

Beyond the binary debates in migration: Experiences of Fulani nomads, sedentary Fulani, and autochthone farmers in Agogo, Ghana

Mary Boatemaa Setrana ^{*,†}, Justice Richard Kwabena Owusu Kyei[‡] and Daniel Nyarko[§]

[†]Center for Migration Studies, College of Humanities, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana, [‡]Department of Sociology and Social Work, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana and [§]Center for Migration Studies, College of Humanities, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana

*Corresponding author. E-mail: mbsetrana@ug.edu.gh, mobkjowat@yahoo.com

Abstract

The contestations over land and pasture redefine broad complex boundaries between three groups: autochthone farmers of Agogo, Fulani sedentary herders, and Fulani nomads. The broad boundaries have emerged into sub-categories between the sedentary Fulani and Fulani nomads who belong to the same ethnic group of Fulbe in West Africa. With growing population pressures and shrinking resources, the competition for land and livelihoods has fuelled tensions among these groups, feeding a cycle of recurring violence. Extended qualitative fieldwork conducted in six communities in the forest transitional zone of Ghana reveals how these tensions are connected to emerging forms of self-categorisation and othering: developing positive attitudes of in-groups, while viewing others less favourably. This has produced a triadic relationship with varied claims to authority, space, and residential superiority. The indigenous farmers claim ownership of the land and demand the evacuation of both sedentary Fulani and Fulani nomads from the area. The sedentary Fulani claim they are not the troublemakers but that they are blamed for the encroachment and destruction of farms. The Fulani nomads resist assertions that they are dangerous and unapproachable, but intentionally remain aloof and outside, at the margins of Ghana's legal authority.

Keywords: autochthone, Ghana, nomadism, sedentarism, triadic relationship

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1. Introduction

We have lived with some of the sedentary Fulani in this community for a very long time. They have not caused us so much trouble like the Fulani nomads we have in the forest. As for the sedentary Fulani, they live with us here in the Agogo, even we the autochthones call them the ‘local Fulani’ because they have lived in this community for so long a time. The Sedentary Fulani are established in Agogo and are well integrated into our communities. On the other hand, we also have the trouble people, they are the ones in the bush known as Fulani nomads—they are much more difficult to live with. (Key informant 1, Agogo)

The contestations over land and pasture redefine broad complex boundaries between three groups: autochthone farmers, Fulani sedentary, and Fulani nomads. With growing population pressures and shrinking resources, competition for land and livelihoods has heightened tensions among these groups, feeding a cycle of recurring violence. The results are a triadic relationship with varied claims to authority, occupation, and residential superiority. The autochthone farmers claim ownership of the land and demand the evacuation of both sedentary Fulani and Fulani nomads from Agogo area. The Fulani sedentary herders claim they are not the troublemakers but blame the Fulani nomads for the encroachment and destruction of farms. The Fulani nomads resist assertions that they are dangerous and unapproachable, but intentionally remain aloof and outside, at the margins of the Ghanaian state’s legal authority.

In this triadic relationship, the farmers at the centre of the discourse define the relationship of the Agogo community with the Fulani nomads and sedentary Fulani, who remain marginal, albeit in different ways. A litany of national laws and decrees has attempted to create binaries of ‘autochthone versus allochthons’ among farmers and herders. By legally defining pastoralists as migrants, strangers, or aliens, the state intends this binary to give autochthone farmers authority over resources. The notion of ‘autochthone versus allochthons’ has gained ground that ‘every group has a homeland and that indigenes have the right to expel minorities by force’. (Scheele 2010: 9). The legalities are a hinderance to the pastoralists with regards to them accessing land and enjoying their rights and exercising their responsibilities because they are foreigners and are therefore marginalised (Atuguba et al. 2020; Oppong 2017). An examination of Agogo’s dynamics gives cause to question both presumptions. Here, the margins of Agogo are maintained so long as the nomads keep moving in and out of the community while sedentary Fulani settle. In this case, the ‘autochthone’ and the centre are defined through differential forms of incorporating and sedentarising a divided other. In Agogo, the margins are further differentiated along residential and occupational lines, where the sedentary Fulani are allowed to settle but have less rights than the Fulani nomads, but each belong and is marginal in particular ways.

The literature on interethnic relations is not conclusive as to whether community diversity enhances social integration or conflict (Cheong et al. 2007; Laurence 2014). With the rapid rate of globalisation, the avoidance of ethnic and cultural diversity is impossible rather the new norm that has to be investigated and understood. The paper further explores how interethnic relations position social actors in the margins and how they exercise agency. The paper is structured as follows: after the introduction, the paper discusses the literature beyond binary debates in migration and immigrant integration; the

paper further sheds light on the politics of land in the Agogo context. The findings highlight key themes including the differences in occupational livelihoods, contestations on access to land, and encroachment of farms and destruction of animals.

2. Beyond the binary debates in migration and immigrant integration

Rapid rate of globalisation with the rippling effect of diversified communities has led to the acceleration of interethnic engagement between migrants and immigrants (Dustmann and Preston 2001; Wagner et al. 2006). In the interethnic literature, the contact and threat hypothesis discourse dominate (Cheong et al. 2007; Laurence 2014). The threat hypothesis argues that as allochthons or foreigners increase in size, the autochthones feel threatened for losing their economic and social privileges (Oliver and Wong 2003). The dominant group generates hostility towards the minority group due to the environment of prejudice. At the community level, there is an attitude of threat as the autochthones encounter people from different ethnic background. The contact hypothesis, however, argue that as people from divergent background interact face to face (Hewstone 2009; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Rocha and Espino 2009) there is the formation of social capital such as intermarriage, friendship, and communication. According to the contact hypothesis, it is only when there is face-to-face interaction that prejudice reduces and so barely living in the same community without much contact may not generate interethnic interaction that yields positive attitudes. Exposure to different ethnic groups or coexistence without mixing or interacting is not contact (Valentine 2008).

In this work, we move beyond the binary hypothesis of threat and contact in which there is alternation of threat and contact hypothesis in interethnic communities. We propose rather that both hypotheses are simultaneously present as autochthones and immigrants may experience receptiveness and threat simultaneously (Amin 2002; Schlueter and Scheepers 2010). In spite of the prejudices that exist at the local communities, both autochthones and immigrants operate within dynamic and contested spaces which may situate them at the margins. The phenomenon also brings into question the touchy issue of citizenship which is related to the understanding of autochthony and immigrants that have been discussed widely at the nation-state level (Setrana 2021) without much emphasis at the local level.

At the community level, autochthones encounter migrants or the 'other'. The 'other' may be citizens from the same nation-state but immigrants in the local community (Geschiere 2009). Discriminatory colonial operations have created differentiated citizenship in African societies which have led to contestations over whether citizenship is different from belonging (Daley 2013). The practice seeks to position some persons at the margins to the extent of excluding them in the body politic at the local level leading to 'integration through marginalisation' (Daley 2013). In contributing to interethnic and migration studies, this paper explores the complexity that surrounds the integration of Fulani and Agogo farmers at the local level. In order to appreciate the process through

which immigrants and autochthones interact in creating contact and threat, we employ the indicators of immigrant integration.

Immigrant integration is conceptualised as a process through which immigrants enter into the social, economic, political, and cultural life of the host society (see [Kyei, Smoczynski and Setrana 2021](#)). We categorise immigrant integration into three namely: social, cultural, and structural to guide the discussion on immigrant integration. Social integration refers to the extent to which immigrants and autochthones interact and come into 'contact' ([Vertovec 2007](#)) and the indicators here are friendship, residential, and intermarriage. Cultural integration refers to the extent with which immigrants and autochthones share values, norms, and preferences ([Kyei, Smoczynski and Setrana 2021](#)) and here the indicator is language acquisition. Structural integration is also described as the extent to which immigrants participate in the socio-economic life and major institutions of the local community; and the elements include educational achievement, occupation, political participation (voting in local assembly elections and membership in voluntary organisation), and political representation (contesting for elections in Municipal assembly and elected as a Municipal council member; see [Setrana and Kyei 2015](#)).

3. The context of Agogo

The Agogo Traditional Area is somewhat independent or quasi-autonomous, with the paramount chief and the traditional council controlling the affairs of the district and wielding power over traditional lands, but still coming under the sovereign power of the nation state ([Setrana 2021: 86](#)). [Figure 1](#) shows the site of our research which is located in the most populated district of the Agogo Traditional Area (ATA) with about 69,186 people, per the 2010 population census ([Ghana Statistical Service 2013](#)). The Twi-speaking Akans are the dominant ethnic group in the area. The indigenous people are mostly Christians while the local Fulani herder and Fulani nomads are Muslims. The main occupation of the people of the Agogo Traditional Area is farming, which employs about 72.7 per cent of the labour force. This is confirmed by a representative of the Traditional Council, 'Agogo is a small farming community and majority of the people in Agogo are farmers' (interview, Agogo, 22 September 2017).

The people of Agogo practice the hybrid system of land tenure system. This land tenure system combines customary and statutory land tenure systems ([Ubink and Quan 2008](#) in [Setrana 2021: 92](#)). About 70 per cent of the land is under the customary land tenure system, which is based on the existing traditions and practices of these communities while 30 per cent are entrusted lands owned under customary tenure but managed by the state or owned by the state for the benefit of the public. The lands are utilised in various ways depending on the type of holding, namely, allodial title, freehold title, leasehold, and sharecropping ([Ubink and Quan 2008](#) in [Setrana 2021: 92](#)). The chiefs, clans, sub-stools, and families hold the highest land title which is called the possessory title. The native farmers also hold usufructuary or possessory titles on the traditional lands or lands belonging to indigenes (Interview with chief of staff, Agogo Traditional Area 2017).

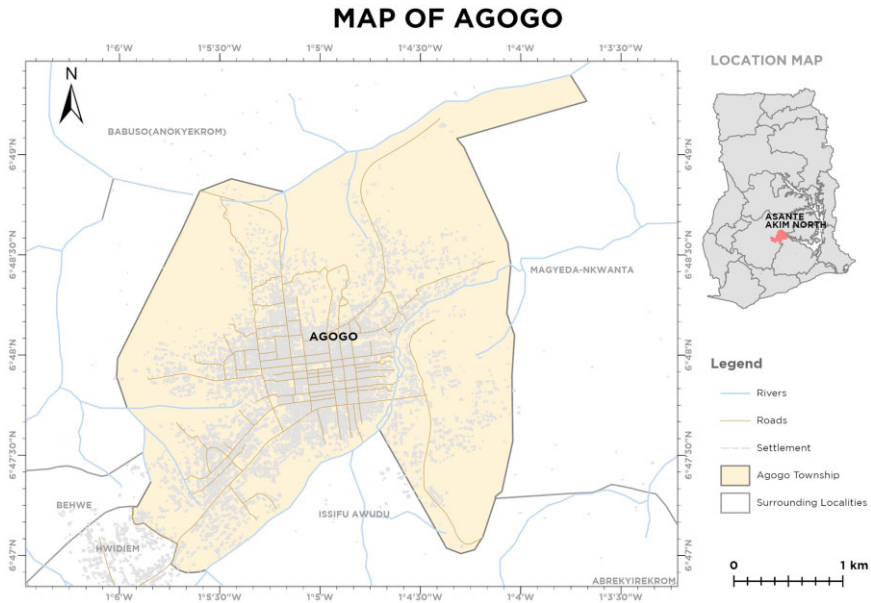


Figure 1. Map of Agogo and its surrounding communities.

The area was selected for this research because of the major incidence of conflict (Bukari, Sow and Scheffran 2018). Climate change with the consequence of water and food shortages has augmented the entrance of Fulani herdsmen in the Agogo Traditional Area with favourable climate conditions for cattle rearing. The livelihood-related conflicts between autochthonous farmers, sedentary Fulani, and nomadic Fulani have become a common feature of this community especially between the months of December and March when the weather is dry. In spite of the decades of conviviality between autochthones in ATA and Fulani pastoralists, the farmer–herder relation is a multiplicity of co-operation and conflict which is, however, dominated by conflict due to competition for scarce land resources. This paper seeks to understand how ATA autochthones and Fulani migrants navigate these complex daily encounters.

4. Situating Fulani in Ghana

Majority of Fulani also known as the Fulbe people hail from the Savanna–Sahel region which experiences one of the most unstable and harsh environment in the world which puts pressure on the use of land with sparse vegetation (Oppong 2017). The Fulani is one of the largest ethnic groups that are located in different parts of the Sahel and West Africa mainly in Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Ghana with cattle herding as their dominant occupation. Although they are indigenous in the nation states in which they are found, they form minority of the population. Since the beginning of the 20th

century, there has been seasonal migration of Fulani pastoralists towards the Savannah in search of pasture for their cattle due to harsh environmental conditions (Benjaminsen et al. 2012; Boutrais 1986). In the last few decades, Fulani pastoralists have migrated to the borders of the humid tropical forest in West Africa. Fulani in Ghana experiences internal tensions and differences as well as similarities.

Although Fulani people have a long history of residence in Ghana that predates the establishment of Ghana as a nation state, they are considered legally as foreigners by the state. Interestingly, some Fulani have naturalised as Ghanaians and some consider themselves as autochthonous Ghanaians they are however, perceived by the local community in which they reside as 'other' in spite of their length of stay (Tonah 1993). It is not enough to be a citizen of the nation state, one has to claim belongingness to a locality. Fulani in Ghana is faced with such challenges which sometimes create scene of violent struggle between autochthones (indigenes of the local community) and allochthons (Fulani). Fulbe people in Ghana originate from different parts of West Africa and speak different West African dialects of Fulfulde as well as other West African languages. They are often distinguished also by their dressing style.

Fulani are widely known as the major cattle-keeping people in the world and Fulani in Ghana also engage in pastoralism. Some of the Fulani in Ghana have, however, settled in the local communities as in the case of Agogo Traditional Area and have blended pastoralism with agriculture as means of livelihood and we describe them here as sedentary Fulani. A section of the Fulani pastoralists have maintained the Fulbe culture of being nomadic by engaging in seasonal migration in search of pasture for their livestock and they are referred to here as nomadic Fulani. It is worth noting that unlike Fulani in Northern Nigeria and Niger, Fulani in Ghana have very little of local power and this is attributed to how they are considered as immigrants or 'other' (Oppong 2017). Moreover, the nation state Ghana abhors the nomadic lifestyle of Fulani.

5. The politics of land in Ghana and Agogo

The political economy of land ownership in Ghana has discriminatory tendencies as land ownership is strictly determined based on indigeneity, excluding guests or aliens. Owning land is critical to maintaining certain forms of authority and the desire to keep that authority helps produce, or at least feeds into, debates and categories of membership that can exclude groups that might undermine that authority. These take the form of ethnicity, but they are imbued with questions of morality, lifestyle, etc.

Land is increasingly a scarce resource because of commercialisation, commoditisation, urbanisation, and the high demand for land by other stakeholders (Flintan 2012). The political economy of land which comprises water, pasture, and grazing fields in Ghana lies in the hands of traditional leaders, the nation, and in some instances in the hands of both the state and the traditional leaders (Ubink and Quan 2008). Traditional authorities are able to have their own modalities of administering these lands. For instance, in Ghana, almost 80 per cent of lands are administered by the traditional authorities that directly fall under the control of families as well as traditional leaders while 18 per cent of lands in Ghana is controlled by the state in use for both public and local people's interest (Mahama and Baffour

2009). In certain cases, the state reserves the constitutional and legal rights to take lands from individuals and the state for projects which are in the interest of the state. Sometimes the state takes land from individuals, families, and traditional leaders among others for conservation and public projects involving construction.

The political economy of land with much land vested in the hands of traditional authorities means individuals and family members have lands as their inheritance in Ghana thereby making it difficult for non-indigenes to control landed common properties such as water, pasture, grazing fields, and rangelands (Beyene 2014). Leasing lands to foreigners in Ghana by law permits it to be for no more than 50 years whereas Ghanaians who are given lands or lease from families, traditional leaders, or individuals is for 50–100 years (Ollenu 1962 and the Government of Ghana 1999). In administration of lands by traditional authorities under customary control, most traditional areas such as stools, skins, and clans have done so to define their boundary lines and areas of control of water, pasture, land, rangeland, and other ecological resources (Kasanga and Kotey 2001; Yeboah and Oppong 2015). As a follow up on these dynamics, this study seeks to show how the allocation of land and other resources in Ago Traditional Area have resulted in the construction and shifting of complex ethnic groupings and boundaries among the farmers, the nomads, and the sedentary herders.

6. Methods and profile of participants

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the complex integration of Fulani and Ago farmers at the local level. As indicated earlier, in order to appreciate the process through which immigrants and autochthones interact in creating contact and threat, we employ the indicators of immigrant integration. To support this argument, this article draws from interviews conducted in ATA in the forest transitional zone of Ghana, from July 2017 to December 2019. The empirical evidence is based on a qualitative study of the conflicts and the peace-building strategies in six communities. Interviews were conducted with 5 sedentary Fulani households, 7 nomadic Fulani, and 10 indigenous farmers, and with key informants such as the heads of the cattle owners' association and of the traditional council. Three focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with farmers, sedentary Fulani, and nomadic Fulani. The cattle owners, nomadic Fulani, and sedentary Fulani were recruited through snowballing. We minimised the biases associated with snowballing by identifying different contact persons who assisted in recruiting cattle owners and nomadic Fulani and sedentary Fulani. Interviews were conducted in Asante-Twi, the native language of the indigenes of ATA, and translated into English. The interviews were recorded before translating and transcribing them into English. Thematic data analysis was done by identifying themes and sub-themes on occupational livelihoods, encroachment, and contestations over land access. We used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

On average, the selected sedentary Fulani households included five persons. The youngest herdsman was 32 years old and the oldest was 48 years old. All the sedentary Fulani and nomadic Fulani were male. In the ATA, herding is done mainly by males. The male

children of each household learn their fathers' occupation. The children were either school dropouts or had never attended school. Neither the herdsman nor their wives had any formal education. The sedentary Fulani trace their roots to Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, and Mali. In all cases, either their grandparents and/or parents migrated to Ghana as herders to seek pasture for their animals. The households moved to find cattle owners who needed herders to keep their own animals. While some moved stepwise before eventually settling in ATA, others moved there directly. The settled herders had spent between a minimum of two years and a maximum of eight years in the ATA. The search for permanent herding jobs required that they settle in locations where such opportunities were available. Once they find lucrative employment, they were willing to settle permanently. The sedentary Fulani acknowledged that the ATA provided better economic environment and they had few intentions of relocating. These mobility patterns influence the kinds of relationships and interactions that exist between them and the autochthonous farmers and the nomadic Fulani.

Unlike the sedentary Fulani, the nomadic Fulani live in the forest (close to the farmlands) where they camp out. The forest or bush is far from town where farm lands are located. They do not migrate along with their family members but the men move alone searching for pasture for their animals. None of them had any formal education. None of them were new to Ghana, however. They had all been following their fathers, uncles, and grandfathers to Ghana for at least five years. Three nomads said they had been coming to Ghana for the past 10 years, and others had been coming for over three decades. Similar to the sedentary Fulani, they were all Fulani from West African countries of Nigeria, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. They usually came to Ghana between December to May and October to March every year. The average time they spent in Ghana was three to five months a year. The nomadic Fulani move in groups of around 20 persons, from two or more groups depending on the number of nomads within each group. The cattle were usually owned by the nomads or their family members, but sometimes upon request, they took care of cattle of Ghanaian owners. These varied mobility patterns affect their relationships with the other groups—the farmers and sedentary Fulani. Even though the nomads are also Fulani, it is not expected of them to find solidarity with sedentary Fulani who already live in Agogo. Both the sedentary and nomadic Fulani have different histories and probably different sub-groups. Despite these dynamics, the Fulani label takes on significance because the indigenous farmers can potentially label both settlers and nomads as 'Fulani'.

7. Findings

In this section, we relate the lived experiences of Fulani and Agogo farmers which are entangled in daily struggles, conflict, violence, and compromises with traces of gender in all these engagements through the lens of immigrant integration. We proceed by presenting data on residential and occupation segregation, then we describe the contestations over land access and finally gendering encroachment of farms and destructions of animals.

7.1 Occupational and residential integration

Ghana's categorisation of migrants and citizens create the impression that each of these different groups is homogenous. However, within these groups, there are further complex occupational and residential boundaries that define each category of social actors as to whether they are sedentary Fulani, nomadic Fulani, or autochthonous farmers. Comprehensively, the definition of occupational boundaries in Agogo also creates the opportunity for interaction among the different social actors. Some farmers are cattle-owners who purchase animals from nomadic Fulani and employ the services of sedentary Fulani to pasture the cattle. There is face-to-face interaction in the engagement of business transaction among the different ethnic groups which is an indicator at the boundaries of social and structural integration. Figures 2 and 3 show the nature of cattle keeping by the Fulani herders and an example of harvested farm produce in the market place by the autochthone farmers in Agogo.

At another instance, the nomads share their experiences of living in the bush which demonises them and renders them 'trouble makers' from the perspective of both farmers and sedentary Fulani, even though their stay in the region is just for a short period each year. One of the nomadic Fulani narrated his experience:

just imagine the nature of our work; it demands that we live in the bush. We live in the bush throughout our stay in this area, sometimes three months or more, our ancestors used to come to Ghana long ago. Living a life in the bush is not easy, we are exposed to all sorts of dangers and attacks but that is our profession so we do not complain. We sometimes come into town early in the morning to purchase a few food stuffs and provisions or join the Muslim prayers on Fridays. Even that, we develop a schedule for such movements among ourselves; we always need some people around to prevent our animals roaming all over the bush. Meanwhile, they see us as the people destroying their farms when in fact we are just here for our animals. (Nomadic Fulani 1, Agogo)

On the other hand, a sedentary herder shared his story as an example of how he and his other group members raise their animals in Agogo. He said

As you can see [pointing to the fenced cattle], my cattle are fenced. As you went around, you would have recognized that all my other colleagues had hedged their animals. Those of us in Agogo city taking care of the animals of the Agogo people, we cage our animals. We release them between 9 to 10 a.m. to move and graze around or herd them into the bush. The main difference is that here, we confine our cattle but our colleague herdsmen in the bush do not have cages for their cattle. On a typical day, we confine our cattle for the whole day until 10 a.m. when we move out to graze. When we return, we take them back into the cages until 10 a.m. the following morning. That is how we do it over here. We don't interact with the 'bush herdsmen' [invisible nomads] and so I don't know about their dealings. We are in our zone and they are in theirs. We the herdsmen over here haven't been involved in any conflict with the farmers this past year.' (Sedentary Fulani 1, Agogo)

Their occupational lifestyles, as narrated above, are one of the ways by which the diverse categories of Fulani define the 'other' and draw boundary, differentiating themselves from each other. Although both sedentary Fulani and nomadic Fulani are Fulani, their modes



Figure 2. The nature of cattle keeping by the Fulani herders.

of occupation differentiate them and each group perceives themselves as different. In this case, the fencing of the cattle, the location for grazing, and the daily routine are significant features in defining what constitute sedentary Fulani. These practices are the currency of the sedentary Fulani in negotiating and bridging the gap between the autochthonous farmers as against the isolated and unfenced cattle rearing business of the nomadic Fulani.

One of the nomadic Fulani shared his story on how nomadic groups are different from sedentary Fulani. 'We are all Fulani though, but we are nomads, very different from the sedentary herders. They live with the farmers. We don't have any stay [translated as permanent residence] in this community, we only come to feed our animals and go back' (Nomadic Fulani 2, Agogo, 2017). In the words of Nomadic Fulani 1 and 2, mobility is part of their identity—and a virtue they are happy with, although that presents them with less access to rights compared with the sedentary Fulani.

The creation of fences for cattle rearing is one identity marker that sedentary Fulani and nomadic Fulani claim distinguish them. This is tied to claims of having the 'best' animal-keeping arrangements as well as the duration of their stays and their attachment to the community which are favourable indicators of integration into Agogo community. The animal rearing strategy of the sedentary Fulani has allowed them to establish a form of identity that is distinct from the nomadic Fulani and that allows sedentary Fulani to claim a deeper connection to the farmers, even if it is not clearly reciprocated. Sedentary



Figure 3. Harvested plantain by autochthone farmers in the market place.

Fulani and nomadic Fulani are both Fulani groups but have become differentiated based on profession which are tied to their different ways of being in the world that demonstrates the fluidity of ethnicity rather than being static. In the interaction among the autochthonous farmers, nomadic Fulani, and sedentary Fulani, ethnicity, and status as migrants and citizens do not necessarily define their groupings and alliances in an intuitive way.

The nature of the occupation of nomadic Fulani compels them to live in temporary structures in the forest or 'bush' [in the local lexicon]. Sedentary Fulani, on the other hand, have verbal employment contracts with indigenous cattle owners in Agogo. Their informal employment 'contracts' give them opportunities to reside and put up buildings in the community. With their employers' support, they have built cement houses where they live with their families, and establish small farm plots outside the house. Residential integration among the three social actors is stratified with the autochthonous farmers at the core followed by sedentary Fulani and the most marginalised group remains nomadic Fulani. From the data, residential segregation or integration is determined by occupational activities that seek to place nomadic Fulani at the extreme margins which are not voluntary choices but choices that are core to their livelihood.

These differences in occupational lifestyles have moral implications on how groups relate to each other. Indeed, the emerging subjectivities and conflictual socialities are tied to each group's self-understanding, based on a sense of moral superiority, assessed in no

small part by their particular relationship to the land. All three groups have well-developed self-respect that bleeds into chauvinism: they each believe their occupational lifestyles to be the best approach and view each other as troublesome and chaotic. These lines of thoughts and feelings influence and define the relationship among farmers, sedentary Fulani, and nomadic Fulani that enhance or deter social ties. The nomadic and sedentary herders distinguish themselves and form solidarities along their lines of occupation, specifically based on sedentarism and nomadism.

7.2 Gendering encroachment of farms and destruction of animals: the moral question

It's all about our work. You will work hard only for cattle to destroy them [crops]. Just yesterday someone came to inform me that cattle have destroyed my onions. As human, once you are given such information, you immediately wish to visit the farm to see the extent of the destruction. But we are not able to do that because even if we decide to find out from the Fulani nomads why they didn't prevent the cattle from invading our land, they will assault us. Especially we the women, they assault us a lot. . . .As for the 'Fulani' nomads they don't care about anything. Once they are determined to allow the cattle to destroy the farm they will surely do that. They are ungrateful. Even if we give them plantain today, they can still allow the cattle to encroach the farm tomorrow. For 'them' they don't know how to apologize. (Female Farmers' FDG, Agogo)

Respondent 2: Eeeiiiiii noo oo. . . ., I had a tomato farm. As we were harvesting one of the Fulani was bringing the cattle there. So I said, Abotchi I am harvesting my tomatoes so you shouldn't let the animals come here. And he responded to me, so where will the cattle eat from? So I said to him: Abotchi I beg you. Even one of our labourers said, Abotchi I beg you I need money to pay my children's school fees. As we were begging him, his cattle were destroying the farm. The next day the land became dry like this park. So, they are really killing us in this place. (Female Farmers' FDG, Agogo)

As shown in the above quote, these cattle are described almost in magical terms—they are like a swarm of locusts—they came and the next day the land was bare. Some female farmers criticise the nomads for their lack of morality. The autochthonous farmers' material insecurity becomes a moral critique of the morality of nomadic Fulani. It is not only that nomadic Fulani have done wrong, but that their conception of right and wrong is fallible and faulty. The autochthonous farmers' claim that the nomadic Fulani lack gratitude, virtue, and manners which further deepens the prejudice and stereotype. Face-to-face interactions do not always yield fruitful integration rather it has the likelihood of entrenching already existing fears.

The quotations above portray interesting gender twist that is drawn from the matrilineal system of the autochthonous farmers in Agogo juxtaposed to the patrilineal system of the Fulani. Cattle rearing is the main source of income for the Fulani and it is a male-only business activity whereas farming which is the main source of livelihood for Agogo citizens is carried out by both males and females. From the narrative, nomadic Fulani do not consider women in the process of negotiation which makes women vulnerable and

marginalised although they are autochthones from Agogo. Gender matters as to whether a person stays in the margins or centre rather than just a migrant or autochthone.

The sedentary Fulani also shared their experiences as victims in this context as a justification for mistrust and violence in reference to past wrongs. They said

We are abused by the farmers and chased out of the grazing areas, leaving our animals behind to be injured by them. Even when the nomads who live in the bush destroy farms, the anger is transferred onto the sedentary Fulani. This is just unfortunate.

Our wives face antagonism from the farmers. No vehicle carried them and their goods to the market to sell. They had to walk to the market [and] no one traded with them. This situation made them uncomfortable and scared and so they stopped trading. These experiences add on to the reasons why we refuse to let our children enrol in basic primary education in the towns, although government says it is free and compulsory. We are afraid to allow our children travel the lonely journey to school in Agogo Township. (Sedentary Fulani' FDG, Agogo)

According to the nomadic Fulani, the indigenous farmers do not want to interact with them because of their negative preconceptions. They have no sort of symbiotic relationship. The nomads say that the indigenous farmers refuse to go about their daily activities such as farming and hunting because they fear the cattle of the nomads could run over them and their farms. Nomadic Fulani confirm the claim that the autochthonous farmers are afraid of their cattle, the farmers in addition, say that they are intimidated by the presence of nomadic Fulani themselves as well. Meanwhile, the nomadic Fulani claim that the autochthonous farmers exaggerate because their animals are harmless. Here, the nomadic Fulani describe another moral component of differentiation between them and the others. In an FGD, the nomadic Fulani expressed themselves this way

Hahaha, the local people are liars, they are very lazy and will always want to rustle our cattle. When we try to protect ourselves and our herds, they accuse us of being violent. Meanwhile their use of the tricycle disturbs our cattle [and causes them] to stray as they get frightened. Most of the men in the local communities have told us point blank that they are also arming themselves for any possible future clashes as they see us openly displaying our weapons. When we even greet them on their way to the bush, they do not respond. These farmers do not want us in their area, let alone to see our faces. The local people sometimes refuse to go about their routine works because of our presence here but we are harmless. The general residents complain of intimidation by our mere presence in the bush to the traditional authorities and the district assembly. The indigenes sometimes farm around water bodies so they can trap our cattle into destroying their farms for compensatory claims. Some of the complaints we receive from the local people include rape, robbery, destruction of farms, intimidations and cattle rustling. The locals complain because they want us out of the area. Our presence puts fear in them as they complain of our weapons, they sometimes complain that some of our people rape them. Sometimes the men in the villages follow us in the bush and beat us but we have decided not to retaliate or respond to their beatings. Once we retaliate the general residents will have the opportunity to put pressure on the District Assembly to invite national security and the consequences thereof will lead to our expulsion. (Nomads FDG, Agogo)

According to the nomadic Fulani, all these complaints about them are also due to what the sedentary Fulani tell the autochthonous farmers about them. The Youth Association leader of the farming community described how their daily encounter with nomadic Fulani breeds insecurity. He said

As for us, the youth, our hope is in the government. We have struggled with the 'Fulani' many times to get rid of their animals from this town but to no avail. The police don't offer any help to us, even when we call on them to rescue us in our farms, they only come to protect the Fulani herders and their animals. Because of that, once we hear the steps of the animals, we certainly know the 'dangerous people' [nomadic Fulani] are here, we run for our lives. Sometimes, by the time we go back to our farms, they would have drunk all our barrels of water and destroyed our crops. See [pointing to some empty buildings] all those buildings have collapsed because the occupants have been forced to leave this village. Even the chief himself is afraid and has fled from this village. In fact, that is the challenge we have here. We fear for our lives and cannot say anything. The cattle owners arm their herdsmen with weapons so that when they enter our farms, they could just feed their animals with farm produce. We are shot with the guns when we approach the herders. (Leader of the Youth Association of Agogo Farmers, Agogo)

The nomadic Fulani describe how they face abuse from the farmers who try to chase them out of the community. In an FGD, the nomads narrated their story this way:

We face many threats. Sometimes the gods of this land kill some of our cattle if we do not offer sacrifice to them. The local people also beat us and steal or poison some of our herds. The threats from the local people sometimes leads to the killing of our herds as some of the general residents spray their farms with chemicals and poison some of the water sources that our cattle use as drinking points. Sometimes the local residents mobilize themselves and fight us, they at times kill our animals or rustle some of our cattle. (Nomadic Fulani' FDG, Agogo)

As illustrated in this quote, the nomads present themselves as an essentialised and yet somehow unknowable moral threat that seems at work. The farmers claim the nomads have weapons that they use when they are confronted. Meanwhile, the nomads claim that the weapons are used for self-protection against wild animals because they live in the bush. The nomads explained,

We use our weapons for self-protection not to commit crime. Just imagine the nature of our work. We live in the bush throughout our stay in this rangeland; sometimes three months or more so we need such weapons for protection. We protect ourselves by using knives, clubs and many other gadgets. By the nature of our activities sometimes we come across wild animals hence carrying along machetes, clubs, guns and other weapons do help defend ourselves as well as our herds. (Nomadic Fulani' FDG, Agogo)

From their narrations, the indigenous farmers see the nomads as wicked, fearful, inhuman, mobile, and armed. No one in the community wants to go near them. Once they are in the forest with their animals, where they are said to belong, farmers can avoid them. These descriptions create the impression that the nomads have 'fetish personalities' [observed as a personality believed to have magical powers because they are perceived as

having a spirit that makes them untouchable] (Fieldwork observation, 2017). The nomadic Fulani and their cattle are viewed as having special powers and are therefore untouchable. These are common beliefs in the community. It is difficult to predict who the nomadic Fulani are and how they are but one thing is sure that they are ‘the little demons’ in the community. The nomadic Fulani create chaos but the farmers are not sure how to stop them from doing so. The indigenous farmers attribute to the nomadic Fulani powers that they do not have. This justifies excluding them but also legitimises particular forms of power within the autochthone group: ‘We are not like them, so we must be like this—and if we’re like this- then we get to stay in charge’.

7.3 Contestations over land access

Land ownership, as noted in much of the early literature on the political economy of land in Ghana, is discriminatory. It is strictly based on indigeneity and prohibited to guests or those with alien status. Land is vested in the hands of traditional authorities through the individuals and family members who acquire land as their inheritance; making it difficult for non-indigenous people to control landed common property (Beyene, 2014). At the state level, non-citizens can have access to land on lease for up to 50 years, but in the various communities the practices are complicated. Therefore, the sedentary and nomadic Fulani navigate their own means of accessing land in Agogo with the help of their employers or buyers who happen to be citizens of Agogo. One of the nomads explained how he and his friends were able to access land in Agogo. He said

We have senior nomads who have relations with the chiefs and landowners as well as some government officials at the district level. Hmm, authorities are aware of our presence as you cannot just occupy some one’s land without their prior notice. Over here, this big land belongs to the paramount chief and the other smaller chiefs. (Nomadic Fulani 4, Agogo)

Similarly, in a FGD, the sedentary Fulani explained the legality of their actions. They said

In 2004, one of our prominent members who happens to be a sedentary Fulani and three others (4 people) paid a courtesy call on the traditional council of ATA, requesting a portion of land to allow our members who herd around that area to fence the area for our animals and livelihoods. ... The chief and elders agreed and asked us for royalties annually. We were given 300 acres of land.

If the farmers are encroaching from the area which used to be the original area for herding as demarcated to them by the traditional council, then it means the farmers are rather encroaching. This means that our encroachment is legal because we have documents to cover our stay in the area. (Autochthone Farmers, FGD, Agogo)

Accessing land through these informal social contacts gives the herders and nomads different levels of autonomy to challenge the power of the farmers. Each boundary seems designed to protect or enable access, and to legitimise it each group expresses the different ‘moral characters’ of their own group versus others. Most often, arrival at the margins or at peripheries present unclear administrative boundaries and divisions because people live

'DIY' (do it yourself) lives. The matters become more complex because all these areas of outskirts and bush are where the Agogo farmlands are located. Without any proper demarcation of grazing lands by state institutions, it is difficult for all three groups to co-exist without intermittent clashes. This is a kind of DIY governance and resource allocation that draws on multiple patterns of authority legitimisation. Here, the farmers who are indigenes describe themselves as land and resource owners with the upper hand to determine who has access to their land or not. They distinguish themselves from the sedentary Fulani and nomadic Fulani, as they describe themselves as the dominant group and as owners of the land on which these groups that they describe as 'strangers' live. Sedentary Fulani and even nomadic Fulani claim citizenship to the nation state, Ghana but at the local level, they are denied equal right to land because they are not autochthones to ATA which position them at the margins in their claim to access land.

8. Discussions and conclusion

The paper set out to contribute to farmer–herder debates with the case of Fulani in ATA. Moreover, it sought to address the debates about migrants versus host population in interethnic studies as it explored the politics of margins and processes of boundary making. Theoretically, the paper contributes to the conceptualisation of interethnic interaction as it reveals the dual and simultaneous existence of contact and threat hypothesis. The contact and threat hypothesis are spread among the groups in stratified manner depending on the level of face-to-face interaction and compromise among the autochthonous farmers in Agogo, sedentary Fulani, and nomadic Fulani.

The nomadic Fulani are part of a triadic relationship. The triadic relationship has the nomadic Fulani at the centre of the tense relationships. Their mobile lifestyle means that the nomadic Fulani are not grounded and do not stay over a relatively long period of time in one place. It is difficult to track the nomadic Fulani once they move into the community and their cattle cause destruction to farms. It is easier for autochthonous farmers to throw tantrums at the sedentary Fulani than to chase after the nomadic Fulani whom they cannot find. The foregoing scenario breeds mistrust and deepens the threat discourse among the triadic social actors. Intriguingly, the triadic relationship has moments of contact. The triadic relationship is built on trust developed through everyday life in the local community. The shared othering of the nomadic Fulani by both the autochthonous farmers and the sedentary Fulani has helped to create a bond or understanding between indigenous people and settled nomads. Yet it is not an equal relationship. It is based on a commodified labour relationship that continues to privilege the indigenous farmers over the sedentary herders when the autochthonous farmers transact business with the nomadic Fulani and purchase some of their cattle that are then entrusted unto sedentary Fulani to take care of. The paper concludes that autochthones and immigrants integrate and create conflict simultaneously within the complex, dynamic, and contested space of Agogo.

Both nomadic and sedentary Fulani belong to the Fulbe ethnic group, irrespective of the diversity of their countries of origin. Meanwhile, the nomadic and sedentary Fulani have created additional social boundaries beyond being Fulbe, based on several factors. Time of arrival in Agogo has compelled the sedentary herders to modify their claim to

belonging and they have grouped themselves in an effort to be accepted recognised and to operate as citizens of Agogo. The process of integrating into Agogo engenders the sedentary Fulani to readjust their Fulbe lifestyle of nomadism into sedentary livelihood as they acquire land and blend pastoralism with farming. Securing a sedentary livelihood has reshaped the sedentary Fulani's sense of shared identity with the nomadic Fulani. Their shared ethnic identities mean little in the context of a growing influx of nomads. The paper has also explored the fluidity of ethnicity and belonging due to interethnic relationships.

These differences in occupational lifestyles have moral implications on how groups relates to each other. Indeed, the emerging subjectivities and conflictual socialities are tied to each group's self-understanding, based on a sense of moral superiority, assessed in no small part by their particular relationship to the land. All three groups have well-developed self-respect that bleeds into chauvinism: they each believe their occupational lifestyles to be the best approach and view each other as troublesome and chaotic. These lines of thoughts and feelings influence and define the relationship among farmers, sedentary Fulani and nomadic Fulani that enhance or deter social ties. The nomadic and sedentary herders distinguish themselves and form solidarities along their lines of occupation, specifically based on sedentarism and nomadism.

Because of the ethnic ties between sedentary Fulani and Fulani nomads, the autochthone farmers classify them as ethnically homogenous, threatening to their relationships with the sedentary Fulani. On the other hand, the sedentary Fulani also consider Fulani nomads as 'others' because of social boundaries between them that are based on contrasting occupations and lifestyles. The mobility of the nomadic Fulani makes it difficult for them to adjust to the occupation of the autochthones in Agogo. Occupational segregation reduces face-to-face contact with the other social actors, enhancing prejudice especially with the nomadic Fulani as they remain at the margins. These sedentary herders wish the farmers would be their allies against a common cause. This kind of 'fetish' relations has broken the trust and distorted the relationship between farmers and sedentary herders irrespective of their pre-existing relations in the community. The jobs and lifestyle of herders place them at the margins of the Agogo traditional area. Their marginality is reflected in their living conditions, the location of their residences as well as the nature of the jobs they do.

There is an imbalanced relationship between sedentary herders and farmers as well as an imbalance between these two groups and the nomads. Instead of sedentary herders and farmers joining forces to resist the encroachment of invisible nomads, they have lost trust in each other because of the assumption of farmers that there exists a Fulani ethnic tie between sedentary Fulani and the nomadic Fulani. In this case, all the three strands of social relationships are challenged and broken. Instead of mobilising numbers using the fact that they both belong to the Fulbe ethnic group, the Fulani sedentary herders and nomads have created their own separate ideas of belonging based on their occupational and daily lifestyles. This has given prominence to 'we' as against 'them' even among people of a common ethnic background such as the Fulani (Ross 1982).

The issues of land ownership and distribution presents the farmers as having control over land and as possessing power relative to the other two groups. However, despite this popular notion of the indigenous farmers as having greater power because they are

defined by law to be the rightful owners of the land (cf. [Beyene 2014](#)) both the nomads and herders also claim autonomy to some extent. Their autonomy allows them to challenge the powers of the farmers, respectively, on different grounds as narrated above. The fact that the herders and nomads need the permission of the indigenous people, in this case farmers, to access the communities deepens the boundaries between the various actors. The linkages that the nomads and the sedentary herders have with indigenous farmers, either as employers or clients, gives them autonomy to resist their removal from the Agogo land by the farmers. We conclude also that neither the centre nor the periphery in Agogo Traditional Area is constant.

In conclusion, the state's categorisation of migrants and citizens creates the impression that these different groups tend to be homogenous and that one belongs and the other does not. However, within these groups we have seen that there are further complex boundaries that define both the indigenous peoples and the migrants' ability to claim belonging. This paper helps shift the debates about mobility/migration away from migrant versus host population; and indigenous versus non-indigenous, suggesting that we also need to understand much more than a binary migration policy to make sense of real lives in and around the margins. The Fulani sedentary herders and nomads have recreated their separate and their own ideas of belonging, based on their occupational and daily lifestyles instead of sticking to the broad visible category of Ethnicity—the Fulani ethnic group. Meanwhile, the indigenous farmers also stake their claim to belonging at the margins of a wider nation-state.

The three different actors at the local level live their everyday life beyond 'state containers' and beyond the binary label of migrant or citizen ([Anderson 2013](#)). They challenge the binary of an insider–outside, migrant–citizen binary. The boundaries are nuanced as they further depict fluidity in ethnicity and interethnic dynamics. The lived experiences at the local level in Agogo depart from the rigid rules of the nation state although both autochthones and allochthons are conscious of their social positions.

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