Framing and conflict: the case of the Asante Akyem North district's farmer-herder conflict in Ghana

Sabina Appiah-Boateng and Stephen B. Kendie

Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to explore how framing of conflict in different phases is constructed and how the specific framing affects the development of the conflict and its management in the farmer–herder conflict in the Asante Akyem North District of Ghana.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The study area is Agogo which falls within the Asante Akyem North District in Ghana. The study used a qualitative approach whose philosophical ontology and epistemology believe that meaning is constructed (interpretivism). It further used a case study design using in-depth interviews, focus group discussion and observation guide. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. The data were analysed using the thematic analysis approach. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, willingness and anonymity of respondents were duly respected.*

Findings – *The findings highlighted that the conflict actors formed frames such as identity-relational, affective-intellectual and negotiation-win frames as the drivers of the conflict. In this conflict, the farmers who are indigenes and custodians of the land feel more potent over the transnational migrants who are pastoralists and argue that the herdsmen be flushed out without negotiation.*

Originality/value – *To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is one of the papers that bring to light the psychological dimension of the causes of the farmer–herder conflict in Ghana.*

Keywords *Framing, Resource conflict, Farmers, Pastoralists, Perception, Sustainable development Asante Akyem North District, Ghana, Agogo*

Paper type *Research paper*

Sabina Appiah-Boateng and Stephen B. Kendie are both based at School for Development Studies, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana.

Introduction

Land is regarded as the most important resource for improving living conditions, economic empowerment, and, to some extent, a source of ongoing struggles and conflicts around the world. At various levels, all human lives and activities rely on land, either directly or indirectly. A chief's land size defines his power and authority in Ghana's chieftaincy or customary system (Gyamera *et al*., 2018). The land is also intertwined with the identity, history and culture of the people (UNESCO, 2003b). The importance that one places on various uses of land, and indeed on land ownership and land-based resources, is dependent on Ghanaian society's cultural perspectives. There are, however, a variety of viewpoints that have affected societal attitudes, and they shift with time. As a result, communities may easily mobilize around land issues, making land a prominent point of contention.

Land-use conflicts are a common occurrence that can occur at any time or in any location among various parties with varying land-use interests (Torre, *et al*., 2014; Wehrmann, 2008). When land conflicts are related to larger processes of political exclusion, deprivation, social discrimination, economic marginalization and a belief that peaceful action is no longer a

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viable path for change, land conflicts frequently turn violent. Regardless, land has diverse connotations for different usage groups. Builders, manufacturers, fishers, miners, herders, hunters and farmers, for example, have diverse land requirements for their products and services. Agricultural production, arguably more than any other user group, has the highest level of demand and expertise in its land usage. This reflects the continent's massive conflicts between pastoralists and farmers (Adisa, 2011). This was not the case in the past, when these farmers coexisted peacefully owing to the mutual help they received (Moritz, 2010). Despite this, their coexistence was occasionally plagued by confrontations, which were attributed to the manner in which the various parties carried out their activities (Little and Horowitz, 1987; Raynaut and Delville, 1997).

Fulani herdsmen and settled farming communities are involved in the majority of violent farmer–herder conflicts in Ghana. The Fulani are Ghana's most powerful pastoralists (Abbass, 2014). In the early 1920s and 1930s, Fulani nomadic herders from Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali began migrating to Ghana in search of pasture, water and better economic opportunities (Tonah, 2002). There were deep interactions and a cordial friendship between these two groups of farmers. Many of these herders were also sometimes people hired and paid by Ghanaian cattle owners. However, most of these hired herders did not always stay for long periods in the community and so did not create problems for Ghanaians, especially crop farmers. Fulani herders today are found in practically all of Ghana's agro-ecological zones, and they are known to have brought their cattle from neighbouring nations in addition to some taking care of cattle belonging to Ghanaians.

Violent clashes between farming villages and Fulani herdsmen have become prevalent of this large-scale coexistence. In several parts of Ghana, a recent outbreak of violent conflicts and retaliation between farmers and Fulani herdsmen has resulted in human deaths and relocation. In places like Gushegu, Nangodi, Agogo, Dumso and numerous communities in Atebubu/Amanteng and Pru districts in Ghana, security agencies have intervened to avert conflicts. For example, in February 2016, over 80 Fulani herdsmen's cattle were slaughtered by enraged youth in Dumso, Brong-Ahafo, in retaliation for the damage of farms by Fulani herdsmen's cattle (Stanley et al., 2017). Violent farmer–herder conflicts have also been reported in the Kwahu East District of the Eastern Region and the Sekyere Central District of the Ashanti Region, according to recent media reports.

The farmer–herder conflict in Agogo is the most violent and well-publicized. This is because Agogo has fertile land, consistent rainfall and enough of pasture, making it ideal for large-scale agriculture and animal production. This has attracted a number of farmers and cattle owners who rely on Fulani herders. Throughout the year, the farmers cultivate a range of food crops such as plantain, maize and watermelon for commercial purposes. These crops have also been discovered to be nutritious for cattle and can be used as an alternative feed, especially during the dry season. Since the 17th century, the townships in Asante Akyem North area have been referred to as a theatre of resource conflicts between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders (Boateng, 2015).

Boateng (2015) further illustrated the depth of effects surrounding the farmer–herder conflict in AAND. Women were raped, people were killed and maimed. Because of the insecurity in the neighbourhood, others have lost their crops and cattle, and students have had to drop out of school. In the media, the scenario is frequently referred to as the "Fulani threat." As a result, farmer–herder conflicts are characterized as recurrent, and members of the community are susceptible to an annual outbreak of violence. Farmers' and herders' livelihoods are impacted as a result (Ghana News Agency, 2012; Ofuoku and Isife, 2009; Olaniyan et al., 2015), necessitating long-term solutions to the conflict (Ghana News Agency, 2012; Ofuoku and Isife, 2009; Olaniyan et al., 2015). For successful management of the farmer–herder conflict in Agogo, there is the need to find out how the actors frame each other and how the framing influences interactions between the groups and the ultimate effects on access to land and thus livelihood improvement.

In this study, framing refers to a unified set of cognitive schemata that appears in discourse, interacts with other discourses and influences information processing. Like Goffman (1974), frame analysis examines how people think and make decisions from inside a framework of consistent narratives that help them process information. The framing concept elucidates the non-substantive factors that contribute to conflict. The possibility of distributive interaction, escalation and protected conflict increases when conflict actors operate under different frames (Donohue, 1991; Pruitt and Rubin, 1986; Pillar, 1983). The framing effect is a cognitive bias in which different groups of people choose options based on whether they have positive or negative implications, such as a loss or a gain. When provided with a good frame, these actors tend to ignore conflict, but when offered with a negative frame, they seek conflict. Frames are mindsets, ingrained attitudinal dispositions that reflect the socialisation setting from which individuals grow. Thus, sedentary farmers and the Fulani herdsmen, as different ethnic groups, have evolved conflicting attitudes towards each other that define the way conflicts between them are viewed and the conflict resolution mechanisms that are used. These cognitive models of each other are often reinforced and entrenched by behaviour patterns as these groups interact. The objective of this paper is to understand how these frames direct behaviour as groups (sedentary farmers and Fulani herders) interact on a daily basis in the Agogo area of Ghana. The paper is thus informed by the framing theory in the context of farmer–herder conflicts.

Review of literature

Framing theory

The framing theory postulates that frames held by the actors involved in a conflict form the basis on which they act, and these frames are built upon underlying structures of beliefs, values and experiences that actors construct to distinguish themselves in unique ways (Burgess, 2017). Framing, which according to Esser, Benford, Snow and Byrd, emerges from actors' and observers' interpretations of conflict events, not only refers to the mode of interpretation through which actors involved in a conflict make sense of a situation but also includes a discursive dimension through which they define conflicts, causes and actions within narratives selected or generated by them (Esser, 1999; Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow and Byrd, 2007).

Framing contributes to understanding conflict from a process perspective and offers an approach that bridges this conventional dichotomy in conflict theorizing (Desrosiers, 2011). According to this approach, conflict dynamics and processes involved in the inter-communal conflict are the results of the purposeful behaviour of actors that takes place against the background of a constraining and constitutive social setting. At the same time, processes involved in the inter-communal conflict and communal violence, including the transition from one stage of escalation to another, are not free from irregularities and digressions. The scrutiny of mobilization in conflicts requires taking into account, among other things, discursive dynamics, such as contested meanings and worldviews, discourses, norms and structures of power relations and their implications for the actions of the actors involved in conflicts (Esser, 1999; Fearon and Laitin, 2000; Desrosiers, 2011).

Additionally, framing is an inter-subjective process of defining, perceiving and identifying a conflict scenario or occurrence that results in the production of a cognitive model of the situation that serves as both an informing and directing tool (Esser, 1999). Frames are created as action-oriented "schemata" Goffman (1974) within the current social environment that organizes experiences and leads the actions of actors in conflict processes, as well as mobilizes the community and resources. In the space of conflicts, frames of a conflict produced by actors are consequential, and this comes about as actors act as signifying agents engaged actively in this process of signification. The causative nature of frames is determined by their embeddedness in conflict dynamics and the wider political and social processes surrounding the conflict (Benford and Snow, 2000). The

resonance of these frames, generated in how a conflict event is defined, predefines conflict dynamics and the processes involved therein, including the escalation or de-escalation of violence (Lewicki *et al.*, 2003).

Furthermore, framing involves frame generation, on the one hand, and frame reception and enacting, that is, mobilization based on the frame, on the other (Minsky, 1975). A conflict event is defined by an actor or an observer based on the social environment and institutional setting that shape social relations. Hence, a frame of a conflict event has to be aligned to the social environment to be successful. From this viewpoint, frames of conflict are generated based on already existing larger "cognitive models," as well as those that are ingrained in the minds, perceptions and understandings of people and embedded as meaningful structures in the social environment (Esser, 1999, pp. 247–249). These larger cognitive models can be myths relating to ethnic identity, traditions and norms governing inter-communal relations, the history of past violence or the like. Actors within a conflict, frame the situation based on already existing cognitive models, to make them acceptable by the community involved through alignment with common concerns and beliefs (Snow *et al.*, 1986). Frames can also rely on more than one of such larger cognitive models already internalized by the given community.

Actors rely on symbolically dramatized depictions of common concerns and interests (including material interests) to activate and strengthen the framing of the given conflict situation, often depicted as collective group interests and apprehensions, to activate and strengthen the framing of the given conflict situation through reflection on the wrongdoings of the other side. In this way, the cognitive part of framing encompasses cognition in a larger sense, including argumentative and symbolic dimensions, and allows for public reception (Esser, 1999). Several elements, according to Burgess (2017), influence the creation of frames. Identity, characterization, power and conflict are frequently the most important frameworks in conflicts. The frames of most importance to conflicts usually include identity, characterization, power, conflict management/process and loss versus gain.

The Fulani herders are mostly alien to the Ghanaian communities from which they seek pasture and because they are mostly nomadic, they tend to settle away from the community and near their kraals. Under such circumstances, integration becomes impossible with the host community so that issues of inter-marriages and mutual language learning are impossible. Beliefs, myths and perceptions about how the Fulani live their lives and conduct their daily business with the cattle among the host communities do not and could never be dispelled or modified under such separate existence. Frames persist regarding the personality of the Fulani and similarly, frames do exist on the part of the Fulani on the host communities which do influence the daily lived interactions, sometimes leading to conflict and violence.

Causes of farmer–herder conflicts

The causes of farmer–herder conflicts have been explored by various scholars and researchers in West Africa. This implies that the menace is a common issue in West Africa (Fabusoro and Oyegbami, 2009; Moritz, 2010; Tonah, 2006). Moritz (2010) opine that at the heart of this menace is a struggle for access to land-use and water resource. Generally, the farmer–herder conflicts are said to have been caused by several factors. The unique interdependent relationship that was said to have existed between these two groups has declined to cause them to engage in conflict (Blench, 1984; Oksen, 2000). The actors now define their relationship more of host–migrant relations which directly gives the herders away not to be members of the host community (Tonah, 2006). Moritz (2010) cited an example of this type of relationship from Cameroon between Mbororo herders and Gbaya farmers in the Adamawa Province of Cameroon (Burnham, 1980). In Ghana, these two

groups of farmers describe their relationship as indigene–strangers' relations explaining this from the demise of mutual reciprocal relations (Tonah, 2006).

The environmental scarcity theorist, Homer-Dixon (1999) has also explained the causes of this conflict from the angle of resource scarcity and increasing competition for these scarce resources as the primary, though not the only reason for more frequent and more frequent violent conflicts over natural resources. The land and water resources are diminishing or increasing in scarcity because of several factors, causing intense competition and violent conflicts over their usage (Moritz, 2010; Oladele and Oladele, 2011). As both herders' and farmers' livelihoods depend on their access to the same resources, any factor that increases competition and the overuse of these resources also increases the possibility of conflicts between the two groups (Moritz, 2010).

In relation to the scarcity of resources is the issue of climate change as a causal factor to this conflict. Climate change has been described by Moritz (2010) as a "necessary evil" in the Sahel region of Africa. On one side, it is the factor that boosts agriculture and pastoral productions. Nonetheless, it also serves as a source of conflict, shrinking environmental spaces and an increase in natural resource scarcity. When this occurs, farmers and herders thus compete over the limited resources and the result is always conflictual (Abbass, 2014; Okoli and Atelhe, 2014).

Studies by Moritz (2010), Tonah (2006); and Adebayo (1997) estimated that there is a positive and high correlation between population growth and expansion of agricultural production as a reason to support resource scarcity and farmer–herder conflicts. The scholars explain that as the trans-national pastoralists move to other regions where there are favourable climates and abundant pasture the pull factors of migration increase the population sides of the migrants. Again, host communities also increase in population, and these two groups thus compete over the limited resource. Farmers now compete directly with herders for grazing lands, which have been slowly disappearing because of population growth and agricultural expansion. The outcome of this is a violent conflict between the two groups. Other factors such as religious and cultural and differences are said to be factors fuelling the farmer–herder conflict. This leads to suspicion, misconstruction, prejudice and antagonism between the two groups (Ahmadu, 2011).

In addition, local authorities and government institutions are said to be a factor in the numerous farmer–herder conflicts because of changes or insecurity of land tenure and corrupt practices by some of these leaders and as result cannot objectively deal with the menace (Ahmadu, 2011; Mwamfupe, 2015). The dimensions of the farmer–herder conflicts are thus on the rise, and as a result, it necessitates that researchers and other stakeholders explore deeper the causes of the conflict. It is for this reason that this paper delves into how the actors in the conflict frame each other, thus exploring the mental schemata; why they act and behave the way they do.

Methodology

The study area is Agogo which falls within the Asante Akyem North District in Ghana. The district is situated in the eastern section of the Ashanti Region, between 60˚ 30' and 70˚ 30' north latitude and 00˚ 15' and 10˚ 20' west longitude. It is bordered on the north by Sekyere Afram Plains North, on the east by Kwahu East, on the south by Asante Akyem South and on the west by Sekyere East. It encompasses 1,126 square kilometres of land, accounting for 4.6% of the region's total land area (24,389 square kilometres) (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014) (Figure 1).

The topography is mostly undulating with gentle slopes, making it ideal for farming. Forest Ochrosol and Savanna Ochrosol are the two principal types of soil found in the research area. Cereals, oil palm, cassava, plantain, cocoa, vegetables, yam, maize and groundnut are all supported by the two soil types. The districts are surrounded by a semi-deciduous

Figure 1 Map of Asante Akyme North District

Source: Authors' construct (2019)
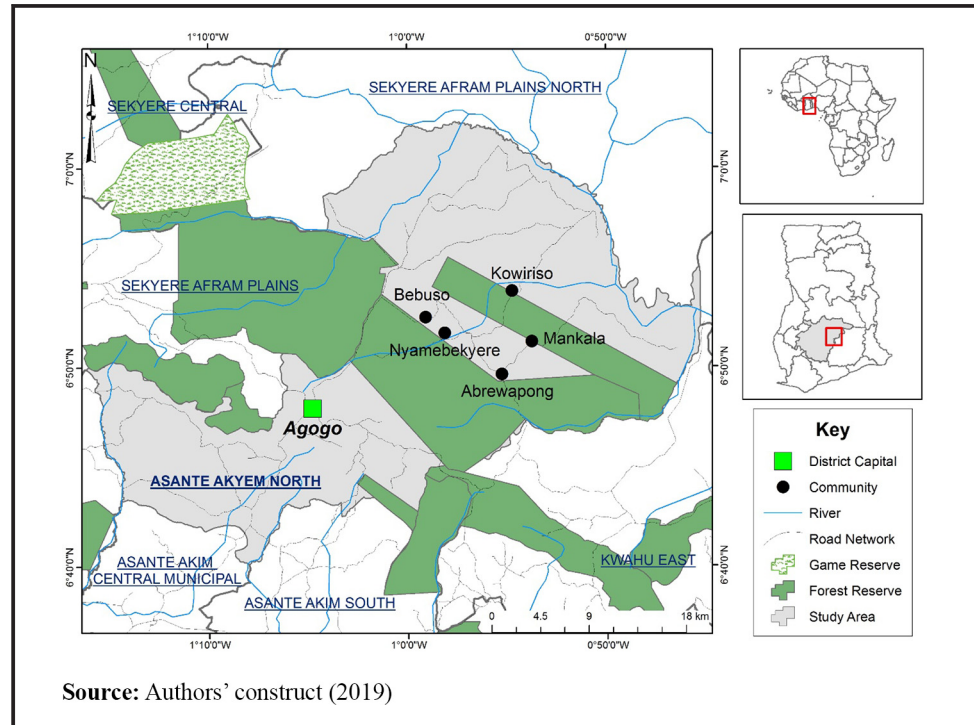
forest. The original forest has been mostly degraded into secondary woods and grassland, making the area ideal for animal grazing as well. This district's capital city is Agogo.

The study used a qualitative approach whose philosophical ontology and epistemology believe that meaning is constructed (interpretivism). Discovering and understanding these meanings, as well as the contextual elements that impact, determine and affect the interpretations made by different individuals, is considered critical under this paradigm. There are several realities, according to interpretivism (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Because "all knowledge is relative to the knower," interpretivists seek to understand others' points of view by working alongside them as they make sense of, draw meaning from and create their realities, and to interpret these experiences in the context of the researcher's academic experience (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006).

We further used a case study design. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used in the investigation. Key informants such as traditional authorities, cattle owners, cattle traders, security official (district police commander), agricultural officials (veterinary and agricultural extension officers), District Chief Executive, District Coordinating Director, unit committee leaders, crop farmers' association and cattle herdsmen association were chosen using the purposive sampling method. The technique allowed for the selection of respondents who were relevant to the study and improved the discussion quality. Because of the difficulty in locating seasonal migratory Fulani pastoralists for interviews because of their dispersed nature, snowball sampling was used to choose individuals (farmers and herders) engaged in specific episodes of conflict.

We used data collection methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and observation guides. On the in-depth interview guide, we used a semi-structured interview guide for the data collection. A total of 46 individuals were identified and interviewed, and the exercise was made possible with note taking and tape recording. Table 1 shows the sample size of the individuals selected for the interview.

Table 1	Sampled stakeholders for the in-depth interview	
Stakeholder		No.
Traditional authorities		1
Kontehene		1
Secretary of the traditional authority		
Cattle owner		
Local cattle owners		3
Fulani cattle owners		2
Cattle traders		2
Security official		1
(District Police Commander)		
Agricultural officials		2
District Chief Executive		1
District Coordinating Director		1
Unit committee leaders		2
Crop farmers		20
Herdsmen		10
Total		46

Note: Authors' construct (2019)

We also conducted four FGD using the FGD guide. For Kruger (1990), this qualitative data collection technique aims to obtain perceptions on a particular area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening setting. We briefed the groups on the study's objectives, divided down the important issues into discussion points and created probe questions after greeting them all in one sitting. Focus groups elicit a diversity of viewpoints and emotional processes within a group context, as opposed to individual interviews, which attempted to acquire individual attitudes, opinions and feelings. We were curious about how people responded to each other's viewpoints in the FGD so that we could draw some inferences from the group interactions (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). We organized two FGDs for farmers, one for local cattle owners and the other for Fulani herders. Each group included between 6 and 12 members.

During the field study, observation was crucial. Participants were observed using both unstructured and organized methods. Because we lived in the research community throughout the data collection, we made more friends with the farmers and herders. We accompanied some to the farms and assisted them with farming tasks such as weeding, harvesting and firewood gathering. Some farmers specifically requested that we accompany them to see the extent of the herders' destruction. It was often difficult to listen to them describe the magnitude of their loss and the daring consequences on their livelihoods. Equally, we paid visits to the herders in the bushes close to the Afram River and other homesteads. In the thick forest, we had a great time with the herders. We cooked and ate together, had fantastic discussions about the research topic, drank their popular tea, ataaya, with them, drank from their water source and shared jokes. We even accompanied some herdsmen in their search for pasture and water for the cattle on occasion. We observed how the cattle moved and were herded by the herders. As we did so, we discussed how livestock ruined farmlands and the compensation methods for crop farmers as and when that occurred. The purpose of the observation was to get first-hand knowledge and have a better understanding of the study's concerns. As a result, participant observation was critical in assisting us in comprehending and seeing concerns that the respondents would not ordinarily disclose.

The data were manually analysed. The authors played the tapes each day after the field trip and assigned name codes to them based on the respondents' assigned. As we coded, we paid attention to the content, performing some content analysis in the process. From the transcribed data, we extracted themes, topics, quotes and sentences for the analyses.

The final data presentation was done in the form of themes, with pertinent quotations used to support these themes as needed. Informed consent, willingness and the anonymity of responders were all taken into account as ethical factors.

Results and discussion on framing and conflict development

In line with the objectives of this study, the authors sought to find out how actors' framing influences conflict development. The data revealed that there are both pre-conflict and post-conflict frames by both the agriculturalists and the pastoralists. Pre-conflict frames somehow contributed to the fuelling of the conflict. Post-conflict frames evolved as a result of the conflict. Discussing the findings of this objective with the framing theory, framing can, therefore, be said to be both a cause and an effect of the conflict. This is in line with Burgess' (2017) postulation that frames held by the actors in a conflict form the basis on which they act. In other words, the frames held by both the farmers of Agogo and the Fulani herdsmen had an impact on what roles they each played in the conflict. The data in this study revealed to some extent how framing contributed to the conflict and the actions of the various factions. These frames are discussed in the ensuing paragraphs. The themes that emerged included the identity-relational frame, emotional-intellectual frame and negotiation-win frame. It was thus difficult to separate the emerged themes as they overlapped each other.

Identity-relational frame

One very significant frame that was identified is what the researcher termed "identity-relational." Both the farmers and the herdsmen have labelled the identities of their counterparts, creating a direct split from each other. The difference in their descriptions of identity draws on the works of Tajfel (1970), Turner (1985); and Drury and Reicher (2000) that when identity focuses on the account of "us" and "them" it breeds relational problems which cause conflict. That is, who "we" are is directly related to how "we" understand who "they" are.

The actors also exhibited the relational component in describing their identities. They drew largely on the closeness, shared values, beliefs, practices and lifestyle and signalled that any person, beliefs and practices that do not conform to theirs can be conflictual. The attributions about the "us" and "them" again become violent and conflictual when one group feels stereotyped, oppressed and abused of their rights. This phenomenon seems to agree with the framing theory that in identity frames, actors usually see themselves as having particular identities in the context of specific situations. These identities spring from the individuals' self-conception and group affiliations (Rothman, 1997). That is to say, both the Fulanis and the Agogo farmers see themselves as having certain identities that characterize them. This mindset had a great impact on the people and their behaviour. It, however, goes further than just couching identities for themselves. They further view others in the conflict as having particular characteristics.

The findings supported Tonah's (2006) assertion that the farmer– herder conflict debate underlines ethnic differences where Fulani pastoralists see themselves as different from the population group of sedentary farmers. The differences created between the feuding groups have resulted in how each group frames the other. The result of this interaction are prejudice, exclusion, marginalization and stereotype elements. This group identity categorization may be either positive or negative, but in conflict situations, these categorizations are mostly negative. It is even possible that positive frames are twisted to appear negative. In a broader discourse in West Africa, the herdsmen (Fulani herdsmen) are considered migrants ("aliens") and the abusers of the host communities, especially when herders start demanding equal rights of tenure and exploitation (Seddon and Sumberg, 1997).

The concept of citizenship was also tied to identity. The farmers labelled the herdsmen as strangers and not belonging to Agogo and Ghana at large, hence non-citizens. Unfortunately, in Ghana, ethnicity and citizenship are intricately linked. The perception that once an individual does not claim primordial ethnic identity the individual is not a citizen tends to negatively affect the Fulani and contribute to discrimination against them. This is why Schlee (2009, p. 223) observes that national politics and ethnicity (and citizenship) have influenced pastoralists' relations where it is often assumed that "every group had a homeland and the right to expel minorities by force." The attainment of citizenship in Ghana as indicated in Articles 6 and 7 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana could be through other means rather than only by parenthood, indigeneity or ethnicity. Citizenship, for instance, can be attained through marriage or naturalization. In this study, one Fulani herdsman claimed he is a Ghanaian but does not feel belonged. This is how he narrated it:

> I am a Fulani. I am 30 years old. I was born here in Agogo. My father currently lives in Techiman. No, I know I was born here but some of the Agogo people don't like me so I don't feel I'm a member of the community. No, I don't vote during elections (Fulani herdsman, 2019).

This respondent claims his citizenship is through birth and the duration of his stay in Ghana. He tells that he only knows Ghana and not any other country. The demographic characteristics of the study supported the argument here that some herdsmen have stayed in Agogo for more than 30 years, yet they do not enjoy any sense of belongingness. There have also been intermarriages between Fulani herdsmen and indigenous women. One security officer added his voice to this finding and puts it this way:

> No, the Fulanis don't believe they belong to the community, because when they see you they start running away, they see the police vehicle then they run away. They see the indigenes and there is always antagonism. You know they are not in the town here. They are in the bush and they feel like they are strangers in this community, meanwhile, they have lived here for more than 20 years. Some have even married and have children with community women. Because they feel this way, for their protection they always carry guns. How many of the people in Agogo walk about holding guns? None because they feel safe. The Fulanis don't feel safe because they know they are not members of the community (Security Personnel, 2019).

The framing theory recognizes the role of identity because it is important for the escalation, duration and intensity of the conflict. Identity, which is a human need, forms an important aspect in the development of psychological processes that ultimately creates psycho-cultural dispositions that cause ethnic groups to enter into violent interactions (Burton, 1990). The threat to individual and group identity is more pronounced when the fulfilment of one group's identity is viewed as a threat to the existence of the other (Northrup, 1989). As a result, there emerges a psychological aggressive response that is distorted and defensive. Northrup (1989) continues and postulates that the rigidification process leads to crystallization and hardening of what is construed as self and non-self which in essence widens the gap between groups as each tries to secure its boundaries. An image of others characterized by suspicion, hostility and mistrust and at worst a process of unfriendly and unbending relationships between the groups.

Another frame that was tied to cultural identity was language. Language was stated as a medium for communication and a source of conflict. It is a tool that cannot be detached from the speaker and his or her context. This frame was stated as a contributing factor explaining the differences that existed between the two groups. Interestingly, people in a community freely make use of their different languages to show their values, culture and beliefs. In a typical non-conflict setting, least would the residents show these differences left alone demonstrate as a cause of conflict. It is only when the conflict parties become aware of these differences, consider them to be responsible for their grievances and feel that their identity is being threatened, do the differences and inequalities become a source of conflict.

This implies that linguistic conflict at one point in time is covert and at other times, it is overt. The district understudy is monolingual, and any dialect spoken outside of the known and spoken dialect is observed as a threat, especially when meaning is not mutually reached and when this occurs contact language conflict erupts. This frame tends to compound the hatred formed between them. This is how a farmer puts it:

> We don't understand the language of the Fulani herdsmen. You know they move in groups so when they come to your farm and in the course of talking they switch to talk to each other in Fulani in our presence. This gets confusing. You actually cannot tell if they are planning evil. But we read their body language and as humans as we are because we cannot understand them as they speak you get aggressive in preparation for their next step of actions (Male farmer, Brahabebome, 2019).

A herder made a similar comment:

> They (referring to farmers) use their language to insult us and plan evil about us and our cattle. Researcher: In which ways? Herder: They plan in their language to poison our animals. Researcher: How do you ascertain that? Herder: We know (Fulani herder, Ananekrom, 2019).

In the case of the Agogo farmer–herder conflict, language is taken as a ruling identity where parties rely on to injure and harm their adversaries. The farms and cattle are of great value to the farmers and herders, respectively. Anything that tends to harm that is perceived as a threat. Unknown verbal expressions made in connection to these resources serve as cues to conflict actors who may diverge or converge on frames in response. The frame here is the quality attributed to the farmer–herder conflict as a result of the actors' linguistic decisions.

Lake (2002) opined that most observers tend to explain conflicts around the world as the result of racial, ethnic, religious or territorial disputes; we rarely see language as a direct and fundamental cause. The role of language in conflict is important. This study revealed how rarely scholars in conflict studies pay attention to and rethink language as a source of conflict. Language was more of a specific cause of the conflict and useful to recognize than understanding the war only in ethnic and religious terms. Lake (2002) recounts the fundamental reason to look to language as the source of tension because it is more tangible than race or religion, arguing that scholars increasingly understand race to be a fiction: belonging to one or another group is more a social and historical matter than a biological one. As one of the most important elements of a culture's identity, language is also inflammatory. A group's language can feel essential to its very existence. It is no surprise that often the more vulnerable a group feels, the greater its devotion to its language. In the case of the land-use conflict in Agogo, language is considered a cause owing to parties' inability to understand what the other speaks hence a perception of framing evil or conflict.

Similarly, there was the idea of tagging and otherness. The parties to intractable land-use conflicts often constructed characterization frames for themselves. Nevertheless, these frames were mostly negative. Such characterizations often undermined others' legitimacy, cast doubt on their motivations or exploit their sensitivity. For example, the indigene farmers have, in their minds, identified the herdsmen as strangers who have an unforgiving and retaliating spirit.

The Fulani identity is characterized by an unforgiving and retaliating spirit. In the minds of Agogo farmer residents, Fulani herdsmen never forgive anyone who offends them and they are always ready to retaliate. This notion informs how they relate with them generally. According to some of the Agogo natives, this character trait stands as the root cause of the conflict. This is in line with the idea that framing emerges from actors' and observers' interpretations of conflict events. According to this viewpoint, framing does not only refer to the mode of interpretation through which actors involved in a conflict make sense of a situation but also includes a discursive dimension through which they define conflicts,

causes and actions within narratives selected or generated by them (Esser, 1999; Benford and Snow, 2000; Snow and Byrd, 2007). Hence, this characterization frame that the resident farmers' place on Fulani herdsmen greatly impacts their views of the issues relating to the conflict.

Other characterization frames that emerged were the tagging that Fulani herdsmen are rapists, criminals and unclean individuals. Whereas many think that the herdsmen do not take a bath or brush their teeth, several others also perceive them as groups of people who even have sexual intercourse with a unique and chosen cattle meant to be a sexual partner. Triangulating this finding, the researchers asked the herdsmen how they satisfy themselves sexually. This is how one of them put it: "our wives are not here because of the conflict. They are in Nsawam. (Researcher: so what do you do when the sexual urge is there?) (Laughing) he replied we satisfy ourselves" (Herdsman, 2019). The means of sexual satisfaction were not disclosed. Perhaps, this somewhat supported the observations by the crop farmers.

Alleged reports by the farmers revealed that most of the criminal cases in the community were committed by the Fulani herdsmen who come from the bush at night to cause those wrongdoings. They either kill, injure or/and take away belongings such as money, clothes, shoes and any other thing they find valuable at the time of the crime. On the rape tagging, data revealed the Fulani herdsmen raped women who visited the farm alone and sometimes would even rape females in the presence of their spouses just to make the men psychologically powerless. Data collected from women's groups, men's group, youth group, individuals and stakeholders revealed that some females were raped as in the case of this narrative: "there was an instance where a woman was raped in the presence of her husband at a gunpoint. The man felt so helpless and could only watch his wife being raped by the Fulani herdsman" (District Representative, 2019).

Neither the police nor the hospital gave evidence to support this claim. Nonetheless, a triangulated interview supported the narrative above and thus validated the data that some women were raped in the presence of their partners. The evidence and claims were not known to the police and the hospital because sexual practices are surrounded in secrecy, and people are hesitant to talk about them because of stigmatization. This study supported the research by Baidoo (2014) and highlight that sexual problems like rape do occur in conflict communities, but the victims are hesitant to report about it with the thought of saving their marriages and protecting their children. The findings of this study corroborated those of Abubakari and Longi (2014), who claimed that Fulani herdsmen were responsible for 7 of 11 highway robbery offenses reported in their study region between December 2011 and June 2014. According to Forson-Asimenu (2011), Fulani nomads have banned social and economic activities like traveling to the bush to harvest shea nuts, baobab or dawadawa for home consumption in all villages in the Upper West Region, fearing that women will be raped.

As farmers used these characterization frames to explain self and herders' behaviours, their perception reinforces the hatred they have towards the herders and their eagerness to fight them.

Such frames of identities have led to the exclusion of the Fulanis from many things in the society including politics, and participation in major activities in society. This seems to agree with the idea that framing involves frame generation, on the one hand, and frame reception and enacting, that is, mobilization based on the frame, on the other hand (Minsky, 1975). This plays out in the social relationships that result from framing. According to the theory, a conflict event is defined by an actor or an observer based on the social environment and institutional setting that shape social relations. As a result, a frame of a conflict event has to be aligned with the social environment to be successful. From this viewpoint, frames of conflict are generated based on already existing larger "cognitive models," as well as those that are ingrained in the minds, perceptions and understandings

of people and embedded as meaningful structures in the social environment (Esser, 1999). Such perceptions and understandings contribute to the side-lining and exclusion that is reported. One Fulani respondent lamented:

We are not part of anything they do in the community. Our place is the bush here. During Akwasidae our Alhajis attend but we do not. This year our cattle did not feature at the farmers' day celebration (Fulani herdsman, Mankala, 2019).

The Fulanis, on the other hand, see the people of Agogo as unaccommodating host farmers. This tag makes them relate with them with some form of dislike and disgust. It is clear that frames are built upon underlying structures of beliefs, values, and experiences that actors construct to distinguish themselves in unique ways (Burgess, 2017). The Fulanis see themselves as different and of a different character compared to the farmers. In other words, they think that if they were the hosts of the place, they would have been more receptive and accommodating.

Emotional-intellectual frame

The actors also created an emotional-intellectual frame, which mirrored the attention paid to the conflict's emotive dimension as well as some specific behaviours such as who said or did what. The perception of an enemy–foe relationship was a reason for the repetitive nature of the farmer–herder conflicts in Asante Akyem North District. Both parties see themselves as enemies with underlying hatred, anger and frustration, and they tied this explanation to their opponents' aim at destroying their source of livelihoods that threatened the well-being of their household. The idea of seeing each other as enemies have led to the Fulanis and residents attacking each other at different times and under different circumstances. These attacks have led to deaths, destruction of livelihoods and causing severe injuries to the people who are seen as enemies.

Some farmers also explained this point by tying it to their source of livelihood. "The herdsmen are evil. They don't want our good. They constantly destroy our farms leaving us poor all the time" (Farmer, Nyamebekyere, 2019). It is clear that such attacks and injuries inflicted upon each other occur because they see each other as enemies. Indeed, framing can lead to conflict dynamics and the processes involved therein, including the escalation or de-escalation of violence (Lewicki *et al.*, 2003). In the instance where these frames do not exist, actors would probably have been a bit more civil in their approach and attitude in the conflicts. Seeing each other as enemies sever the feeling of pity or sympathy for each other and fill actors with rage and hatred and the desire to hurt or kill each other. When one faction begins, the response is equally serious as a result of framing. In disputes that become intractable as a result of framing, it is common for most parties to the conflict to focus on threats of potential loss rather than on opportunities for gains. People tend to react differently to a proposed action when its expected consequences are framed in terms of losses as opposed to gains. This kind of framing happens as a result of the enemy–foe relationship with each other. In this instance, preventing a perceived loss is often more salient and more highly valued than capturing a commensurate gain (Schweitzer and DeChnrch, 2001).

Finally, conflict over how best to manage or resolve differences is central to many intractable disputes. Depending on disputants' identity, characterization of other disputants, perceived power and perception of the available options, conflict frames may impel parties to seek very different remedies in response to common problems. These remedies may range from actions as disparate as violence, civil disobedience, litigation and negotiation. Because of the wide complexity of possible actions and the uncertainty of their consequences, groups with shared interests and values may draw significantly different conclusions as to the best course of action within a particular dispute.

Negotiation-win frame

Actors in the Agogo farmer–herder conflict have also formed negotiation-win frames. This occurs when one party is eager to sit down with a mediator and discuss, while the other, believing it has the upper hand, refuses to talk, preferring litigation or aggressive action, according to Schweitzer and DeChnrch (2001). Disputants' identities, characterizations of other disputants and perceived power are all common sources of inspiration. Farmers who are indigenes and land custodians feel more powerful than transnational migrants who are pastoralists in this dispute (Schweitzer and DeChnrch, 2001). Conflict dynamics are influenced by disputants' perceptions of power and social control throughout decision-making processes. These power frames assist the disputant in determining not only which types of power are valid (e.g. governmental, legal and civil disobedience), but also which forms of power are most likely to promote their argument (e.g. authority, resources, expertise, coalition-building, threat and voice). As a result of the conflict, the farmers, as opposed to the voiceless pastoralist/herders, appeal to Ghana's central government for assistance, and this is how the government responds, according to some stakeholders:

> Almost every year, when the conflict arises, we call on the president of the nation, and soldiers are deployed. When they come, it is ''operation cowleg'' which means the security forces shot and kill all cows as and when they see them. They also expulse the herdsmen and their belongings from Agogo (District Representative, 2019).

The herders also stated on this frame that:

> What we want the government and the authorities in this community to do for us is to give us some land far away from the farmers like those close to Afram so we graze there and we would not interrupt the farmers and also govern ourselves but this doesn't seem to sink well for the authorities and the people. We think that this way the conflict would stop or be minimized (FGD with indigene herders, 2019).

The herdsmen also pointed out that there have been some occasions where the regional ministers and local authorities invited them to a workshop on the management of the conflict. They spelled out their suggestions but at the implementation stage, their views were not considered. This, the herdsmen concluded as unsatisfactory and discriminating. The findings generally suggested that the various factions in the conflict had frames of each other and themselves. Their respective frames impacted the pre-conflict and post-conflict situation, and this accords with available literature and theories on framing,

Conclusion and recommendations

The study sought to explore how the main actors of the Agogo farmer–herder conflict frame each other and how these frames influence conflict development. Unlike the traditional ways of identifying the causes of the conflict, the work explored the cognitive models formed about each of these main actors and how these form the basis for conflict eruption. These mental constructions (frames) are held by the farmers and herders built upon by their beliefs, values and experiences. The identity-relational frame was one of the main factors influencing the farmer–herder conflict in the district. In this frame, the actors were very much concerned about how they see themselves from each other and how that shaped their relationship with the other party. The actors created the "us versus them" phenomenon where each faction sees themselves as having unique identities different from the other. This influenced their behaviour towards each other, contributing to frequent violent and conflictual clashes.

Further, there was the conflict management frame which mostly reflects the differences between the two parties over how best to manage or resolve any conflict. This frame highlights the power dynamics between the incompatible actors. It again posits that actors who feel more powerful are less willing to be around the negotiation table. In this conflict,

the farmers who are indigenes and custodians of the land feel more potent over the transnational migrants who are pastoralists and argue that the herdsmen be flushed out without negotiation.

The study recommends that stakeholders such as conflict researchers and practitioners, psychologists, religious leaders and policymakers come on board to manage the situation, converge ideas and thought for eliciting a permanent solution to the protracted conflict. The study requires the services of psychologists to deconstruct these destructive frames formed by the farmers and herders into constructive ones. There would also be the need for community-level education on the underlying causes. The educational campaign should involve the psychologists who would be responsible for applying their expertise in supporting the various factions of the conflict in the deconstructing process. There is also the need for mediation processes that take cognizance of the role of opinion leaders of the factions of the conflict in Agogo who could influence their followers, in one way or the other, in enduring the successful implantation of education. Religious leaders must also put religious strategies in place to support the actors in these mental deconstruction exercises. Policymakers need to also put policy measures, surrounding these identified frames formed by these conflict actors, in place to help minimize the eruption of the farmer–herder conflicts in Agogo to allow for smooth management of the conflict.

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Corresponding author

Sabina Appiah-Boateng can be contacted at: saboateng@ucc.edu.gh