

“Cattle Violence”: The politics and fantasies of cattle ranching in Ghana

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ABSTRACT (EXTENDED)

In *Resource Violence*, Watts and Peluso argue that to understand the critical politics of environmental resources, we need to focus on the complex ways resources are shaped and embedded in historically and geographically contingent institutional and political economic forces (Watts and Peluso, 2013). That conceptual path—the resource complex—broadens from *access*’ classical focus on relations between resources and “regimes of accumulation”—the powers actors wield to enable them derive benefit from things (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). The resource complex formulation embraces a much broader landscape of institutions and processes (truth, rule/hegemony) as well as the ways material quality of a particular resource within complex resources shape violent struggles and political contentions (Mitchell, 2011; Branch and Martiniello, 2018). We follow Watts and Peluso’s method, and at the same time examine discourses shaping the access, use and contentions of natural resources. Discourses are ideas, concepts, and categories through which meanings are attributed to physical and social phenomenon (Hodges et al., 2008; Myerson and Rydin, 1996). They are shaped by social and political structures, serve certain functions and have power implications as they shape what is held as knowledge, truth and realities (Ahl, 2004; Roth and Lucas, 1997). Underlying debates and discussions of environmental resources is the fact that actors exercise power, impose a particular discourse onto a discussion, and actively influence policy making process (Adisa and Abdulraheem, 2017; Nartey and Ladegaard, 2021).

We use the resource complex approach and the discourse framework to map out the ways in which cattle resources have been construed in Ghana. In the 1900s, cattle herders from the Sahel regions (Mali, Niger, Senegal) migrated into southern Guinea Savannah belt in search for pasture and returned when climatic conditions improved. Severe Sahelian drought in the 1960s however, caused many herders to permanently settle in West Africa (Agyemang, 2017; Tonah, 2006). In Ghana, herders (most belong to Fulani ethnicity) first settled in northeastern cities including Bolgatanga and Bawku, but later moved towards the south (Tonah, 2006; Kaiser, 2019). Gradually and by the late 1990s, cattle production (both sedentary and nomadic forms) formed part of Ghana’s crop-based rural economy attracting the participation of national elites who employed the services of migrant herders to care for their livestock (Kaiser, 2019). However, since the early, 2000s severe confrontations and violent extremism have persisted between arable farmers and cattle herders—the conflict has been attributed to the need for extra land space for farming, changes in land use and resource access, and night grazing of cattle and associated destructions (Kaiser, 2019; Olaniyan et al., 2015; Tonah, 2006). Previous national efforts to mediate the conflict employed ‘expulsion policy’ where herdsman and their cattle were evicted from the country—but the expulsions were not successful (Tonah, 2005; Agyemang, 2017).

In 2017, the elected President of Ghana (Nana Akufo-Addo) established 272 ha cattle ranch in Wawase in eastern Ghana to confine cattle at one location to modernize nomadic pastoralist activities. The establishment of the Wawase Ranch was a fulfillment of Akufo-Addo's 2016 election campaign promise made to Ghanaian chiefs and farmers to establish cattle ranches across the country to keep cattle away from croplands. Upon winning the presidency, the Akufo-Addo Government implemented a national ranching policy in 2017 and established the Kwahu Afram Plains Wawase Cattle Ranch (henceforth, Wawase Ranch). However, after five years of its establishment, the ranch has been abandoned by most cattle owners. Herdsmen refuse to send cattle to the ranch, and cattle owners who initially kept cattle in the ranch have evacuated their livestock. The Wawase ranch fails to produce the intended result of keeping cattle away from crop lands and surrounding villages in the ranch neighborhood.

Africa has a long history of failed government ranches. In one example in Kenya, Kimani, and Pickard (1998) show how growing herd size and limited access to forage caused herders to exploit pasture beyond legal boundaries. The Kenyan Government established group ranches in the Kajiado District to minimise cattle feeding pressure on grazing lands and associated land degradation. Community lands were brought together into group tenure to enable the Maasai pastoralist to keep their livestock within boundaries of group lands to avoid invasion of farmlands. The introduction of group tenure with legally recognized boundaries provided group members flexible access to resources but did not limit cattle size and cattle movement beyond legal boundaries. Grazing lands outside the ranch were frequently exploited, and eventually the ranch failed. The Maasai people divided their traditional lands into smaller plots and sold lands to non-Maasai people. The Maasai lost their best lands and were pushed into drier areas decreasing mobility and increasing land degradation (Kimani and Pickard 1998).

In another example, Ahmed and Kuusaana (2021) identify ranch facilities and practices impacting on ranch outcome in Ghana. They show that the Keseva Cattle Ranch in Volta Region which housed over 30,000 cattle witness regular cattle theft, premature deaths and limited accommodation for herders causing cattle owners to withdraw cattle from the ranch. Security service in the ranch is poor, and in the dry season, access to feed is a challenge due to drying grasses and water ways. Cattle owners fail to pay herders on time, and herdsmen are unable to sell cow milk due to poor road network and weak cattle market structures. Herders are divided along ethnic lines, and poor communication exist among herdsmen, cattle owners and ranch management. In another site, Ahmed and Kuusaana (2021) observe how local perception that Fulani ethnic groups are perpetrators of violent extremism coupled with corruption of chiefs and security personnel render cattle ranching less appealing to citizens.

Considering past failures of government ranches in sub-Saharan Africa, the paper responds to the following questions. What motivated the Government of Ghana's ranching intervention and why has it not worked as officially intended? How is the national ranching policy being implemented in practice, and what is the nature of conflicts it sustains? The article shows that the conversion of fodder banks to a ranch at Wawase manifested as part of the political regime of the New Patriotic Party, the process enhanced the political legitimacy of Akufo-Addo's Government but did not provide pastoralist access to forage and cattle security. The management and practices at the Wawase ranch results in limited ranch facilities (grazeable area, water, housing) and services (security, veterinary service, funds) deterring herdsmen to keep cattle in the ranch. However, cattle owners and herdsmen engage in discourses of exclusions to conceal their wealth in cattle resources, and therefore reject the idea to keep cattle in ranches.

The empirical work for this article took place in two project phases. The first is the development of fodder banks at Kwahu Afram Plains Wawase, a project that ran from 2007 to 2013 and funded by the African Development Bank as part of four project components with a total budget of US\$ 32.5 million (MoFA, 2022). The Wawase fodder banks project was implemented during President Kufuor's tenure of office. President John Kufuor was the flagbearer of the National Patriotic Party and *President* of Ghana from 7 January 2001 to 7 January 2009. The second is the conversion of fodder banks into cattle ranch at Wawase by the Akufo-Addo Government in 2017 with a budget of GH¢1.8 million. The field work operations cover an approximate cumulative 4 months over 2019-2021. The data stemmed from open and semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, and life stories. We employed 'studying through' method (Wright and Reinhold, 2011), by combining "studying up" – interviews with officials at the higher level and "studying down" – interviews and observations at community level (Nader, 1972). We conducted content analysis of policy/regulations, program documents, and other materials (media reports and indentures) to understand the interplay between discourses and practices on farmers and herders.

IV. References

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