

# State and Hegemony in Nigeria: Implications for Environmental Politics

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses the implication of state and hegemony on environmental politics in Nigeria. It argues that Nigeria as a British colonial creation is essentially a capitalist system that was invertedly created because unlike Western systems, it is a capitalist system that is run by non-capitalists. This implies that in Nigeria, there is a palpable absence of the state which is a creation of capitalists to coordinate other superstructures. This then explains why the political class in Nigeria comprises of fractious groups that are too preoccupied with politics and material survival and as such do not have hegemony. The import of absence of the state and dearth of hegemony in Nigeria is that environmental politics is uncoordinated with cases of Niger Delta and farmers-herdsmen crises demonstrating this reality. The paper concludes hegemony-induced environmental governance can ensure nationalistic values which would treat environmental and related issues with the urgency they deserve.

**Keywords:** State, Hegemony, Environmental Politics, Environment, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian state as other African states is a colonial creation. This means that it has an inverted process of capitalist formation in which a capitalist system is being run without capitalists. The absence of hegemony because of the fractious nature of the political class, the so-called 'capitalist' class that assumed control of the country upon independence, meant that the disorganisation that attends issues within conventional political process also affects environmental politics in Nigeria. As a result, environmental issues and problems have not received the required response and attention in such a way the country can experience sustainable development.

The nature and character of environmental politics are reflected in the responses and views on environmental crises in the Niger Delta and the Middle Belt regions of the country. In the Niger Delta, decades of oil and gas exploration have impacted rather negatively on the ecology of the region. This is reflected in the fact that oil and gas pollution has rendered the land unsuitable for agricultural and fishing purpose thereby making the people poorer (Jike, 2004). In the Middle Belt, southward movements of herdsmen in search of fodder for their cattle due to desertification in the North have led to clashes between local farmers and herdsmen with wanton destruction of properties and loss of lives. The responses have been ethno-religious in view and the Niger Delta case reflects the role of the political class as capitalists without

capital having to dwell on rents from oil and gas exploration and as result have been violent towards dissent from the region (Obi, 2009).

The fundamental issues affecting environmental politics in Nigeria lies in the incongruence between the state and hegemony. The state in the view of Marx remains a tool of domination through force by a minority of people who possess economic power and advantage over the rest of the society. In effect, there is no state in Nigeria (Fadakinte, 2013). This is because there is no class of capitalists in Nigeria as in European societies. After all, it is this class that forms the state. The import of this is that there is no production of hegemony, that is, ideas, values, world view, morals etc. from the political class to ensure domination over the society that can serve as the focus of development. The fractious nature of the political class in Nigeria owing to the needs to compete for state power to acquire 'capital' is responsible for lack of hegemony.

Lack of hegemony and the travails of the state in Nigeria has muddled up environmental politics in line with conventional politics of the country which has thrived along with themes of otherization such as ethnicity and religion, especially in a North-South pattern. What happens because of this is that the country not been able to address quite holistically the drivers of environmental crisis in the country as environmental discourse has tethered towards ethnicity and religion. Hence, environmental travails of one region of the country do not elicit country-wide empathy that could make environmental discourse of a unified national discourse. This has affected the whole trajectory of policy issues and even legislation such as

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revenue allocation and Federal Grazing Reserve Bill for the Niger Delta and farmers-herdsmen conflict raging in the Northern part of the country.

This paper is divided into eight parts, the first of which is the introduction. Section two deals with a conceptual analysis of environment politics while section three is a theoretical discourse on the state and hegemony. Section four considers the contradictions of capitalism in the formation of the Nigerian state as section five discusses the dearth or absence of hegemony in the Nigerian state with vivid examples. The sixth and seventh sections consider selected cases in the crisis of hegemony and environmental politics and rethinking environmental politics in Nigeria respectively while section eight serves to conclude the paper.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS: CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS**

The environment is the home of man and as such issues about the environment have come to elicit political interests. Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century environmental issues has grown in political importance (Carter, 2007). Environmental issues such as global warming, climate change and the whole dynamics it brings with it among other environmental issues have elicited the interest of political authorities across the world. The sustainability of the human environment is facing some of its most serious challenges. The earth's biodiversity is under fundamental stress amid unprecedented population growth. According to (Tella, 2015, p. xi), "the totality of the conditions that support our existence on the planet earth is dependent on our environment. Our existence, lifestyles and economies depend completely on the sun and the earth whether we live in a developing or developed country". The environment is undebatably important, and its unsustainability poses existential threat to humanity.

Governments around the world have come to accept the reality of environmental crises facing the earth and political and policy efforts are being debated, lobbied for and against and put in place on a multi-level scale, that international, national and local levels. Environmental politics deals with issues left outside the purview of the traditional study of politics. (Carter, 2007, p. 3) states that among others, environmental politics covers "the examination of political parties and environmental movements; and the analysis of public policymaking and implementation affecting the environment at international, national and local levels".

Environmental politics involves the dynamics around the formulation of policies to resolve the many issues and challenges affecting the environment. It involves the activities of environmental actors in the political process. Environment actors include government, business, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), political parties, environmental movements and citizens. The ongoing web of interactions and influences among environmental political actors is the concern of environmental politics.

Environmental politics links humanity with the environment. In linking humanity with the environment, environmental politics covers attempts at providing solutions to the following environmental issues: "wilderness preservation and nature conservation, air, water and land pollution, the depletion of scarce resources such as fish stocks, rainforests and endangered species, the use of nuclear power and biotechnology, and 'global' problems such as biodiversity loss, climate change and ozone depletion" (Carter, 2007, p. 3). The use of environmental resources and the problems arising from this use have come to occupy the face of politics across governmental levels. Environmental politics involves the interdependence of the environmental, political, social and economic issues around the use of resources and the ways they interact with one another.

Environmental issues that were hitherto within the purview of science have now acquired political character. The scientific exactitude of the rising environmental problems facing the world has resulted in a new concept of environment and its problems (Forsyth, 2004). As a result, environmental issues have changed from being technocratic issues to issues of policy and politics (Carter, 2007). As new environmental problems arise, they elicit demands that can only be solved or addressed by the state or even a group of states. (Ziervogel *et al.*, 2014) posit that environmental issues such as climate change are now seen as developmental issues. The conceptualisation of environmental issues as developmental issues because many of environmental resources much of which are being recklessly depleted are public goods (Carter, 2007). As a result, the use of environmental resources must be guided by policy to avert Gareth Hardin's (1968) Tragedy of the Common warning.

As policy issues, environmental issues elicit the interest of an interplay of actors because many environmental issues are transboundary and the irreversibility of these resources once they are

completely exhausted (Carter, 2007). Environmental politics brings about the platform for actors to interact with one another on the exploitation of environmental resources. The reality of Homer Dixon's (2010) thesis of environmental scarcity and the possibility of violence makes a huge justification for environmental politics and policy. The nature of the environment as capable of inducing struggles among actors makes it political. (Forsyth) asserts that the politicization of environmental science became inevitable because environmental politics "understands the social and political framings of environmental science" (2004, p. x).

Environmental politics is a complex merger of environment and politics. Environmental events since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have lifted the environment in the policy and political sphere. The interactions, contestations, compromise and consensus on the use of environmental resources and problems arising therefrom and the role of the state stands environmental politics at a vantage position to set agenda, regulate, adjudicate and negotiate the environment and its resources among actors. This is a reality from the international through national and subnational levels. The ubiquity of environmental resources makes the need for politics to arise.

### **THEORETICAL DISCOURSE ON STATE AND HEGEMONY**

The theoretical analysis of the state and the role it plays in human society is arguably the most important discourse in the study of politics. So much confusion has come up in the conceptualisation of the state and this has taken on ideological colourations. The many theories of the state have attempted to establish why the state is a 'collector's item' in political studies. The state has been defined in the Weberian term which combines geographical location with institutions that allow the state to maintain a monopoly of violence within that geographical location (Heywood, 2000). This conception of the state confirms the dominance of the social contract and force theories of the state over other theories.

The state is a tool of domination and serves as the mechanism for the control of man's unfettered freedom. Starting with the Hobbesian analysis of the dominance of the state over the society, theories of the state locates the impetus for development on the ability of the state to create the ambience of peace and tranquillity (Heywood, 2015). Majority of these theories of the state opines that man is unruly and unfettered

natural freedom is antithetical to the quest for order and stability without which the society cannot develop (Raphael, 1990). Hence, the state carries with it both negative and positive effects. (Raphael, 1990) argues that the state is differentiated from other forms of associations by its negative activity that is the ability to monopolize the means of violence and the fact that it is the only association which membership is compulsory.

An important contribution to the theoretical elucidation of the state is the contribution of Marx. As the purveyor of the force theory of the state, Marx established the state as domination. Picking holes in the basis of other theories, Marx argues that the state is a special superstructure that gives essence to other superstructures and serves to protect the economic base, which is the structure from being undermined. (Marx & Engels, 2002, p. 4) state that "The executive committee of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie". The state is very central to capitalist production and appropriation of surplus-value. In Capitalist astute quest for domination of the labour, the state was brought about to ensure that labour maintains the dominant relations of production. Hence, using the state capitalists can enforce their dominance.

Marxist theory of the state speaks to the import of domination through force as the state and its institutional paraphernalia maintains the monopoly of violence over labour. Without the state, labour will find it appealing and rather easy to overturn the structures of domination built by capitalism. The state is a small of property-owning individuals who direct the affairs of the rest of the society through its institution and ideas. Marx maintains that the dominant idea is the idea of the ruling class. (Fadakinte, 2013) argues that the core of the state is the dominant economic group, that is, the minority property-owning individuals and while the other aspect is the state structure. Through the state structure, the dominant class can enforce domination.

The enforcement of domination has been subject to contending commentaries as to the best means of ensuring domination. Marx alludes to the fact that the ideas of the ruling class as the dominant idea, what comes to mind is questioning the end of such ideas. While economic domination for Marx is all that is required by the capitalist to become dominant and reinforce such dominance over the rest of the society, the production and dissemination of such ideas need to be interrogated. This interrogation portends that domination through hegemony is an extension of

Marx's position on the generation and purpose of ideas.

Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci in his Prison Notebooks laid the foundations of what is known as hegemony which is an important extension of Marxian analysis of the capitalist state. By hegemony, Gramsci argues that the state is not only ruled by force but also by ideas. Marx and Engels had earlier discussed the role of ideas in the capitalist society. For them, the overarching ideas are the ideas of the ruling class. This is also encapsulated in the economic structure of the state. Hence, hegemony for Marx has economic colourations. However, the elucidation of Gramsci notes that what makes capitalist's economic dominance durable and enduring is the percolation of the other strata of the society to give economic domination no matter how biting its realities a form of consent. Hence, the sustainability of the capitalist system over a long time is the acquiescence of the dominated (Bates, 1975).

The Marxian conception of the state as an arena of domination by force was found incapable of offering a full understanding of the order the state. Rather than having the state as a sphere of domination by force, Gramsci opines that ideas offer a clearer picture of the operations of the state vis a vis the rest of the society. He holds that the state is not ruled by force alone but also by ideas. Therefore, society is divided into two societies according to their relations to the production of power. The political society which is the state and operates based on force and the civil society which comprises of other sections of the society such as schools, religious organisations, clubs and so on contribute to the formation of social and political consciousness (Bates, 1975). The political society dwells on the force while the civil society dwells on consent and it is within the latter that hegemony comes out. Hence, hegemony rather than force explains stability and order in the capitalist society.

Hegemony has to do with political leadership based on the consent of the ruled. This consent is gotten through the instilling of the values, beliefs and ideas of the ruling class into the class of the led (Fadakinte, 2017). The diffusion and popularisation of the world view of the ruling class are aimed at changing the perspectives of the rest of the society from that of opposition to or feelings of the illegitimacy of the ruling class by the ruled. Hence, the need to change the cultural orientation of the non-propertied class totally with that of the ruling class. In the view of Gramsci, it is

until this happens that there can be domination by consent rather than by force (Nielsen, 2006)(Fadakinte, 2015). Fadakinte(2017, p. 121) maintains that "hegemony is meaningful to the extent that the dominant class can persuade the other classes of the society to accept its own moral, political and cultural values. In other words, hegemony is an exercise based on the consent of the people. Indeed, hegemony is domination that is accepted by those who are dominated".

The development of hegemony by the ruling class is necessary for the establishment of order in society. The development of society depends on the hegemony as the search for order and organisation has always dominated the historical trajectory of human society. Man, by nature abhors political authority that undermines his natural and unfettered freedom except by an arrangement that proves suitable or the one he consents to. Several intellectual efforts have been made to explicate why man submits to political leadership. Hegemony speaks to the conferment of legitimacy to domination by the dominated. Hegemonic order ensures that the dominant class' ideas are accepted by the rest of the community.

The state as a tool of domination becomes recognised by the society and this leads to the development of consensual relations between political leadership and the led. Unlike the Leviathan figure of Hobbes, a hegemonic state is recognised not because it is not bound by the rules of engagement leading to the consummation of the state, but by the consent of the dominated and the garb of legitimacy, the cascading values, views, beliefs and morals of the dominant class covers domination with. The state may, however, be able to develop hegemony through the fractious and feuding nature of the dominant class (Fadakinte, 2017). Hegemony building in a product of dominant class cohesion which allows for negotiation, compromise and consensus-building among members of the class (Onuoha, 2011). When the state fails to build hegemony, it rules with force which is not consensual and maybe altogether illegitimate.

## **STATE FORMATION IN NIGERIA AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF CAPITALISM**

State formation in Africa started with the official take-over of partitioned African societies following the 1884/1885 Berlin Conference. Colonialism served as the official transplanting of the Western capitalist system into Nigeria. Nigeria had served as the source

of cheap raw materials for the burgeoning industrial concerns in Britain, so colonialism afforded the British government to fully annex the mosaic of nations lumped together as Nigeria (Coleman, 1963). Nigeria is a product of capitalist incursion into the African continent. The various administrative organisation and reordering eventually brought about a multinational state that was thrust into the global capitalist network. Hence, the colonial state was a capitalist system in which however production did not take place. Rather, production took place in the British Metropole but to open the country to the capitalist market dynamics, the paraphernalia of capitalist was established.

Capitalist governance process had primarily economic system and political system. In the classical capitalist pattern of hiding economic intentions under political pretensions, a capitalist state was established and manned by British officers. (Ayoade, 2010) argues that the ruling logic in the administrative reordering leading to the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria was business and did not in any way involve a consideration of social and cultural compatibility of the nations. The process of building a colonially-constructed Nigerian state followed a pattern of constitutional gradualism through the capitalist-motivated codification of rules. As a result, the country went from one constitution to the other in ways that further thrust her into the capitalist orbit. These constitutions did not receive any serious attention to building a nature out of the amalgamated mosaic of nations. For example, the Richards Constitution only enjoyed a mere 28 minutes discussion in the British House of Commons (Ayoade, 2010). The quest accumulation of surplus by British capitalism ensured that Nigeria attained independence as a collection of unwilling partners.

The immediate import of the capitalist state formation in Nigeria is that the dominant class that took over from colonialist at independence was fractious, lacking the necessary cohesion to ensure and sustain nation-building. Ethnic consciousness and religious differences and an unbridled quest for state power served to reinforce the lack of cohesion within the political class after independence (Diamond, 1988). Colonialism developed among the political class 'false' capitalists that had no capital and industrial infrastructure for production. This is akin to (Fadakinte, 2015) questioning the rationale of a capitalist system without capitalists. To run the capitalist state bequeathed to them, the state became the means of production for the political class, hence the quest for

winning state power meant a matter of 'life and death' (Ake, 2001).

Capitalist formation in Nigeria as in the rest of Africa is inverted. In the European capitalist societies, it was the colonialists that created the state as a tool of domination. While the Nigerian colonial state was dominant, the post-colonial aftermath showed clearly the contradictions in capitalist state formation in the country. For Nnoli;

"Colonialism, as a historical factor in the development of the post-colonial state made African variant of capitalist formation to possess some unique characteristics. Thus, the post-colonial capitalist formation devoid of certain similarities which do not make her to be quite the same with the other capitalist states of Europe, where the state is the classic state in the sense that it is the instrument of the capitalist class domination over the other classes in the society" (Fadakinte, 2017, p. 130).

The inversion of capitalist formation in the state in Nigeria accounts for the political instability and the crisis of development she is suffering from. The state is arguably the important form of organisation within the society and is usually a product of civil society. The Nigeria state system is not homegrown, and the structures of Nigeria's economy was not developed enough to run a capitalist system (Fadakinte, 2017).

The quest for state power within and among members of the political class led to the emergence of politics of meaning which involves the interpretation of government policies and actions along ethnic and religious lines. The emergence of a capitalist state in Nigeria without real capitalists is a negation of the procedural ethics of capitalism. The only way to have power in post-independence Nigeria was to win political power and the loss of political power means the loss of everything. The travails of the First Republic could be directly linked to the fractious nature of the Nigerian political class. Intra- and inter-party politics became incendiary as political parties as arenas of political contestation yielded itself to ethnic and religious confrontations (Anifowose, 2011) or what Osaghae (1998) terms 'politics without vision'. This intra-class struggle has been fingered as a crucial explanation of the fall of the First Republic. Political contests, census and even labour relations were ethnicised to the point of inoperability of the Nigerian state (Diamond, 1988).

The socio-political implications of the inverted process of capitalist formation in Nigeria manifest in the lack of hegemony by the political class. The ethno-religious divisions within the political class have not allowed it to be able to come up with values, ideas and national ethos to guide the country to development. Ethno-religious basis of class formation in Nigeria coupled with lack of capital to sustain political power and relevance made political contest an inter-ethnic and inter-religious confrontation. Intra-ethnic and intra-regional political scuffles in the First Republic were also manifestations of the lack of among members of the political class (Anifowose, 2011). The inability of the class to come up with a consensus on some of the most vital issues of governance such as the federal structure of the country, census, the status of Lagos as the Federal Capital and many others demonstrate the absence of the ambience for hegemony. Hegemony as soft domination resulting from the ideas, values, world views and morals of the ruling class is a product of cohesion and consensus. Lack of this important resource accounts for political instability and the general crisis of development in the country.

#### **THE NIGERIAN STATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS: THE DEARTH OF HEGEMONY**

Nigeria as a vast country is plagued by serious environmental problems from both the Northern and Southern part of the country. Nigeria has an area of 923,768 square kilometres. This includes a total of 13,000 square kilometres of water. Situated along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, she has a coastline of 853 kilometres (Library of Congress, 2008). Nigeria's vegetation also shows that she has vast Savanah grassland and one of the most of Africa's largest rainforests. In terms of Land use in Nigeria, 33% of her land is arable land, 3% is used for permanent crops while 64% is used for other purposes (Library of Congress, 2008). Nigeria's geographical profile makes her environmental political analysis a very interesting one within the continent. This is because citizens of the country depend on environmental resources for livelihood and the economy is based on the exploitation of resources from the environment.

Environmental politics in post-colonial Nigeria has been most conflictual. The trajectory of environmental politics bears fundamental imprints of the lack of cohesion within the political class that took over from the colonial powers. As an environmentally-at-risk country, ethnic-inspired political competition has

relegated environmental issues to second-order problems. Crises of hegemony bringing with its absence of consensus make political and economic survival the first-order problem. Since independence, the Nigerian state has been a theatre of political confrontations and as a result, environmental issues have not enjoyed the kind of attention they deserve. The high governmental turnover arising from the crisis of hegemony made the environment only as an afterthought in political discourses. The environment only receives attention when an environmental crisis occurs. This means that environmental discourse and mostly, governmental intervention in the environment in Nigerian politics are impact-based as opposed to vulnerability-based (Meribe, 2017).

The absence of nationally-shared culture and values as passed down by the dominant class makes environmental problems a local and ethnic problem. Following the ascension of environmental issues into global reckoning since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, issues of the environment has been taken as developmental issues (Ziervogel *et al.*, 2014). In Nigeria, environmental issues are not seen in that light as they are seen in the as the sole problem of the section of the country where they exist. The lack of shared culture and values has resulted in environmental individualisation based on ethnicity. Mamdani(2014) opines that African states upon independence failed to de-ethnicize their polity, albeit near-successful de-racialization. In Nigeria, along with the politics of meaning birthed by the failure to achieve de-ethnicization, the environmental crisis does not universal empathy (Isumonah, 2016).

Apart from ethnicity, party politics also impinge on environmental politics in Nigeria. Party politics has long dominated the face of politics in Nigeria. Political parties have since the thick of nationalist agitation in the country followed ethnic lines (Osaghae, 1998; Sklar, 2015). Party politics affect how the Federal Government attends to issues of the environment in opposition states. For example, the statutory Ecological Fund allocation states were allocated based on friendliness to the Federal Government (Nwabughio, 2017). The Jonathan Administration denied 19 states and Federal Capital Territory in 2013 while two billion Naira to ally states. It is of note many of the states that were denied funds include some of the most ecologically-at-risk states such as Lagos, Rivers and several Northern states threatened by increased desertification.

A most significant feature of environmental politics in Nigeria is the role of environmental resources as a source of capital for the political class. As a wrongly set up a capitalist system, Nigeria lacks capitalists to man the heights of the economy like European bourgeoisie. Ake(2001) notes that because of poor and/or lack of resources and the need to control the political machinery of the state in Africa, the political class converted the state and its resources to personal and political use. The more effectively and successfully this can be done means the weakening, annihilation and total elimination of the opposition. With the lack of resources and technology to exploit resources, Multinational Corporations (MNCs) became important players in the environmental politics of Nigeria (Onimode, 1983). Thus, oil rents became the oil that greases the engine of corruption and resource course in Nigeria (Ojatorotu & Olaopa, 2016).

The nature and character of environmental politics in Nigeria are such that despite the evident at-risk situation of the country to environmental problems, the political process of the country is structured in an anti-environmental manner. The dynamics of politics that produce environmental policies are affected by the peculiarities of Nigerian politics. Actors in Nigerian environmental politics of Nigeria are also fashioned by the contradictions of the inverted process capitalist formation which is the basis of the state in Nigeria and Africa. The dearth of hegemony within the dominant class means that the conventional political crisis of state formation and the general organisational and developmental miasma facing Nigeria were brought to bear on the issues and policies on the environment. Hence, environmental realities in Nigeria are products of their political environment and economic environment in general. The Nigerian case follows the trajectory of historical economic determinism as theorised by Marx. It also an important case study in the crisis of hegemony in post-colonial societies.

### **Selected Case Studies in the Crisis of Hegemony and Environmental Politics within the Nigeria State**

Environmental politics in Nigeria has graphic representations of the ways different sections of the country have experienced environmental crisis and the nature of interpretation and intervention of the Nigerian state and society in terms of policies and shared empathy which occurs during the periods of environmental travails. This is bearing in mind that hegemony produces national empathy in times of crisis, and the fact that this has not been the case in

Nigeria as ethnicity, religion, party politics, rent-seeking and other travails have made the environmental crisis in Nigeria a rather most miserable event. States or regions that experience environmental crisis are left to the vagaries of their realities. The following cases studies serve to illustrate the crisis hegemony with the Nigerian state and its impact on the environment.

### **Oil and Gas Exploration and Environmental Crisis in the Niger Delta**

The Niger Delta environmental debacle is one the foremost case of the resource curse in which a resource-rich state experiences all sorts of unpalatable experiences because of mismanagement of nature's abundance and grand corruption in the state (Morake & Ojatorotu, 2010; Ojatorotu, 2008; Ojatorotu & Olaopa, 2016). Oil exploration started in Nigeria in 1956 when oil was discovered at Oloibiri in the old Eastern Region. The Niger Delta is home to a vast deposit of oil and gas. An estimated 33 billion barrels and 160 trillion cu. ft deposit has contributed to not less than 96% of Nigeria's foreign earning between 1970 and 2000 (Omotola, 2009). Within this period, the role and importance of oil as Nigeria's economic mainstay grew increasingly. Following the end of the Civil War, the hitherto economic earner, agriculture was gradually being de-emphasized with more and more rise in the contribution oil to the country's Gross Domestic Product (Osaghae, 1998). The political economy of oil and gas exploration in Nigeria is such that the Niger Delta became host to Multinational Oil Corporations which moved into oil-bearing communities with attendant accrual of oil rent to the Nigerian state.

The environmental impact of oil and gas exploration through the activities of Multinational Corporations is dire. The advent of oil exploration in Niger Delta brought with it environmental degradation and crisis through oil spillage, gas flaring and the general activities of the Oil majors. The depletion of flora and fauna in the region means that traditional economic activities of the people could no longer be carried on, that a people whose daily living once depended on agriculture and fishing could not do so due to environmental degradation (Afinotan & Ojatorotu, 2009; Jike, 2004; Obi, 2009; Omotola, 2009; Osaghae, 1995). In the view of (Omotola, 2009, p. 42) "The cumulative effects of oil spills and gas flaring have been devastating. Not only do they destroy environmental resources, damaging farmlands, rivers and their resources, but they also deny the people their livelihood". The environmental effects of oil and gas

exploration in the Niger Delta have attracted global attention due to the intransigence of the Nigerian state and the seeming irresponsibility of the Multinational Oil Corporations.

Oil spillage represents the most important cause of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. The region has experienced some of the most severe cases of oil spillage with dire environmental, economic and health implications for the people and this goes so far to demonstrate the irresponsive nature of the Nigerian state. The age-long Ogoni oil spillage which attracted global condemnation and brought Nigeria to the precipice demonstrates the nature of environmental politics in Nigeria more than anything else (Osaghae, 1995). Other cases include Eket Spillage of 2000 that drew the attention of the World Council of Mayors. Some of the oil spillages also come with inferno which destroys the little that remains of farmland viability in the region. These include Jesse inferno in 1999, Ovir Court and Ewreni spillage and fires of 2000 (Jike, 2004). The travails of Niger Delta are summed up by the response of the Nigerian state with intransigent lack of empathy because of its unique brand of politics.

There was a rise in feelings of neglect by the Nigerian state felt by people of the Niger Delta because of economic disempowerment and other travails resulted in agitations, demands for environmental. Since the start of oil and gas exploration in the Niger Delta. Demands for environmental revamp has taken different forms and response from both the Nigerian state and oil corporations. (Frynas, 2001, p. 28) notes three forms of state response to the Nigeria Delta agitations. According to him "First, the Nigerian state and the oil companies have been willing to grant concessions to the protesters such as the creation of development projects; second, they have utilized public relations methods in dealing with the Niger Delta crisis and third, they have used repressive security measures against the protesters". The most prominent response of the Nigerian state to the Niger Delta environmental debacle was, however, that of violence fuelled largely by an ethno-religious understanding of the issues surrounding the crisis.

The killing of the Ogoni nine led by Ken Saro-Wiwa on November 10, 1995, by the Abacha Military Junta against interventions by prominent world leaders and governments was the height of state violence against environmental voices in the Niger Delta (Osaghae, 1998). In 1999, there was the Odi Massacre in Bayelsa State which left scores of people dead and made

thousands homeless. Violent state response to Niger Delta agitations led to the militarization of the region. It was the Nigerian state aggression in the Niger Delta that led youth in the region to pick up arms against the state. Anti-state and anti-oil corporations in the region then went violent as armed militias such as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) attacked oil and gas installations, rocking the operations of the oil Multinationals and pushing the state toward economic precipice (Anifowose, 2011).

The lack of hegemony by the fractious Nigerian political class did not allow for a unified view on the environmental carnage fomented by the activities of Multinational oil corporations on the Niger Delta. The Nigerian political class converted oil rents to capital to maintain the capitalist social formation that was left behind, colonial masters. This is responsible for the relegation of the environmental interests of the Niger Delta to the background in favour of its economic plunder. (Osaghae, 1998, p. x) posits that the "state emphasizes the Defence of its key economic asset and interest rather than the Categorical (welfare, or ethical/moral) Imperative in respect of the persons directly affected by the outcomes of incessantly reckless exploitation of an otherwise valuable national resource". Absence of hegemony means that instead of environmental and economic revamp of the Niger Delta region which would make the people accept the fact of the region as the economic base of the country meant that force was used to silence dissidence.

### **Desertification and Environmental Conflicts in the North**

The most prominent environmental issue in the Northern part of the country is desertification. Of the nineteen states in the Northern part of Nigeria, ten are at varying degrees of vulnerability to desertification while dunes have increased from 820km<sup>2</sup> to 4,830km<sup>2</sup> between 1976 and 1995 (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2013). The rate of Sahel encroachment into these Northern states is put at approximately 1400 square miles a year (Sayne, 2011). This is responsible for the extensive nature of land degradation in that part of the country and has hampered crop production and pastoral activities of the people. The high rate of desertification means a higher rate of poverty and health challenges that come with a higher temperature which is the main cause of desertification.

Several parts of the North have experienced drought which is deemed the twin of desertification for

a very long time. Because of drought, 63.83% of Nigeria's approximately 900,000 square kilometres is facing increasing desertification (Olagunju, 2015). Generally, in Nigeria in recent decades, there has been noticed late commencement and early cessation of rainfall. In Yobe state, for example, climatic factors, increased population and livestock pressure on the land and vegetation are responsible for the unhealthy rate of desertification in the state. This results in environmental degradation leading to a reduction in the water body, depletion of vegetation cover, shifting dunes, increasing bare grounds and loss of biodiversity in the State and other parts of the North (Amadi, Abel, Sabo, & Tor-Agbidye, 2013).

The most important impact of fast creeping desertification into states of the North are environmental-induced clashes between farmers and herdsmen which started as Northern phenomenon and then moved southward into the Middle Belt and several Southern states. Historically, farmers and herdsmen in the Northern and most parts of Nigeria have always lived peaceful and complementary lives (Shettima & Tar, 2008). The shrinking in the level of vegetation for both planting and grazing led to the initial clashes in the core North. With the further shrinking of vegetation, migratory shift southwards by cattle herders into the Middle Belt led to almost immediate confrontations between farmers and herdsmen leading to a mind-boggling number of deaths. A further southern movement of herdsmen in search for pasture brought them in confrontation with farmers in several states. In Benue states alone, there were 1,269 deaths between 2013 and 2016 with herdsmen overrunning 14 Local Government Areas (Isine, 2016).

Farmers-herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria acquired ethno-religious interpretations and views. In many sections of the country, herdsmen aggression was tagged 'Fulani' declaration of war on other ethnic groups. The historic rivalry between the Hausa/Fulani and the Benue Valley of the Middle Belt including Tiv, Idoma, Agatu, Birom, Junkun and other minority groups in the North was rekindled. This is because the conflict is seen as ethnic cleansing by the Fulani herdsmen who seem to be having tacit support of their kinsmen who did not come out to condemn such aggressions. The Fulani through herdsmen aggression is aimed at wiping out the minority groups in the Benue valley to take over their rich land (Gledhill, 2016). People of the Middle Belt, especially the Tiv have documented confrontations with the Hausa/Fulani political structure of the North. In 1960 and 1964, the Tiv revolted against

what they took to be Hausa/Fulani highhandedness on them (Anifowose, 2011).

The religious understanding of the conflict was brought to greater light with the killing of 2 Catholic priests and 17 others in Gwer Local Government Area of Benue State on April 24, 2018. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) staged a protest and stated that the President should stop the 'Fulani' herdsmen attacks or forget about being re-elected come 2019 (Eyoboka, Abdullah, Agbakwuru, & Duru, 2018). Some political commentators argue that herdsmen aggression was a move toward the accomplishment of Sadauna of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello's mission, which was to ensure continued Northern rule over the rest of country (Awhefeada, 2018). The religious narrative of the Farmers herdsmen conflicts in the country is because they conform to the religious configuration that had plagued the country since independence. The simple fact that by religious affiliation, traditionally, herdsmen are Muslims, Fulani and from the North and the victims of their attacks are non-Muslims of the North and Christian South serve to confirm the fears of Christians in the country (Onah & Olajide, 2020).

The surge in the rate and intensity of the conflict since the beginning of the Buhari Administration has seen the President being accused of bias. The Fulani background of the President and the fact that he is the Grand Patron of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN) majority members of which are Fulani led to insinuations in certain sections of the country that he is seen as the sponsor of the attacks (Amaza & Commentary, 2018). The conflict has also been interpreted along party lines. Opposition parties have hung on to the position that the President and his party are behind the attacks or not too averse to them. This is because the ruling party and the President have failed to protect the lives of Nigerians by condemning and stopping the rampage (Oke, 2018). Nigerian political parties tend to politicize issues. The immediate-past government was also accused along that line by the ruling party in his days as opposition on the same issue and especially the Boko Haram terrorism.

At the legislative/policy level, efforts to find policy resolutions to the conflict has been interpreted at both ethnic and religious levels. The Federal Grazing Reserve Bill that was planned to put an end to the crisis was met with criticism and opposition from within the National Assembly to the public. An important

proposition of the Bill was that each state should set aside some lands for herdsmen to graze their cattle. Rather being a solution to the crisis, the Bill served as the evidence of Fulani expansionism to the Southern parts of the country. According to Arthur Nwankwo, a social critic;

“stripped to its bare bones, this bill seeks to use the apparatus of government to dispossess our people of their ancestral land inheritance and hand over the same to herdsmen. When this is done, the original owners of the land would become refugees in their own space and subject to the whims and caprices of Fulani cattle rearers” (Nwankwo, 2016).

Rather than forge nationally-agreed solutions, a number states such as Ekiti and Benue came up with laws restricting open grazing. This has also been interpreted by the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria as an attempt at curtailing their rights to free movement in the country. NuruAbdulah, chairman of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), Plateau State queries the rationale for wanting to restrict the movement of pastoralists especially in southern parts of the country.

“Why would they ask them not to go to the southern part of the country? It is their constitutional right to move as freely as guaranteed by the laws of the land...The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees the freedom of movement for every citizen of this country; this include right to live, work and carry out legitimate activity in any part of the country. If and when you breach this freedom, then the law should deal\* with you. So, asking anybody not to go to any part of the country is unconstitutional” (Punch, 2016).

Further herdsmen attacks in Benue state has been blamed on the Anti-Open Grazing law leading to worsened scenarios than before the enactment of the law.

## **RETHINKING ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS IN NIGERIA**

The travails of environmental politics due to the absence of hegemony by Nigeria's fractious and

feuding political class meant that environmental issues have attracted the most incongruous of attentions and responses by the class and the society. The two case studies demonstrate aptly the nature and character of environmental politics in Nigeria which cannot be divorced from the conventional politics of the country. While the response of the Nigerian state to the environmental crisis in the Niger Delta was that violence that involved the incarceration, killing of the champions of the struggle and other protesters in the region, the unorganised nature of the environmental conflict in the North bordering on the interpretation of the nature, causes and solution of the conflict show that environmental issues in Nigeria are rather secondary as the fundamentals of divisions along ethnic and religion have not been dealt with.

Environmental politics globally has taken a new course with the agreements on resolving some of the world's environmental problems. The new theme of environmental governance globally is seeing environmental issues as developmental issues especially in Africa where lack of development infrastructure is likely to exacerbate the impacts of environmental problems such as climate change (Ziervogel *et al.*, 2014). In line with this global direction, there is a need for Nigeria's political class to see environmental issues across the country in a new light. Rather than seeing environmental issues through the divisive lenses of ethnicity and religion or seeing environmental protests in the Niger Delta as an attack on the economic interest of the political class who disguise as the state in Nigeria, they should be problems that require a unified view of all sections of the country. The need to come with national empathy for victims of environmental problems in the Niger Delta and other parts of the country would help to heal the wounds of such environmental catastrophe which impact on livelihood and have claimed several lives.

Environmental governance should be considered in Nigeria because it raises environmental concerns to a high pedestal. (Kotzé, 2012) is of the view that environmental governance helps to holistically regulate human activities and its effects on the environment through the instrumentalities of public and private institutions. As a result, governments at all levels and Non-Governmental Organisations can work together more than ever to prevent further damage to the environment and help to revamp the environment, resolve the existing crisis and more importantly healing the wounds of ethnoreligious interpretations of environmental issues that have led to injustices on the

part of the state and citizens toward one another. Environmental governance can also address the long-standing issues around fiscal allocation to the Niger Delta and other environmentally-threatened areas of the country. Due to its environmental focus, it is capable to attract improved allocation to cater for extensive environmental damage and other economic palliatives for citizens who have been affected. For example, it can help address issues of average Niger-Delta farmer who can no longer farm due to oil and gas pollution. It also can help compensate Middle Belt farmers whose farms have been destroyed by grazing cattle of the herdsmen.

Through the development of hegemony by the political class, environmental governance will ensure better monitoring of Multinational Oil Corporations in the Niger Delta both in terms of adherence to Environmental Assessment Impact. With this, indiscriminate oil and gas activities leading to pollution can be checked, already affected communities cleaned and compensated and generally, the practice tokenism by the Corporations in terms of Corporate Social Responsibility addressed to enhance the relations between them and their host communities. Regarding farmers-herdsmen conflict which is caused largely by climate change, adaptation policies and strategies should be devised to ensure reforestation in the North. Such policies should be devoid of ethno-religious connotations and input. This is possible with sound environmental governance principles which will include the publicization of issues climate change, ensuring adequate climate change financing that helps the greening project of the North and other parts of the country.

## CONCLUSION

The trajectory of environmental politics in Nigeria is very unhelpful to the development quest of the country. With the global change of view on environmental issues, it is a serious disservice to the development of the nation that these issues are seen in an ethnic and religious light. The unhelpful politics of interpretation that fixes environmental narratives shows that unresolved issues of what and who the state is the cause of disorganisation that leads the festering of crisis. In both Niger Delta and the Middle Belt where farmers-herdsmen conflict is most rife, the issues that led to the environmental crisis have often been left unresolved due to absence of hegemony-induced national empathy. Environmental crisis leads to impoverishment because of disruption of the

indigenous economy of the affected areas, health hazards, conflicts which can only be dealt with environmental governance based on hegemony as produced by the political class.

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