this situation by inciting sections of the community, especially the youth against the Fulani. Farmer-herder clashes are the artificial creations of the chiefs in the area. It is a political issue for the chiefs to resolve. Why is it that chiefs in Yeji and Konkoma are able to resolve farmer-herder conflicts arising out of stock-stealing, destruction of crops by livestock and so on while other chiefs in the region claim these conflicts are beyond them?⁸

⁸ Personal communication of an Agricultural Extension Officer, 19th June 2000. See the Ghanaian Daily Graphic

Generally, the indigenous population perceive the Fulbe pastoralists as wealthy, irrespective of whether they are hired pastoralists or actual owners of the animals under their management. Local farmers cannot determine the owners of a particular herd; therefore, any increase in the number of cattle being managed by the Fulbe is an indication that they are becoming wealthy. It is common for the indigenous youth to mention Fulbe pastoralists whom they claim to have known as poor, hired pastoralists but who have been able to acquire a sizeable herd of cattle of their own within a short period. Pastoralists who have been able to substantially raise the number of cattle under their care are often the source of envy and resentment amongst these youth, many of whom are often frustrated by their own inability to make a decent living from farming.

The social lifestyle of the Fulbe youth is another source of misunderstanding. The Fulbe generally live an ascetic lifestyle. They spend most of their time in the villages and bush camps with few infrastructural facilities and opportunities for social activities and entertainment. The weekly market days in the main towns provide an opportunity for the Fulbe to sell their cattle, purchase provisions and other consumer items and to socialise with friends and relatives. It is particularly the adolescents who relish the weekly opportunity to break out of the monotonous and sometimes boring pastoral life. As trading activities on the main markets gradually come to a close, the Fulbe assemble in small groups in the bars and chat for long hours. Young pastoralists (often carrying cassette tape recorders blaring their traditional songs) also congregate around the numerous street-corner restaurants. This display of wealth and the ostentatious lifestyle of the Fulbe youth on market days is a major source of resentment amongst the indigenous population, many of whom believe that the Fulbe have become wealthy by over-exploiting local resources.⁹

Expelling the Fulbe

In 1999, the Ghanaian print media carried several reports of clashes between Fulbe pastoralists and farmers across the country. In Agogo, a provincial town at the edge of the forest zone, irate young men armed with guns and machetes attempted to drive Fulbe pastoralists out of the town and its surrounding villages after accusing them of destroying their maize farms. They shot and killed three Fulbe pastoralists while many others sustained gunshot wounds. Other pastoralists

(No. 147931 of 10th June 2000) for more detailed information on the attack on the Fulbe in Dromankese.

⁹ For a detailed analysis of local prejudices as a source of farmer-pastoralist conflicts see Tonah (2000).

sustained serious injuries after being pelted with stones. Thereafter, the youth attacked an outlying village and ran away with looted cattle. They also attacked migrant farmers suspected of harbouring Fulbe pastoralists. In another incident in the Nkoranza District, farmers were reported to have engaged Fulbe pastoralists in a gun fight that resulted in the death of several pastoralists and the destruction of property. Similarly, in Seilla, in the Atebubu District, the indigenous youth attacked a group of Fulbe pastoralists who were moving cattle through the settlement en route to the Afram plains, thereby forcing them to seek shelter in a neighbouring village.¹⁰

In all of these incidents, the local youth involved argued that they were acting to prevent the destruction of their crops by pastoralists because earlier appeals to the local government to restrain the Fulbe from using their settlements as transit points had not yielded any fruitful response. Besides sending in police officers to the various trouble spots, there were no attempts by either the national or the district government to ensure that those responsible for such incidents were arrested and prosecuted. Police investigations of both incidents remained incomplete. Suspects arrested during the heat of the mayhem were later released for “lack of sufficient evidence to prosecute the case”.

In apparent response to the numerous reported incidents of farmer-pastoralists clashes in Ghana, the government in 1999 ordered the various Regional Security Councils to drive away “alien Fulani herdsmen” from Ghana. Under an action code-named “Operation Cowleg”, police and military personnel were used to expel Fulbe pastoralists and their cattle across the national borders to their supposed countries of origin in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Côte d'Ivoire. The official rationale for the expulsion order was the alleged negative impact of nomadic pastoral activities on the environment and communities in Ghana. This official position was succinctly captured in a Ghanaian weekly thus:

The main complaint against these Fulani herdsmen was the danger they and their livestock posed to the environment. Their animals devastated farmlands, caused soil erosion through over-grazing and polluted water bodies which sometimes served as sources of drinking water for the host communities... To make matters worse, the Fulani herdsmen, these days, are adding new dimensions of terror to their already destructive activities. Most of them go about armed with dangerous knives and sometimes even guns, which they use to intimidate those farmers who confront them. There have even been reports of these herdsmen raping some women they encounter in the bushes.¹¹

¹⁰ Personal communication of an Agricultural Extension Officer, 19th June, 2000. See also the Ghanaian Daily Graphic No. 147931 of 10th June, 2000.

¹¹ See the Ghanaian Chronicle of 7th July, 2000.

In response to the central government's directives and in response to pressure by several groups, District Assemblies throughout the country set up special taskforces to "flush out alien Fulani herdsmen" from their territories. The execution of the programme depended on the availability of financial resources and the urgency given to the issue in the district. Whilst some districts like the Salaga District with its large Fulbe population did not consider it necessary to follow the national directives, other districts with a lesser Fulbe presence were quick in responding to the alleged "Fulbe threat".

In the Atebubu District a taskforce consisting of thirty-five police and military personnel was set up with the responsibility of expelling Fulbe pastoralists and their livestock from the district. The action was sanctioned by the local parliament (the District Assembly) and placed under the direct supervision of the District Chief Executive, the central government representative in the district. The District Assembly placed logistics (mainly vehicles) at the disposal of the security forces and bore all expenses relating to their boarding and lodging. Two expulsion actions (each lasting about two months) were launched between July 1999 and June 2000. The security personnel combed the entire district including the lakesides and other locations frequented by the pastoralists. However, their searches were mainly concentrated on settlements on the main roads and pathways since they conducted most of their searches by car.

To evade members of the taskforce, the Fulbe were reported to have moved their cattle deep into the forest regions and far from any human settlements or roads. Some of them were reported to have crossed Lake Volta onto many of the inaccessible islands, where they were protected by parts of the local population. The taskforce conducted several unannounced checks in settlements known to be sympathetic to the Fulbe. Livestock markets were also frequently raided. The Yeji area, with its large Fulbe population bore the brunt of the activities of the taskforce. Livestock owners and their pastoralists were frequently harassed by members of the taskforce seeking information on the location of so-called "alien herdsmen". Another strategy employed by the taskforce was to confiscate all cattle of "foreign" breeding, that is, cattle other than the West African Shorthorn breed, commonly found in most Ghanaian villages. This strategy was fraught with difficulties however, especially in the Yeji area, with its large numbers of crossbreed cattle. Hired pastoralists managing livestock belonging to Ghanaian nationals were also instructed to keep their animals in kraals during the night or have them confiscated by the taskforce.

The total number of "alien herdsmen" arrested and the number of cattle herds confiscated

during the period of the exercise is not exactly known but a rough estimate puts it at 156 Fulbe herdsmen with a total of 2,100 cattle. Many of the herdsmen who were arrested had to be released as it turned out that they were hired pastoralists keeping cattle of indigenous farmers. Two farmers who falsely claimed to be the owner of a cattle herd seized from the fleeing herdsmen were also fined. Every Fulbe pastoralist arrested by the taskforce was fined 50,000 cedis (equivalent to US \$8) per animal and forced to move his livestock beyond the district boundaries. Cattle seized from fleeing pastoralists were later auctioned to livestock traders and the general public (cf. Abdulai 2001: 66-8).

Assessment of the Expulsion Exercises

Generally, the official government rationale for expelling the Fulbe has been to resolve the growing farmer-herder conflicts that occur in various parts of the country, especially in the transition zone between the forest and the savanna. These conflicts are largely a result of competition for resources, especially, farmland, pasture and water. The central government is often compelled to respond to growing complaints by farmers and their threat to use force to expel the Fulbe. Farmers' viewpoints and complaints are often echoed in the Ghanaian media, thus forcing the central government to intervene on behalf of the farmers rather than resolve existing problems.

Similarly, local (district) governments are also under pressure from interest groups such as farmers, youth groups, environmentalists and local non-governmental organisations to stem the rising tide of farmer-herder clashes. Farmers and members of youth organisations compete with pastoralists for the use of available land. There is, even in areas with abundant land, (seasonal) competition between farmers and pastoralists for the use of land along riverbeds and the plain of Lake Volta. Many farmers would therefore like to see the Fulbe expelled or their activities restricted so that they can pursue their own farming activities unimpeded. The struggle for resources has become even more acute with the introduction of commercial farming of grain and vegetables along the riverbanks and on the lake basin. Many of these commercial farms are located in areas hitherto used by pastoralists as dry season pasture or along dry season cattle trails (Tonah 2001). It is these groups that pressurise the local government officials into taking action against Fulbe pastoralists.

In the Atebubu District the results of the expulsion actions were rather mixed. The exercises could not achieve the desired results as most of the Fulbe pastoralists apparently had prior information about the actions and the impending activities of the security taskforce. They were therefore able to move their animals beyond the district and regional boundaries to areas inaccessible to the taskforce before the actions commenced. Furthermore, the widespread use of hired pastoralists by local cattle owners provided the Fulbe with ample opportunities to hide their cattle amongst those owned by the local population. Members of the security taskforce could not easily distinguish between cattle belonging to Ghanaians and those owned by the so-called “alien herdsmen”. This was particularly the case in the eastern parts of the district with its large number of hired pastoralists who were born in the Atebubu District. The increasing number of crossbreed cattle in both the indigenous and the Fulbe herds also made it difficult to identify cattle owned by migrant pastoralists.

The decision by the central and local governments to expel the Fulbe was not endorsed by all groups. Landlords, cattle-owning farmers, livestock owners, livestock traders and veterinary officials were amongst those who did not agree with the decision to expel the Fulbe. Some of these groups actually undermined the expulsion actions. In areas where the chiefs, landlords, opinion leaders and other parts of the community benefited significantly from the Fulbe, the population was generally hostile to the presence of the taskforce and did not cooperate with them in locating the whereabouts of the Fulbe pastoralists and their cattle. The local population would intentionally misinform members of the taskforce by directing them to villages where they were unlikely to locate any Fulbe settlements.

Landlords and livestock owners are closely associated with the activities of Fulbe pastoralists and many of them benefit directly from their presence in the district. Unlike local farmers who only make a symbolic payment by offering a bottle of schnapps to landowners, Fulbe pastoralists pay such landowners rent in cash and in kind to allow them settle on their property and use adjoining land for farming and as pasture (Tonah 2002b). During the expulsion actions, some Fulbe demanded the refund of rent paid to local landowners although most of them were not in a position to do so. These landowners therefore encouraged the Fulbe to either stay on as their guests or return to the area as soon as the military and police personnel recruited to enforce the decision were withdrawn.

Similarly, cattle-owning farmers and livestock traders who had entrusted their herds to the Fulbe encouraged them to stay since they could not find a replacement for the hired Fulbe herdsmen. Most of the Fulbe identified themselves as hired herdsmen of well-known cattle owners and livestock traders in the district to avoid being expelled. Others joined their cattle herds to those of their neighbours working as hired herdsmen, thus making it difficult for the security personnel to differentiate between cattle belonging to local stockowners and those of the Fulbe pastoralists.

Many residents also questioned the rationale for the expulsion action and justified their non-cooperative stance by claiming that more damage is done to the environment through the annual bush-burning and the felling of trees for wood and charcoal production than the activities of Fulbe pastoralists. Others believed that the expulsion of Fulbe pastoralists from the district would deprive them of their means of livelihood and a substantial income.

The expulsion action was planned by the District Administration and executed by security personnel brought in from other parts of the country. Officials of public organisations, such as the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the Veterinary Services, who were conversant with nomadic pastoralism and had a long-standing working relationship with Fulbe pastoralists at the district level were not consulted during the actions. Many of them were very critical of the rationale given by the District Administration for the expulsion of Fulbe pastoralists and the strategies employed by the taskforce. They also discounted the official perception that the Fulbe were introducing “foreign” livestock diseases into the area. According to an Agricultural Extension officer in Prambo, there had not been any contagious disease in the district for quite a long time, despite the presence of the Fulbe in the area. Many public officials also expressed concern about what they considered to be the increasing politicisation of farmer-herder relationships by the local administration and some chiefs in the district. They argued that while farmer-herder disputes did occur occasionally, most of these were minor incidents that were often resolved at the family or community level. Furthermore, they asserted that the various livestock associations were quite effective in resolving farmer-herder disputes and in managing available pastureland.

The members of the District Assembly also differed in their assessment of the danger posed by pastoralism in the area. Many believe that the scale of the problem did not justify the huge expenses incurred by the administration in the expulsion actions. Farmer-herder disputes, they

contend, are best resolved at the local level by the various crop and livestock farmers associations. Fulbe pastoralists, they argued further, willingly compensate farmers whose crops are destroyed by their livestock, as long as the compensation claims are realistic.¹² The District Administration, however, thinks otherwise and justifies its decision in taking part in the national action to expel Fulbe pastoralists. In its view, no price is too high to pay for “saving the environment”. According to the District Chief Executive:

Environmental issues are of prime concern to the District Assembly, every effort would be made to protect the environment from further degradation...even though the operation (to expel the Fulani) is expensive, it served a fruitful purpose as the environment has been saved from further destruction.¹³

The expulsion of Fulbe pastoralists triggered a mass movement of livestock out of the Atebubu District into neighbouring regions and other inaccessible areas. The indiscriminate seizure of livestock by security personnel and the frequent harassment of persons suspected of being Fulbe pastoralists forced many local stockowners to send their animals to more isolated regions. The presence of armed military personnel also compelled stockowners to confine their livestock to safe locations out of fear that their animals might be seized. The restriction in the movement of cattle during the period of the action resulted in a sharp drop in the incidence of livestock destroying food crops. This calmed tempers in the areas where incidents of farmer-pastoralist conflicts had become rampant. Furthermore, the action was a demonstration to the general public that the government was taking action against the “alien herdsmen”.

The action, however, affected the activities of livestock traders. Many traders refused to convey livestock from the main stockholding areas to the marketing centres in Yeji, Atebubu, Prang and Zabrama. This resulted in a shortfall in the supply of livestock to the main marketing centres. This shortfall resulted in a sharp rise in the prices of both live animals and meat. On the livestock markets of Yeji and Prang, cattle prices increased by 120 percent within two months of the implementation of the expulsion action, while beef prices rose on average by about 150 percent. Livestock traders, butchers and middlemen were particularly affected by the lull in livestock trading in the main markets. The frequent harassment of livestock traders by police and other security personnel forced many traders to suspend work temporarily. Livestock traders who

¹² An executive member of the Livestock Farmers Association informed me that most farmers tend to exaggerate the extent of destruction of their crops by livestock so that they can make higher compensation claims. Consequently, disagreements tend to be on the level of compensation to be paid, since most Fulani accept the need to compensate farmers for losses incurred. Where farmers were unable to identify the cattle that caused the destruction, stockowners in the area were charged jointly with the cost of any damages.

¹³ See the Ghanaian Daily Graphic No. 147929 of 8th June, 2000.

remained in business had to contend with the numerous police checkpoints along the main Yeji-Kumasi highway. Many of them alleged being forced to make illegal payments to the security personnel before being allowed to transport livestock to the marketing centres.

Conclusion

Barely two months after the withdrawal of the security task force, most of the Fulbe pastoralists expelled from the Atebubu District were able to return to their former places of sojourn. Many of them simply renewed existing agreements with the local chiefs and landowners, permitting them to reside temporarily in areas they had been driven away from. The response of Fulbe pastoralists to hostile reception and aggression by their hosts or neighbours has often been to immediately move away from the area to a more suitable abode and then hope to return to the area when conditions improved. When they consider the resources of a particular region to be indispensable for the survival of their herd, they may also withdraw from the area temporarily and negotiate their re-entry with the landowners.

The Fulbe have apparently learnt from earlier expulsion actions carried out in 1988 and 1989. In 1988 most of them had no prior information about the impending expulsion action and did not hear about their forthcoming expulsion until the deadline given by the government had almost expired. They were arrested and forced to sell their cattle to traders at give-away prices. Local youth also seized livestock from pastoralists trying to cross the Ghana-Burkina Faso border (Tonah 1993: 132). During the current action, most pastoralists had prior information about the movement of security personnel in the Atebubu District and were aware that the District Assembly could not sustain the action for a long period of time. They therefore did not move livestock across regional and national borders. Their immediate strategy was to quickly move away from any hostile environment and find temporary solace in areas inaccessible to the security personnel. They then hoped to re-negotiate their return to the district with the landowners after the heat of the action had died down and the security personnel had been withdrawn. Another strategy commonly employed by the Fulbe to avoid persistent harassment by Ghanaian security personnel has been to combine their cattle herds with those belonging to prominent individuals in the district and place them under a common management. When they happen to get into trouble they can expect the local population to protect them. The joint management of cattle

herds has been facilitated by the widespread ownership of crossbreed cattle by the local population.

Fulbe pastoralists constitute less than three percent of the total population of Ghana and most of them are resident in the northern parts of the country. They are still considered “foreigners” by the government and large parts of the population. Contacts between the Fulbe and other ethnic groups are limited to reciprocal economic exchanges, with little social interaction and friendships across the ethnic divide. Their pastoral activities often compel them to reside on the outskirts of their settlements, leaving the core areas to sedentary farming groups. Cattle owners and persons working in the livestock trade (with whom the Fulbe often have close contacts) constitute only a small part of the population. The majority of the people are farmers with little contact with the Fulbe and little appreciation and understanding of nomadic pastoralism. The Fulbe rarely participate in social and religious ceremonies of the other groups, such as weddings, child-outdoorings, funerals, cultural festivals, association meetings, youth parties etc.¹⁴.

Their low enrollment in schools and the high drop out rate, especially for Fulbe girls, also makes it difficult for the youth to get to know young people from other ethnic groups well or to interact with them. Furthermore, the Fulbe in Ghana have remained a comparatively closed in-group. This is partly a result of their pastoral lifestyle but is also due to their cultural uniqueness. They have to a large extent been endogamous in their marriage practices. Inter-marriage with the indigenous population in areas where they have settled are still considered an aberration.

The policy of forcibly expelling pastoralists across regional and national borders has the effect of shifting farmer-herder conflicts from one region to the other or across national borders rather than resolving such conflicts. The mass movement of cattle across regional and national boundaries has often increased damages to communities along the regional and/or national borders. In 1988, Fulbe pastoralists expelled from Northern Ghana moved across the border to southern Burkina Faso and the Bondoukou region in Côte d’Ivoire. They returned to Ghana after the euphoria that characterised the expulsion action died down. Similarly Fulbe pastoralists fleeing conflicts in the Korokara region of Côte d’Ivoire frequently move to Ghana for protection

¹⁴ Social interactions between the Fulbe and the indigenous population appear to be better in areas with a high percentage of Moslems, as in the northeastern part of Ghana. In the East and West Mamprusi Districts of Northern Ghana, the Fulbe (almost all of whom are Moslems) interact closely with the Mamprusi in mosques and they jointly organise islamic religious ceremonies and festivals such as *Id Fitr* and *Id Aida* and other social activities (Tonah 2002a)

(Bernardet 1999: 438). The refugee Fulbe pastoralists are often pursued by the Lobi on the Ghana-Ivoirian border following the destruction of the latter's property by rampaging cattle.

There is increasing evidence that the expulsion of Fulbe pastoralists from Ghana in 1999 has worsened farmer-herder relations. Conflicts between the two groups more frequently degenerate into bloody battles. As opportunities for an inter-ethnic dialogue decline, both groups have resorted to settling disputes through armed conflict. There has been a sudden rise in the number of Fulbe pastoralists carrying weapons on their seasonal migrations through the savanna and forest regions. Similarly, local groups of youths and farmers have armed themselves to protect their interests and defend themselves in case of attack by Fulbe pastoralists and their sympathisers. This has been accompanied by a sharp rise in the reported cases of gun fights between Fulbe pastoralists and farmers throughout the country (Daily Graphic, 12th March, 2000; Ghanaian Chronicle, 7th and 8th August, 2000).

The politicisation of farmer-herder relations has also heightened tension between the two groups and reduced their willingness to resolve issues through dialogue. Central government pronouncements expelling Fulbe pastoralists may satisfy some interest groups within the country but this does not take account of the realities on the local level. Chiefs, landowners, local stockowners, cattle dealers, pastoralists, butchers and traders are powerful interest groups on the local level, whose economic survival depends on the activities of Fulbe pastoralists. They are therefore unlikely to comply with any directive that does not take their interests into account. There is evidence that organised groups on the local levels can ensure cordial farmer-herder relations and resolve conflicts before they escalate. The Livestock Farmers Association in Yeji has been able to maintain cordial relationships amongst the various ethnic and professional groups in the traditional area. The association regulates the activities of its members, ensures a balance between available resources and livestock numbers, and effectively utilises its authority to settle farmer-herder disputes.

Finally, another major reason for the frequent expulsion of Fulbe pastoralists by the Ghanaian government is the aversion of many policy makers to pastoralism. It is widely believed that the Fulbe must settle and adopt a sedentary livelihood. However, attempts by the government to promote livestock development through the establishment of ranching schemes, fattening grounds, livestock marketing centres etc. have largely failed. Parastatal organisations set up to handle the production and marketing of such livestock projects have performed dismally. These

organisations were crippled by inefficiency, mismanagement, corruption and nepotism. Besides, the ranching schemes did not fit into the low resource, high risk and the environmental and climatic uncertainties that characterises the West African savanna (Lachenmann 1991; Tonah 1993: 53-66). It has therefore become apparent that livestock development and marketing has to focus on improving the conditions of the indigenous agro-pastoral households if there is to be any marked improvement in production. The experiences of Fulbe pastoralists are vital in improving local livestock production methods. The Fulbe have considerable experience in stock rearing and are very conversant with the conditions under which local stock production takes place. Rather than antagonise them, governments in the West African sub-region might do well to tap their rich experience for the mutual benefit of both the indigenous farmers and Fulbe pastoralists.

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