

## **AGRARIAN VIOLENCE, NEOPATRIMONIALISM, AND STATE-BUILDING IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

*This conceptual review establishes a nexus between agrarian violence, neopatrimonialism and state-building in Nigeria. Grounded on Political Ecology, it purports that the state's apparent frailty in quelling the persisting agrarian violence derives from the national leadership's proclivity towards ascriptive and particularistic values. Pointedly, the state's tolerance for impunity by powerful ethnic networks that publicly threaten, mastermind killings and accept responsibility for same without reprimand underpins the 'economy of affection' while the remedial options by the state reverberate the 'political instrumentalisation of disorder' by key political actors enmeshed in neopatrimonial proclivity which adds force to the origin and continuity of agrarian violence and failed state-building in Nigeria. What can be rationalised from the above trend is that, the Nigerian state has a major state-building challenge that may only be overcome by a systematic reconsideration of the meeting points of the socio-political undercurrents that condition agrarian violence in Nigeria which is congruent with the theoretical tenets of the political ecology approach.*

**Keywords: Violence, Agrarian violence, Neopatrimonialism, State-building, Nigeria.**

### **1. Introduction**

The age long mutual collaboration over natural resource access and use between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders in agrarian communities in West Africa, guaranteed their sustained symbiotic, reciprocal, barter and cooperation relations (Moritz, 2010). These cooperative relations were moderated largely by the traditional institutional norms and rules of interactions that defined the institutional basis of this cooperation (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020; Vanger, 2018). However, the once peaceful relations that endured between farmers and herders especially in the West Africa subregion was distorted and became confrontational and enmeshed in iterant contestations linked essentially to territoriality (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020), and the interference of emerging political institutional arrangements which undermined the hitherto existing traditional institutional norms that regulated their intergroup relations, and progressively, transformed into violent conflicts (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020; Vanger, 2018).

To be sure, the West Africa subregion has experienced population surges which have resulted in space inefficiency swayed by ecological exigencies and finding expression in the inclination towards legitimate territoriality on the part of farmers and the ensuing *alibi* for the herdsmen to surreptitiously engage farmers through violent skirmishes (Brottem, 2016). In Nigeria, the

conflicts between farmers and herders are convoluted altercations that are composite and informal, stimulated and aggravated by opinionated proclivity, cultural plurality, and ecological pressure (Hagher, 2013), varying prolific and tenure arrangements (Vanger, 2018), incessant mutual distrust (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020), and cyclical incongruity sandwiched between the farmer-herder agrarian livelihoods (Vanger, 2018).

Conflicts between farmers and herders in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon, they are as old as the earliest contacts between the conflicted parties when herders began to glide southwards from the Sahel region into areas that were hitherto out-of-the-way to them and peoples and cultures previously unknown (Hagher, 2013). However, these conflicts became more prominent in the 1980s and since the return of democracy to Nigeria in 1999; the conflicts have escalated annually into higher dimensions also rooted in delicate but momentous institutional dynamics that bear interest and analysis (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). Precisely, there is a fundamental correlation between the consistent surges in inequality occasioned largely by neoliberal democracy, political processes and environmental change in explaining resource-related farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria (Vanger, 2015).

The escalating agrarian violence in Nigeria which gained momentum from the Federal Government's complicity in its response to the farmer-herder clashes have resulted in an estimated 3, 641 deaths recorded from the beginning of 2016 to the end of 2018 and with 57 percent of such deaths occurring in 2018 (Ojigbo, 2018). The deaths resulting from agrarian violence have exceeded by almost a six-fold the death toll from terrorist insurgency in the country (International Crisis Group. 2018). What we can add is that, agrarian violence if not checked will suffocate agrarian livelihoods, exacerbate humanitarian concerns and erode cooperative relations overtly expressed in mutual distrust and suspicion, ethno-cultural and religious proclivity and above all, worsen national security in Nigeria. Nevertheless, conflict conciliation has become a daunting task which finds relevance in mutual distrust between farmers and herders premised on religious and ethnic coloration (Ortserga, 2014).

Interestingly, all endeavours to arbitrate over these conflicts and ensure state-building by the government through legal instruments, policies/programmes are viewed to be subtly rooted in neopatrimonialism and correspondingly, met setbacks and aggravated the tensions (Ortserga, 2014). Thus, a perfunctory look at neopatrimonialism will divulge the socio-political undercurrents associated with state-building in agrarian societies in Africa (Scott, 2007). In this, Chabal and Daloz (1999) and Reno (2000), demonstrate that the seeming weakness of the state in the face of fragility does not connote a power void but an *alibi* for key political actors in developing countries to leverage on the situation to raise their profitable stakes by relinquishing power to influential informal groups and patronizing 'shadow states'. Consequently, state-building no longer becomes desirable as ruling authorities in the country incline towards neopatrimonialism; they craftily thwart state-building policies and programmes, crumbling the state and its paraphernalia and arm-twisting individuals for patronage to overcome poverty of access and power derived from the disorders orchestrated by the leaders themselves (Chabal and Daloz; Reno, 2000).

In Nigeria, the President Buhari led federal government exhibits apparent frailty and connivance in its response to the iterant agrarian violence while patronising influential

informal networks like the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) and the Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore conveys neopatrimonial proclivity of the country's President (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). To be sure, these Fulani socio-cultural associations openly threaten to and perpetuate violence in agrarian communities under the watchful eyes of the state without any rebuke. This complicity on the part of the Nigerian State gives credence to the 'political instrumentalisation of disorder' by Chabal and Daloz which they claim is pervasive in the neopatrimonial state in Africa (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). Interestingly, these powerful informal networks are privileged to whittle economic and political hegemony which places them in vantage position to dominate policy and legal course of action that supports their livelihood. Secondly, its membership comprises of key political actors in Nigeria like President Muhammadu Buhari who makes the list of global flamboyant benefactors of the group (Olugbenga, 2017; Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). Intriguingly, in the build-up to the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN) endorsed the candidacy of President Buhari for the presidency (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020).

Consequently, primordial concerns can be deduced to undermine the neutrality and clear-headedness of the President Buhari led central government in curtailing agrarian violence and ensuring sustainable state-building drawing from the premise of the 'political instrumentalisation of disorder' in a neopatrimonial setting (Chabal and Daloz, 1999). To be sure, the President Buhari led government has neither established early security warning signs, set up any Judicial Commission of Inquiry in any part to the country to investigate the conflicts, or even assign responsibilities and those culpable brought to answer to the law which gives impetus to the accusations of government's endorsement of the violence (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). For instance, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) and the Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore had vowed to deliberately violate the Benue State law on Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment of 2017 at a press conference in Abuja, the seat of power in Nigeria (Duru and Okafor, 2017). This threat was executed on the eve of 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2018 when 73 persons including men, women and children were brutally murdered in their sleep in agrarian communities in Benue State (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020).

Our concern over agrarian violence derives from the highhandedness of these powerful informal transhumance networks (Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria and Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore) and the Central Government of Nigeria's deliberate none meddlesome approach in the face of the violence and impunity with which the perpetrators of such heinous crime against the State walk away freely, underpins neopatrimonialism and the political instrumentalisation of disorder by Chabal and Daloz (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). Thus, whatever factors account for touching off processes that lead to competition and conflicts around livelihood resources, they primarily take place within agrarian rural space between farmers and herders whose prolific capability is tied directly to the environment hence land becomes contentious (Ortserga, 2014).

This conceptual analysis attempts to establish the link between agrarian violence, neopatrimonialism and the socio-political undercurrents associated with state-building in the

face of agrarian violence in Nigeria which constitute important components that account for touching off processes that lead to the origin and continuity of agrarian violence in Nigeria.

## **2. Understanding the socio-political undercurrents that condition Agrarian violence in Nigeria**

A perfunctory examination of the pervasive speculations of the 1950s modernization thinkers that countries would eventually rationalize above ethno-religious proclivity as groups cooperate to contend with other groups over access to public resources particularly those in the jurisdiction of the State when they transform and become modernized, has been voided in the face of persisting ethno-religious identities shaping resource contestation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Genyi, 2017). In Nigeria, there exist intricate social identities that shape inter-group relations and the iterant farmer-herder competition over access to and use of natural resources that results in agrarian violence can aptly be accommodated within this context (Genyi, 2017). Consequently, the socio-political undercurrents that condition Agrarian violence in Nigeria shall be discussed under the following sub-headings:

### *i. The Ethno-religious trajectories*

It is a daunting task trying to excuse farmer-herder conflicts in the West African sub-region from affinity to ethnicity and religion because farmers and herders and their varying livelihood patterns are affiliated with diverse ethnic identities hence squabbles between them underline political, ethnic or religious undercurrents (Moritz, 2006). Incidentally, Moritz further elaborates that a good number of farmer-herder conflicts are induced by socio-cultural consciousness that justifies contestation for access to public resources particularly those in the jurisdiction of the State (Moritz, 2006). To be sure, in the West African sub-region, prolific systems are inexorably allied to particular socio-cultural groups which implies that there exist cultural undertones associated with agrarian violence hence conflicts between them can easily be associated with other tensions and conflicts (Moritz, 2006). Conversely, while it is perilous to endorse and patronise ethnic concerns (Breusers, Nederlof and van Rheenen, 1998), it is even more intriguing to jettison and reckon ethnic proclivity in the farmer-herder conflict discourse as primitive.

Incidentally, farmer-herder conflicts are a product of values that replicate an innate suspicion and distrust between them. This apparent distrust and resentment shared by farmer and herder groups towards each other including their livelihood patterns remains an essential but unexplored dynamic in agrarian violence that bears interest and analysis (Moritz, 2006). This pervasive distrust derives from the antecedents of slave expedition and recurrent ethno-religious cleansing in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by the Fulani jihadists which interfered with the farmer-herder relations in Nigeria (Moritz, 2006; Ortserga, 2014). What can be added with particular reference to the central region of Nigeria is that some ethnicities within the region resisted the jihadist and this has heightened the distrust and resentment between these groups (Ortserga, 2014).

In as much as it is trendy and instructive to trivialize ethnic proclivity in the farmer-herder conflict discourse (Breusers, Nederlof and van Rheenen, 1998), it is perilous to jettison the ethno-religious identities shaping the contestation for land and its resources in agrarian communities for being out of tune with modernity (Moritz, 2006). Going forward, the ethnic

proclivity undercurrent in the farmer-herder contestation has to be critically examined by juxtaposing it with the political economy premise especially that resource conflicts are prejudiced and manifest chauvinist tendencies orchestrated by political actors in neopatrimonial settings (Bassett, 1988; 1993). Similarly, the analysis of agrarian violence of 1991 between Gbaya and Fulle in the Adamaoua Province of Cameroon by Burnham suggest that the point of crack between the conflicted groups had no direct bearing on the compatibility of their livelihood practices but on their cultural plurality and the identity proclivity within the confines of national and global politics (Moritz, 2006).

Interestingly, Moritz corroborates this position by arguing that it will not be out of place to situate the post 18<sup>th</sup> century Islamic revolution in Hausa States in Nigeria and the Cameroon within the context of farmer-herder conflicts (Moritz, 2006). We ground the events after the *Dan Fodio* conquest of the Hausa States in Nigeria derived from the respective works of Gusau and Islahi, as subtly connected with foisted land redistribution in favour of the *Fulbe* in West Africa (Gusau, 1989; Islahi, 2008). To be sure, the Dan Fodio jihad bears interest and analysis because it was aimed at establishing the *Fulbe* Islamic teachings and dominance or if you like supremacy in Nigeria which was inexorably nexused with building of in-roads into agrarian communities for the possible migration and settlement of the pastoral *Fulbe*. A perfunctory look at the nature and character of the Islamic revolution suggest that the jihad concentrated around the river basins aimed at getting converts through conquest to ensure 'non-hostile environment for the migrant herders' (Blench and Dendo, 2003).

By the way, ethnic and religious inclinations inextricably and inexorably, constitute the fulcrum of the analysis of these agrarian conflicts in Nigeria (Ortserga, 2014). In this, parties in the conflicts are identified to be the *fulbe* (Fulanis) who are basically transhumance and constitute the major ethnic group in Nigeria, who are mainly Muslims on the one hand, and indigenous arable farmers who constitute the minority ethnic nationalities, and are predominantly Christians. Thus, the analysis of agrarian resource conflicts between these two groups is likely to be enmeshed in ethno-cultural and religious prejudices that depict the ethno-religious attitude of Nigerians (Ortserga, 2014). This is especially that ethnicity is flaunted as an important sentiment in social identity affiliations for clamouring support by the conflicting parties and significant in conflict sponsorship (Blench and Dendo, 2003).

Of particular importance is the fact that the Christians in Central and Southern Nigeria point accusing fingers at the predominant northern Muslim Fulani bourgeoisie absentee herdsman of masterminding agrarian violence supervised by the central government, remotely connected with plans to actualise land-grabbing, establish Fulani hegemony, peddle the influence of the Sokoto Caliphate and subtly foist the idea of grazing reserve on the country (Benue State Government, 2014). Interestingly, the above narrative is congruent with the claims by former President Olusegun Obasanjo of the national leadership's tolerance for *West African Fulanisation, African Islamisation and global organised crimes* (Ojoye, 2019).

To be sure, the above claim by former President Olusegun Obasanjo strengthens the ethno-religious undercurrent trajectory that tends to undermine the development discourse narrative in understanding agrarian violence involving farmers and herders in Nigeria. Incidentally, the complicity exhibited by the President Buhari led federal government in

addressing the conflicts bear interest and analysis as political instrumentalisation of disorder hypothesised by Chabal and Daloz (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). For instance, the preference to establish a radio station to serve the Fulani herdsmen as a strategy to persuade herdsmen to desist from agrarian violence was criticised by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) accusing government of complicity (Ojoye, Odebode, Akinkuotu, Aluko, Adepegba and Isenyo, 2019).

Similarly, legal authorities like Femi Falana, Ladi Rotimi-Williams and Monday Onyekachi Ubani perceive the decision to establish a radio station to serve the Fulani tribe as illegal hence it negates due process in sourcing and securing public fund for the project (Adewakun, Ogundare, and Adewole, 2019). They also argued that the radio station project infringes on Section 14 on the primary purpose of government which is security and welfare of Nigerians and conveys government patronage for powerful informal networks which seemingly is an endorsement of agrarian violence, banditry, terrorism, armed robbery and kidnapping (Adewakun, Ogundare, and Adewole, 2019). Correspondingly, Rotimi-Williams and Onyekachi Ubani criticises the ethnic radio station decision for purportedly invoking divisiveness and representing abuse of power and highhandedness on the part of government for wanting to spend out of budgetary provisions (Adewakun, Ogundare, and Adewole, 2019).

Thus, the purported helplessness of the Nigeria state in adequately addressing the endemic agrarian violence is consistent with an *alibi* for key political actors in developing countries who aim to raise their profitable stakes by relinquishing power to powerful informal groups and patronising 'shadow states' thereby suffocating and crumbling the state and its paraphernalia while inclining towards neopatrimonialism (Chabal and Daloz, 1999). What we can add to this argument is that, the Nigerian state has a major state-building challenge that may only be overcome by a systematic reconsideration of the meeting points of the socio-political undercurrents that condition agrarian violence in Nigeria.

*ii. Legitimate Territoriality, Sedentarist Metaphysics and Institutional Transformation*

Territoriality is an inclination towards delineating and preserving a personalized activity space by an individual, community, ethnic group, or a country to the exclusion of others (Ortserga, 2014). Similarly, territoriality is perceived as an inclination by a person or group to establish and peddle their hegemony over people, objects and affiliations by carving out sphere of influence within which they demonstrate the propensity to preserve and attempt to alienate other land users (Sack, 1983). Interestingly, territoriality encompasses the confined use of resources in the carved sphere of influence which is articulated and reinforced by property rights and the traditional institutional norms governing resource access and use especially in agrarian-based rural economies. Conversely, non-territoriality implies a tendency by a person or group to sway behaviour around an area while seldom asserting control over the area (Sack, 1983).

In the face of shrinking land per capita, precipitated and exacerbated by population surges, climate variability and low adaptation capacity of agrarian livelihoods, the struggles over legitimate territoriality become inevitable in agrarian rural economies (Ortserga, 2014). Thus, the leaning towards territoriality and the propensity to preserve 'home space' in agrarian-

based economies of rural areas by native land users and the attempt to exclude other land user groups largely accounts for agrarian violence in Nigeria. Incidentally, territoriality depicts particular livelihood patterns that lend credence to the cultural understanding of one's ecosystem (Ortserga, 2014). The prioritization of territoriality is made worse by three factors. First, farmer-herder economies are utterly adversative with each other. Second, the farmer and herder livelihoods are land-based and require 'large space per capita'. Thirdly, farmers and herders prioritize a 'within-group inclusive culture of all herders or all farmers and territory as an exclusive jurisdiction' (Ortserga, 2014).

Worse still, there is the absence of social coherence between them that would provide a common ground for collaboration especially that they are either all Muslims or all Christians. Thus, when this sentiment towards territoriality on the part of farmers collides with the expression of unlimited '*awareness space*', notion by the herders, agrarian violence becomes inevitable (Ortserga, 2014). Conversely, the impression people have about their socio-political and ecologic space influences their mindset as regards territoriality and property rights (Barre, 2012). To be sure, Barre's justification for the above trajectory is that, the reaction of the native land users to herder entry into their acclaimed territories derives from understanding of their activity space. Congruently, Sack explains that territorial proclivity influences the preferences for tenure rights of resources in the activity space and suggest that '*successful territoriality engenders more territoriality*' expressed in sophistication of its approaches (Sack, 1983).

Within the context of sedentarist metaphysics, the predilection to associate people and their eccentricity to defined activity space and ethnic home-land give impetus to many a sedentarist particularly farmers to consider nomadic pastoralism as an antiquated and abhorrent activity hence should be discarded and sedentarisation adopted in line with the modern practice of pastoralism (Barre, 2012). In Nigeria, the institutional transformations instigated by the Nigerian state particularly those that relate to issues of territoriality interfered with the seeming existing traditional institutional norms that guided farmer-herder resource access and use in agrarian settings (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020), and has deepened the crisis over legitimate territoriality. Of particular consequence was the enactment of the Land Use Decree of 1978 which placed all lands in the Nigerian state under the custody of the state governments.

This new institutional framework was reinforced by the freedom of movement and residence in any part of the country without any encumbrances assured by the 1999 constitutional (as amended). These institutional underpinnings from the state seemingly meddled with the claim of legitimate territoriality of the farmers while legitimizing the queries over the capacity of sedentary farmers to resist the unencumbered inroads of herders into their supposed home domains since such lands have purportedly dissolved into a national resource common to be accessed by all (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). In the ensuing altercations, sub-national governments in Nigeria like Benue, Ekiti, Taraba among others invoked the sedentary metaphysics by enacting laws prohibiting open grazing (Vanger, 2018). Conversely, nomadic metaphysics unlike the sedentarist metaphysics that prioritises proclivity towards linking people and their peculiarities to definite activity space and ethnic home-land, it shows preference for cattle trails as against '*roots of place*'.

Thus, reciprocal tussles over access to and use of land and its resources, space consciousness, place and migration conspire to shape people's opinion about their activity space and the manner of its use (Barre, 2012). Of particular importance is the likelihood that the non-compatibility of itinerant and sedentary livelihoods and tenure arrangements will tend to divide both parties perception of activity space and its rights which will remain an important component that underpins the intergroup relations between sedentary farmers and their herder counterparts in West Africa (Barre, 2012).

### **3. Neopatrimonialism and State-building in Nigeria in the face of Agrarian violence**

One major dilemma of state-building, particularly in Africa resonate the thinking that *ab-initio*, the institutionalisation of the state in Africa was faulty on account of lack of its liberation from primordial proclivities (Chabal and Daloz, 1999). The primordial proclivity here means patrimonialism. Concisely, patrimonialism connotes receptiveness towards ethnicity as a traditional institutional norm that shaped the interaction between the pre-colonial societal leaders and the led (Chabal and Daloz, 1999). Nevertheless, patrimonialism is a patron-client relationship in which a ruler patronises his supporters with the resources over which he administers, intended to secure allegiance and support from them (Therkildsen, 2005). This familiar feature of the patron-client rapport in African politics births informal networks and shadow states which the ruler uses the largesse of state apparatus to procure allegiance and perpetuate ethnic patronage (Chabal and Daloz, 1999), which according to Hyden, amounts to expressing 'economy of affection' (Hyden, 2006).

Interestingly, the presumption by the modernization apostles that once the decolonised states particularly in Africa and Asia become secularised, they would jettison the deep-seated patrimonial leaning has remained an illusion in the face of the consolidating neo-patrimonial regimes (Eisenstadt, 1973; Clapham, 1985). Rather than experience a negation of patrimonialism as envisaged by the modernisation scholars of the 1950s, the adaption of the modern state paraphernalia by the patrimonial states in Africa is to the extent that it formalises patrimonial dynamics within the context of the 'Western template' (Chabal and Daloz, 1999). What can be added to this argument is that the state institutionalism is no longer purely traditional (Nyaluke, 2013).

Ultimately, Africa is portrayed as a sophisticated political system in which the norms of patrimonialism and modern state paraphernalia coexist with the former inundating the latter (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997). Chabal and Daloz (1999), situate this hybrid political system prevalent in African polities within the context of 'political instrumentalisation of disorder'. In this, the neo-patrimonial elites who are key political actors manning the modern state apparatus perpetuate tendencies that lean towards patrimonialism: patronising informal networks and shadow states purported to sustain themselves in power and reap the much personal gains that can be achieved from state machinery (Therkildsen, 2005). Thus, these patrimonial antics by the key political actors are consistent with the gains derived from tolerance for fragile political institutions and systems (Chabal and Daloz, 1999). This situation the authors sum creates a weak and ill-functioning state which makes good governance an illusion.



In Nigeria, the complicity exhibited by the President Mohammadu Buhari led national government in addressing the persistent loss of lives and property derived from agrarian violence involving the 'Fulani herdsmen and the others' gives credence to neopatrimonial concerns raised by Chabal and Daloz as the political orchestration of disorder (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). This purporting is derived from the national leadership's indifference in the face of persisting agrarian violence which is interpreted as patronage for powerful informal networks like the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN) and Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore which are Fulani socio-cultural associations and have ties with key political actors in Nigeria (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). To be sure, President Muhammadu Buhari is a key benefactor of these networks. Grippingly, these powerful transhumance networks openly threatened at various occasions to visit violence on Benue State if the anti-open grazing legislation of 2017 was not rescinded (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020).

Startlingly, the threat makers were known as they officially had on 30th May, 2017, put the Nigeria's Police chief on notice of their intent to enthrone anarchy in Benue communities if their demands were not met (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). To further illustrate that these transhumance networks were untouchable, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2017, they hosted a world press conference in the Nigerian seat of Power, Abuja, outlined how they intended to violate the anti-open grazing legislation of Benue State (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). On her part, the Benue State Government had written President Buhari and all the national security operatives intimating them of the said threats (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). Sadly, these un-reprimanded threats resulted in the unprovoked massacre of 73 farmers including men, women and children on the eve of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020).

As follow up to memos written to the President and relevant national security operatives in the wake of the 1<sup>st</sup> January massacre, a high powered delegation of all the three (3) paramount traditional rulers in the State, first class chiefs, and selected key political actors in the state led by the Governor visited the President to further appeal for his commitment to secure and protect the state from the threat makers. The President assured them of his commitment to find an enduring solution to the crisis noting that the Inspector General of Police, Ibrahim Idris, had been instructed to relocate to the state to provide security for lives and properties. Most importantly he enjoined the Benue contingent to return home with the injunction to accommodate their countrymen. (Erunke, 2018)

Surprisingly, the Police chief never relocated to Benue State as ordered by Mr. President, he was not reprimanded by the President for such impunity and gross insubordination for the office and person of the Commander –in-Chief (Ogundipe, 2018). Besides, no arrests were made by any of the security operative services even though the threat makers and those who claimed responsibility were known and walking the streets freely. Interestingly, a rejoinder issued by the Kaduna State Governor, Mallam Nasir El-Rufai to excuse the northern Fulani from allegations of masterminding agrarian violence in Nigeria bears interest and interrogation (El-Rufai, 2016). Pointedly, he (El-Rufai) confirmed that the marauding herdsmen were from other parts of West Africa comprising of Chad, Cameroon, Mali, Niger and Senegal whose entry into Nigeria was permitted by the ECOWAS sub-regional protocol on transhumance of 1988. In this, the Governor confirmed his familiarity with this hallowed transhumance network which he purportedly negotiated with and compensated to wade-off

violent follow-ups in the Southern area of Kaduna governed by him since 2015 (El-Rufai, 2016).

Correspondingly, the perceived patrimonial proclivity and the seeming endorsement of agrarian violence targeted at central Nigeria in particular and the Christian south in general by the inaction of the central government and its paraphernalia against the perpetrators of these heinous crimes prompted a former Defense Minister, T. Y. Danjuma to call on affected minorities to resist ethnic cleansing supervised by the Nigerian state and its military (Mkom, 2018). Interestingly, the deliberate non enforcement of the provisions of the ECOWAS Protocol on Transhumance and its miscellaneous provisions by the federal government in the face of agrarian violence while assigning liability to purported foreign violent herdsmen bears interest and interrogation (Vanger, 2018).

Incidentally, the careless statement accredited to Chief Audu Ogbeh, the former Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development which purported that, enforcing the trans-border entry conditions, supervision of transhumance livestock during grazing, ensuring adherence to permissible timelines for transhumance movements and; activating the miscellaneous provision of the ECOWAS transhumance protocol by the Nigerian State would infringe on the spirit of regional integration bears interest and analysis (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). To further buttress the government's 'political instrumentalisation of disorder', the country's Vice President Yemi Osibanjo had lamented the country's laxity towards enforcing the ECOWAS (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020).

Neopatrimonial proclivity exhibited by top political actors in the country remains a key quagmire to state-building in Nigeria which needs to be surmounted to rejuvenate a successful nation-building process (Hippler, 2004). To be sure, Hippler (2004) confirms that nation-building is not a given but a dynamic process that is amendable to evolution and catalysed by the instrumentality of a subsisting state evident in the experiences of notable 'European nation-states'. Ultimately, the efforts aimed at state-building helps us to understand factors that underpin the intrinsic nexus between the state and society and the interdependence of each on the other (Migdal, 2001). According to Migdal, the seeming ineptitude of the state can be best understood by a deep-seated interrogation of the 'society's structure' which determines behaviour of key state actors at all levels of the public sphere (Migdal, 2001). Thus, social formation determines the moral fibre and competence of its key political actors (Scott, 2007).

Correspondingly, Migdal (2001) argues that the existence of the culture of 'strong men' invariably fetters the proper institutionalisation of the state apparatus thereby adding force to fragmented social control vested in powerful informal networks. To be sure, this situation births neopatrimonialism whose main conduit is ethnic plurality which constitutes the main fulcrum of 'patrimonial maintenance of power' predominantly in Africa (Clapman, 1985). Congruently, state-building is a major challenge in ethnic heterogenic societies in Africa due to the erroneous ditching of ethnicity in the construction of the state system (Brock, 2001).

Nevertheless, state-building can be rationalized within the context of state intervention by key political elites in the country aimed at correcting market and other imperfections in society

(Rodrik, 2011). Intriguingly, state intervention has produced varying economic outcomes in the developing south (Kohli, 2004), depending on the profligate disposition of its key political actors (Rodrik, 2011). Enthrallingly, Kohli queries the neoliberals' wisdom of kicking away the ladder with which their states ascended the throne of enviable economic heights, especially that there exists no proof that the non-meddlesome approach of government in the economy births more economic growth (Kohli, 2004). Thus, the antidote or perhaps intrigues prescribed for developing countries by the Washington consensus, reverberate Chang (2007) book, the Bad Samaritans.

Even so, Ottaway (1999) perceives state-building to be congruent with peddling political systems convivial to deep-seated democratic norms and a penchant for ethnic plurality which is somewhat not compatible with nation-building which abhors ethnic plurality thereby repulsing state-building. Concisely, Nigeria, can be categorised as a 'neopatrimonial' state grounded on the defining parameters espoused by van de Walle (2001) portraying that neopatrimonial state features a governance structure which is seemingly anchored on Weberian modern state paraphernalia but harbour vestiges of patrimonial norms that overlap concomitantly with the former. Like Moritz (2006), I believe that the actor-oriented approach that considers individuals as tactical actors capable of manipulating situations conveys a deep-seated appreciation of the farmer-herder conflicts and state-building especially in Nigeria. This is consistent with the seeming inability of the President Buhari led federal government to resolve agrarian violence and secure lives, properties and livelihoods given the heightened and exponential annual escalation of agrarian violence, with powerful primordial networks arbitrarily visiting un-reprimanded violence (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020).

Interestingly the President Mohammadu Buhari led government's schmaltsy handling of the agrarian violence betrays his penchant for primordial inclination which is obvious in his attempt to repackage and float the rejected Rural Grazing Areas (RUGA) Settlements through the implementation of the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) which purportedly conveys an Islamization agenda (Arotiba, 2019). Beyond the morality and pedestrian standpoint, an unfussy perusal of the National Livestock Transformation Plan shows that the new livestock policy is at variance with the Land Use Act (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). Grippingly, concerns pertaining to the National Livestock Transformation Plan include: First, the policy statement and its implementation component failed to articulate how the Nigerian state can guard against the overrunning of the earmarked space by the foreign herdsmen whose entry, the national leadership claims is permitted by the ECOWAS transhumance protocol. Secondly, considering that President Mohammadu Buhari is a Fulani man with ethnic affinity with the *Fulbe* tribe in West Africa, he is likely to use the NLTP to surreptitiously grab lands and settle his kinsmen to sustain their obscure transhumance practice across the West African sub-region (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020).

#### **4. Understanding Agrarian violence, Neopatrimonialism and State-building: A Political Ecology Approach**

The study is grounded on the Political Ecology approach espoused by Blaikie and Brookfield in 1987 and Bryant and Bailey in 1997 respectively. In its core, the approach juxtaposes ecological concerns and political economics to demonstrate that the undercurrents that underline the origin, continuity and management of environmental problems are embedded

in social and political undertones (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987; Peluso and Watts, 2001). To be sure Moritz (2006) describes the political ecology approach as 'putting politics first'. Ultimately, the political ecology approach is in tune with understanding the underpinnings and the resultant transaction costs of the structural inequalities associated with natural resources and its management (Le Billon and Duffy, 2018). Pointedly, Tschakert (2012) highlights the nucleus of political ecology to feature an understanding of the rivalry regarding inequalities, deprivations and injustices in the domain of access to and control over natural resources.

Ultimately, the incongruity in prolific patterns and tenure arrangements amongst resource users is overtly expressed in fixations hinged on social configuration, ethno-religious proclivity and masculinity or femininity compositions which are often qualified in condemnatory terms and demonstrated in continuing tensions which are adjudged to "become the source of political struggles" (Robbins, 2004). Thus, variations in ecological order are rooted in political underpinning and cannot be assumed to stem from a natural course acquiescent to scientific management.

Even so, Vayda and Walters are disillusioned with the proclivity towards politics above ecology by most political ecologist who ultimately undermine the latter, and unwittingly enthrone "politics without ecology" (Vayda and Walters, 1999). Contrastingly, Moritz (2006) argues that "belly politics" which bears interest and analysis in "studies of natural resource management in West Africa" are yet to assume their pride of place in the political science or development literatures. Pointedly, Moritz argues that this trend fails to consider seriously, the 'political instrumentalisation of disorder' enthroned by those who control the state and its paraphernalia echoed by the seeming feebleness of state apparatuses, patrimonialism, prebendalism and patronage for powerful informal networks and shadow states, and the habitual abhorrence of state-building within the context of a neopatrimonialism. He concludes that, formalized or not, belly politics is inseparable from a neopatrimonial state, particularly in West Africa.

Similarly, Reno (2000), confirms that the actions or inactions of key political actors in developing countries that are interpreted as ineptitude, graft, failed governance etc are actually orchestrated by the elites to hide under the pavilion of 'shadow states' to pursue and achieve their self-serving ambitions which are largely economic. While agreeing with Moritz that belly politics is an integral characteristic of a neopatrimonial state, particularly in West Africa, Peters (2002) affirms that there exists deep-seated inequality in access to and use of land resources suffices.

In relation to agrarian violence, neopatrimonialism and state-building in Nigeria, we derive impetus from the political ecology approach to elucidate how key political actors in the state anchor their actions on primordial proclivity, patronage politics and institutionalised disorder thereby making the state a catalyst for conflicts over access to and use of lands and its resources (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). Interestingly, Chabal and Daloz (1999) and Reno (2000), let slip that the apparent failings of the state amidst agrarian violence does convey an *alibi* rather than power void for key political actors in less developed countries to catalyse on such

opportunities to anchor their gainful wager by surrendering power to high-ranking informal groups and condescending 'shadow states'.

Derivatively, state-building becomes abhorrent as key political actors imbibe neopatrimonialism; thwart state-building policies and programmes, suffocate the state and its paraphernalia and cajole the followership for benefaction to surmount poverty consequential of the disorders devised by the leaders themselves (Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Reno, 2000). The inability of the President Buhari led federal government; to effectively address agrarian violence seemingly masterminded by familiar networks of influence suggest his neopatrimonial patronage politics (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). This allegation derives from the national leadership's tolerance for public threats issued and executed in agrarian communities by the Fulani socio-cultural organizations under the watchful eyes of the state without any responsibilities assigned (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). Incidentally, these hallowed informal networks are privileged to whittle economic and political hegemony which places them in vantage position to dictate policy and legal course of action that wires their livelihood. Secondly, its membership comprises of key political actors in Nigeria like President Muhammadu Buhari who makes the list of global flamboyant benefactors of the group (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020).

Enthrillingly, in the build-up to the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN) endorsed and unleashed their support for the candidacy of President Buhari for the presidency (Vanger and Nwosu, 2020). It therefore becomes apparent to assume that, primordial leaning could chip away at the neutrality and clear-headedness of the President Buhari led central government in curbing agrarian violence and ensuring sustainable state-building drawing from the premise of the 'political instrumentalisation of disorder' in a neopatrimonial setting (Chabal and Daloz, 1999). Captivatingly, the surreptitious motive of the agrarian violence and neopatrimonial leaning of the Nigerian state is aptly captured by former President Olusegun Obasanjo in a public lecture in which he accused the national leadership of tolerating '*West African Fulanisation, African Islamisation and global organised crimes* (Ojoye, 2019).

The allegations raised by the former President Olusegu Obasanjo confirms the ethno-religious undercurrent trajectory that tends to weaken the development discourse narrative in understanding agrarian violence involving farmers and herders in Nigeria (Kodili, 2020). Intriguingly, the allegations of fulanilisation were reinforced by the choice of the President Buhari led central government establish a radio station to serve the Fulani herdsman as a strategy to persuade herdsman to desist from agrarian violence. This deliberate instrumentalisation of disorder was criticised by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) (Ojoye et al., 2019). Correspondingly, legal personalities have also queried the wisdom underpinning the establishment of an ethnic radio station in the country on grounds that it contradicts due process in sourcing and securing public funds for the project, incites divisiveness and represents the abuse of power and highhandedness and endorsement of banditry, terrorism, armed robbery and kidnapping which is at variance with the constitutional mandate of Section 14 on the primary purpose of government which is security and welfare of Nigerians (Adewakun et al., 2019).

Reverberating the neopatrimonial proclivity and the political instrumentalisation of disorder by key state actors in addressing agrarian violence in Nigeria, the Governor of Kaduna State, Mallam Nasir El-Rufai in a rejoinder to excuse the northern Fulani from allegations of masterminding agrarian violence in the country alleged that the marauding herdsmen were from other parts of West Africa comprising of Chad, Cameroon, Mali, Niger and Senegal whose entry into Nigeria was permitted by the ECOWAS sub-regional protocol on transhumance of 1988 (El-Rufai, 2016). Unequivocally, the Governor established his acquaintance with this powerful transhumance network which he purportedly negotiated with and compensated to wade-off violent follow-ups in the Southern area of Kaduna governed by him since 2015 (El-Rufai, 2016). Interestingly, perceived complicity of Nigeria's national leadership concerning the agrarian violence visited on the Christian south in general and central Nigeria in particular prompted a former Defense Minister, T. Y. Danjuma to call on affected minorities to resist ethnic cleansing supervised by the Nigerian state and its military. (Mkom, 2018). What we can derive from this argument is that, state-building in Nigeria is a daunting task that can only be surmounted by a logical examination of the point of convergence of the socio-political undercurrents that condition agrarian violence in Nigeria.

## **5. Conclusion**

The paper sets out to establish a nexus between agrarian violence, neopatrimonialism and state-building in Nigeria. Of particular importance is the fact that, the time honoured cooperative relations between arable crop farmers who are mostly Christians and the predominantly Muslim Fulani pastoralists in Nigeria has eroded precariously, resulting in fierce agrarian altercations rooted in delicate but momentous institutional dynamics and state complicity in its responses to the ensuing situation. Interestingly, the escalating agrarian violence which has seemingly gained its momentum from the President Muhammadu Buhari led Federal Government's complicity in its response to the farmer-herder clashes have resulted in deaths between 2016-2018 that surpasses those incurred from terrorist insurgency in the country (Amnesty International, 2018). The federal government's apparent feebleness in the face of familiar informal networks that publicly issue threats, mastermind killings and accept responsibility for same in daylight and walk away freely without reprimand underpins the economy of affection expressed by the state and consistent with and reflects the choices of strong men in the country.

It is also thought that President Buhari's indifference towards these killings stems from his primordial affinity as one of the flamboyant benefactors of Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria which is known for masterminding agrarian violence in Nigeria. Thus, the country's national leadership proclivity towards ascriptive and particularistic values is derived from neopatrimonialism with a deep-seated penchant for institutionalising political disorder while patronising powerful informal networks and shadow states.

Therefore, it becomes reasonable to question the neutrality and clear-headedness of the President Buhari led central government in curtailing agrarian violence and ensuring sustainable state-building drawing from his neopatrimonial proclivity. Ultimately, the use of the state paraphernalia to pursue policies that purportedly show preference for particular ethnic groups in the country like the Cattle Colonies project, the Rural Grazing Areas (RUGA)

scheme, the ethnic radio station to serve the Fulani herdsmen as a supposed strategy to persuade herdsmen to desist from agrarian violence and now the National Livestock Transformation Plan all confirm the use of the state and its paraphernalia to peddle ethnic hegemony in the country.

Intriguingly, the pervasive speculations of the modernization scholars that with time, countries will out-grow primordial proclivity and different affiliate groups will cooperate with others to contend for access to public resources particularly those in the jurisdiction of the State once they cue into modernization has been voided in the face of persisting ethno-religious identities shaping resource contestation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is especially that contestations for agrarian resources and the ensuing violence in Nigeria can seldom be excused from ethno-religious proclivity because particular prolific systems are inexorably allied to socio-cultural groups and so conflicts between them can easily be associated with other tensions and conflicts. Moreover, the adaption of the modern state paraphernalia by the patrimonial states in Africa is to the extent that it formalises patrimonial dynamics within the context of the 'Western template', indicating that the state is no longer purely traditional.

In the case of Nigeria, the neo-patrimonial elites who are key political actors manning the modern state apparatus perpetuate tendencies that lean towards patrimonialism and birth a weak and ill-functioning state situation which makes good governance an illusion. It is purported that the complicity exhibited by the President Muhammadu Buhari led national government in effectively addressing agrarian violence involving the 'Fulani herdsmen and the others' gives credence to neopatrimonial concerns raised by Chabal and Daloz as the political orchestration of disorder. What can be rationalised from the above trend is that, the Nigerian state has a major state-building challenge that may only be overcome by a systematic reconsideration of the meeting points of the socio-political undercurrents that condition agrarian violence in Nigeria which is congruent with the theoretical tenets of the political ecology approach.

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