LITERATURE, LINGUISTICS & CRITICISM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Has this house fallen? Fragile nationhood and the Fulani herdsman’s genocide in Nigerian poetry

Niyi Akingbe¹*

Abstract: The paper evaluates the prevailing anxieties gnawing at the Nigeria nation-state, deriving from the Fulani herdsman’s genocidal campaign. These anxieties are painstakingly reflected in insecurity, chaos, violence, banditry, and uncertainty that have built up in recent times to complicate the Nigeria nation-state’s fragile sovereignty. Embedded in the poetics of the selected poems is the repudiation of the postcolonial contradictions, which highlight egregious inequity as foreshadowed in the northern Caliphate’s domination of the middle-belt and the southern federating units. The emergence of varied ethnic nationalisms becomes a political fallout from a rejection of the northern Caliphate’s domination. Years of accrued resentment against this domination will be contextualized in the paper, to explicate the possibility of ostensible Nigeria nation-state’s disintegration. Frenzied calls for the country’s disintegration culminated when middle-belt and southern Nigeria are being continually plundered by the Fulani herdsman to perpetrate the most horrendous genocidal killings on a daily basis. The paper intends not only at drawing attention to possible causes of Nigeria nationhood’s failure thematic but to also interrogate the Fulani herdsman’s killings within the context of a genocide framework. Further, the paper foregrounds a condemnation of the insidious pressures of Fulani-inspired ethnic cleansing in the poetry of diverse Nigerian poets.

Subjects: Literature; Literature by Geographic Area; Interdisciplinary Literary Studies

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1. Introduction

Anxieties emanating from the ostensible Nigeria nation-state’s failings and a palpable threat of its imminent disintegration are embedded in the poetry of John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, Tanure Ojaide, Harry Garuba, G’Ebinyo Ogbowei, Ademola Dasyyla, Remi Raji, Musa Idris Okpanachi, and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo. The selected poems in the paper, individually interrogates a rupture in Nigeria’s nationhood as each probe into the defective Nigeria’s federal system of government—an obvious fault line in political inequity. Such probing is done with a forensic eloquence that testifies

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Niyi Akingbe is Professor of Comparative Literature and Poetics. He is presently a Distinguished Research Fellow at the Department of English Studies, University of South Africa, Pretoria. He received a Ph.D. from the University of Lagos, Nigeria, where he studied Protest Literature. His scholarly interests include: Comparative Literature and poetics, Postcolonial Literatures, Commonwealth Literatures, African Literatures, cultural studies, music-in-literature, Protest Literature, Intersection of Literature and film studies. His work has been published internationally in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and the United States.
to the overbearing ferocity at which the Fulani herdsmen perpetrate acts of genocide that become catalyst of a possible dismembering of the country. The selected poems have been chosen to examine the thrust of power relation dialectics between the northern Nigeria’s Fulani Caliphate and the ravaged southern Nigeria. As the nation struggles to establish a sense of self, a high number of casualties continues to grow, scores of women are being raped and hundreds of women, men and children are continually hacked to death by the Fulani herdsmen. The selected poems further highlight the poets’ disenchantment with the prevailing inequitable power relation in postcolonial Nigeria.

If individual federating units now clamour for self-determination and imminent excision from the burdensome contraption called the Nigeria nation state, the tenuous political link between the Caliphate north and other federating units becomes overstretched. A perceived northern domination has given rise to innumerable fears, which only exacerbate tensions that threaten the country's indivisibility in the most recent time. An added complication is the growing concerns marked by a conscious effort to retain the Nigeria’s cultural diversity by other federating units in contrast to the pain of its rebuff by the Fulani minority from the north. By constructing other federating units as secondary and less important in the pursuit of indissoluble Nigeria, the Fulani minority has only cast aspersion on the postcolonial aspirations that culminated into the country’s independence attained in 1960. The recent onslaught of genocidal killings launched by the Fulani herdsmen against other ethnic groups has been testing the political foundations of the postcolonial Nigeria. The killings have further affirmed the herdsmen’s pathological disposition to the displacement of indigenous farmers from their ancestral lands. Akali Omeni has contended that “since 1960 when it became an independent political entity, Nigeria has faced threats to its sovereignty … the most notable security threats have been endogenous, localized within the country” (Omeni, 2020; 1). Over the years, Nigeria, a politically troubled nation-state of 220 million people, has continually experienced incessant political upheavals of religious violence, banditry, and kidnapping for ransoms as fallouts of continued security breaches. As a result of this, hundreds of people continue to lose their lives and livelihoods. Porous borders make Nigeria vulnerable, as the country is perennially prone to invasion by the armed Fulani herdsmen, who often crisscross its territory as they plunder farmlands with impunity and attack those who dare to resist. For the foregoing reasons, the Fulani herdsmen’s actions are now exploding in menaces and threats of vengeance from other Nigeria’s federating units. Such an explosion is beginning to undermine collective Nigerians’ confidence in the inviolability of the country’s sovereignty. This ostensibly loss of confidence in Nigeria’s nationhood by its citizenry is further elucidated in the words of Karl Maier “Nigerians from all walks of life are openly questioning whether their country should remain as one entity or discard the colonial borders and break apart into several states …” (Maier, 2000; xx). Suffice it to state that unequal power relations between northern and southern Nigeria have unabatedly privileged the perpetration of Fulani herdsmen’s barbaric killings. It is important to note that the fear of the Caliphate’s domination has compromised the tenuous historical link between the north and other Nigeria’s federating units. The incessant killings by the Fulani herdsmen ostensibly bear the imprint of genocide with unsurprising undertones of Islamic Jihadist posturing. Just as the current Nigerian government’s response to the killings has been distinctly underwhelming, the Caliphate’s reticence has been unhelpful. Of a Fulani extraction, President Muhammadu Buhari’s equivocal response has done nothing to dampen the speculation of his complicity in the surreptitious genocidal campaign of the Fulani herdsmen.

Against a backdrop of cultural diversity, Fulani minority’s display of discontent with the interdependence among other federating units has significantly portrayed it as haughty and rancorous. Again, as the murderous activities of the Fulani’s herdsmen in the last 3 years portend a possible threat to Nigeria nation-state’s continuity, the ostensibly clinging to ethnic nationalism tends to hold sway among the diverse Nigerian federating units. A resort to regional formation of militias for possible self-defence by other federating units now appears to be an alternative determination to ward off intrusion by the rampaging Fulani herdsmen. While these killings have caused a major rupture in the political ties among the varying federating units, Fulani minority’s capacity for quick,
remorseless violence challenges any typical expectations for the north–south mutual benefit and progress. By interiorizing the herdsman’s killings as a clash between farmers and herdsmen rather than a genocide, the Nigerian government is complicit with the Caliphate north and Fulani minority. Unfortunately, the intensity of the violence continues to be downplayed by the United Nations and the concerned Western governments. Nevertheless, as widespread condemnation of these killings gained prominence internationally, the Nigerian media is apprehensive of a full-blown genocide soon. An important intervention, a caricaturing of the Fulani herdsmen killings, has become emboldened in the selected poems to reverberate its callousness. The paper is premised on three discursive planks: an attempt to interrogate dialectics of power in the postcolonial Nigeria regarding the explicit leitmotif of subjugation wielded by the Fulani herdsmen; an attempt to explain the disastrous manifestation of the unleashed genocidal wreckage on the Nigeria’s nationhood; and a bid to assuage the grief of differing federating units’ casualties. Suffice to state that the Nigerian poets in the selected poems have deployed genuine affectation, which conveys how the individual mind experiences grief not just as something that can be measured by the experiences of others, but as something deeply personal and particular. The paper will further examine leadership’s failure to acknowledge a complex web of the country’s ethnic diversity, which has given rise to an irredentist pursuit of Fulani’s expansionist agenda.

2. Theoretical Approaches
This paper utilizes genocide, postcolonial, and migration theories as interpretive models to explain migration, ethnic conflicts, and attendant mass killings unjustifiably perpetrated by the Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria, and West Africa in general. These theories are helpful in determining the aesthetic values of the poems selected for analysis in this paper. A mélange of these theories offered a critical interpretation or understanding of the basis of the ruinous ethnic clashes and mass killings preponderantly unleashed by the Fulani pastoralist herdsmen on the agrarian farmers from other federating units, who are often unarmed and defenceless. The choice of the theories is largely informed by their relevance to the thrust of the paper and the need to examine the treatment of Fulani-inspired killings in Nigerian poetry. Ever since its coinage by Raphael Lemkin after World War II (Scott & Gordon, 2005; 234; Powell, 2007; 527), the term “genocide” has continued to receive scholarly attention with regard to its depiction of mass violence induced by the variables of ethnicity, chauvinism, resentment, and many other ill-feelings borne by genocidal actors against their victims. Quite a few studies have examined it as a proposition to map out the processes, causes, actors, victims, and other dimensions of the sociological concept as an interpretative field of study. Bradley Campbell (2009) conceives it as a deviance of social control, and his hypothesis is premised on the belief in criminoLOGY that mass killing by people ruptures social order. James Waller’s (2002) hypothesis of the theory focuses on the perpetrators of genocide. It sees the concept as an extreme form of mass slaughter and mistreatment of other humans, on the one hand, and addresses “how” it happens, on the other hand (Adelman, 2008;196), even though Howard Adelman (2008) argues that Waller’s conception of genocide should have been more on why it happens to explain reasons why humans become instruments of mass slaughter (197). Waller, therefore, comes up with a four-model hypothesis to tease out his understanding of genocide that focuses on “rank-and-file killers” (2002; 7). These models include human predispositions, cultural forces, institutional cultural re-enforcers that submerge an individual perpetrator within the group, and institutions that alter the perceived identity of the other (Adelman 2008:198; Waller, 2002;17–21). While predispositions take core of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and desire for dominance; cultural forces focus on authority system, moral disengagement, rational self-interest; cultural re-enforcers address professional socialisation, group conformity, merger of person and role; and identity alterations cover othering, dehumanising, and blaming others. Just as Waller and Adelman privilege the position of genocidal actors in mass slaugther, this paper adopts the genocidal perpetrator model to examine the motivation, intention, reasons, and impacts of Fulani’s incessant attacks on different ethnic groups in Nigeria.
Categorising Fulani killings as genocidal is debatable, as some scholars may raise questions about the aptness of such taxonomy. Among the questions that the taxonomy may generate include: When do killings of people become mass slaughter? Are there statistical thresholds to cross before killings can be regarded as mass murder? How can ethnic killings in Nigeria be contextualized, and what taxonomic evidence qualifies Fulani killings as genocide? What are the existing power differentials between the Fulani killers and their victims? Does the label Fulani killing not reek of ethnic scapegoating since it may be argued that not all Fulani persons are killers? What methods or processes of brutalisation or dehumanisation the killers employ, and how are these related to foremost genocides the world has witnessed in recent times? If the Armenian killings (1914–1923), the Serbian killings (1941–1945), the Cambodian killings (1975–1979), and the Rwandan killings (1994) are genocidal, can Fulani killings too be termed genocidal, in view of socio-political, economic, and ethnic peculiarities that drive these genocides? This paper addresses these and other questions, bearing in mind that “genocide means what we want it to mean, like any other mode of human behavior” (Huttenbach 2007, para. 8). The paper argues that there is no other nomenclature befitting Fulani herdsmen’s killings in Nigeria other than genocide since the perpetrators fulfil many of Waller’s four-model hypotheses. The warlike nomadic ethnic group Fulani is ethnocentric, pursues self-interest and dominance of other ethnic groups in Nigeria, dehumanises, and terrorises its victims.

Apart from the theory of genocide, migration theory also comes in handy to provide adequate explanation for the migratory trajectory of the Fulani believed to have existed in the Sahel, alongside the Wolof, and the Dogon for ages (Mehring, Zajonz, and Hummel, 2018:88). The article builds on and extends the eighth law of Ernst Georg Ravenstein’s The Laws of Migration (1976) to stress the fact that there are economic, political, and ecological factors that underlie the Fulani’s nomadic consciousness. While the need to graze their cattle in places with green vegetation may be argued to be overt cause responsible for the migration of Fulani pastoralists to different parts of Nigeria, the real cause of their migration may not be unconnected with their quest to dominate and seize political powers in the country that commenced with the 1804 Fulani conquest of Hausa kingdoms that led to the establishment of the Fulani hegemony over northern Nigeria till date (Nwobara, 1963; 232). Postcolonial literary theory is also used to capture the existence of Nigeria as a British creation and a nation of nations. The poets whose poems are examined are post-colonial writers who express their opinions about the post-independence disillusionment and warped socio-political structure founded and bequeathed to Nigerians by the British. Nigeria to these poets is more of a colonial absurdity that has been exploited to strengthen Fulani’s hegemony and the fixation of Fulani elites on power politics. Through the theory, it is argued that Nigeria is a British contraption that privileges a warlike and unspeakably baleful transnational ethnic group -the Fulani, over other ethnic groups. The British divide-and-rule colonial policy favours the Fulani hegemony as a political stratagem to control Nigeria, especially the northern part of the country (Iwuchukwu Marinus, 2013:15). Fulani, the privileged ethnic group with its nomadic civilisation subjugates other ethnic groups, disrespects Nigeria’s sovereignty, and engages in mass killings as a means of political control.

There is intersubjectivity among the adopted theories, and this synergy underlies human persons (genocidal perpetrators), their agency, intentionality, and ideology. While migration theory captures man’s resolve for movement for socio-political and environmental reasons, genocide theory provides the critical basis for the interrogation of social conflicts brought about by the interaction of one ethnic group with another and the struggle to control power or socio-economic resources. Postcolonial theory interconnects with the duo of genocide and migration theories by foregrounding the unremarkable roles played by the European superpowers in Africa. The perennial ethnic clashes and mass killings in Africa are a corollary of a poor nation-building process in which different ethnic groups—that have nothing in common—were forcefully married to form sovereign states by the colonialists. Many Africans in postcolonial African countries are proofs of this forced marriage. The interconnectivity between the theories is, for instance, accentuated by the inglorious Belgian colonisation of Rwanda and the undue influence of France in post-independence Rwanda.
Western favouritism showered on the minority Tutsi is believed to have wetted the ground for the genocide that took the country by storm. The West weaponised its prejudices and sentiments to privilege an ethnic group (the Tutsi)\(^2\) in both pre- and post-colonial Rwanda, just as it deliberately subjugated other ethnic groups (the Hutu and Twa) for their self-seeking agenda. The same trend happened in Nigeria, where the British deliberately encouraged Fulani’s dominance over other ethnic groups in the country.

3. Locating Fulani Herdsmen’s Killings within the framework of Genocide

Vahak Dadrian has described genocide as destructive annihilation of vulnerable groups through, the use of coercion and lethal violence, often perpetrated by a dominant group with preponderant access to state resources and power (Dadrian, 1975; 202). Donald G. Dutton in *The Psychology of Genocide* has argued that genocide is often fuelled by “the will to annihilate an entire people” (Dutton, 2007; ix). Correspondingly, Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn in their book *The History and Sociology of Genocide* have depicted genocide as “a form of one-sided mass killing (Chalk, 1991:23). In a similar tone, John L. Thompson and Gail A. Quets (cited in Fein) have defined genocide as the “destruction of a social collectivity by whatever agents with whatever intentions” (Fein, 2005; 406).

Lemkin has offered a convincing explanation on genocide:

> By “genocide” we mean the destruction of a nation or an ethnic group . . . . Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group. Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. This imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain or upon the territory alone, after removal of the population and the colonization of the area by the oppressor’s own nationals.\(^3\)

Lemkin’s explication on genocide has been adopted by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948. According to the Convention, genocide:

> whether committed in time of peace or war is a crime under the international law and genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such; killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”\(^4\)

Locating the signification of humanity within the framework of genocide, Tsehloone C. Keto has argued that “the humanity of all people is [or should be] an essential value element in the cosmic vision that undergirds an African-centred perspective” (Keto, 2000;19). The selected poets’ valiant efforts at addressing the debased humanity of those who have been killed and injured in the clashes orchestrated by the Fulani herdsmen, appropriate the use of emotive language grounded in imagery and metaphors of maiming, killing, rape, and displacement, to speak directly to the trauma. Now that there are palpable fears that the Fulani herdsmen’s genocide might degenerate into full-scale civil war anytime soon, the selected poems have been chosen with the intent to
speak truth to power for the reclamation of the genocidal victims’ humanity. Such emotive language has been adopted to reverse what Omer Bartov has described as the creation of genocide victims when they are compelled to “conform to a definition that they might not share, based on categories imposed on them by a larger community or political regime” (Bartov, 1998;772). It is important to reiterate that, the selected Nigerian poets’ literary careers have been marked by a steady artistic progress, and their voices represent an incisive critique of postcolonial Nigeria’s degeneration into anarchy. In responding to artistic demand, their commitment toward a poetic reconstruction of the upheavals becomes compelling for the interpretation of senseless killings superintended by the Fulani herdsmen. Earlier on, Wole Soyinka in A shuttle in the Crypt (1972) has significantly condemned the artificiality of the Nigerian federal state which reflects in “the narrative of ethnic differences, mediated by the 1966 political crisis, which led to the destruction of social and political equilibrium in the country and metamorphosed into the Civil War (1967-70)” (Akingbe, 2013; 124). The inherent failure of the Nigeria nation to address the problematic of equity and fairness among its federating units is further revalidated in the gamut of confrontational poetics embedded in the selected poems. Again, harking back to the dialectics of privacy/cultural infringement, empathic poetics of the selected poems collectively provide a therapeutic site that seeks to lessen the trauma of the casualties of the Fulani herdsmen’s genocidal campaign.

Matter of fact, the selected poets contend in their poems, that a quest for the desperately needed Nigeria’s unity cannot crystallise until some level of power-sharing equilibrium is fashioned out among the different federating units and, the nagging issue of religious tensions between the Islamic north and Christian south are sufficiently addressed (Akingbe, 2019;15). This contention derived from individual experiences and reflections of these poets on the Fulani herdsmen’s genocidal campaign as it impinges on the traumatic conditions of the captive Nigerians, who are caught in the crossfire between ethnic nationalism and a retention of the burdensome federated system. Furthermore, as scores are helplessly mowed down by the Fulani bandits on a daily basis, cynicism continues to trail the Nigeria’s lopsided federalism. It sounds irrecconcilably strange that, as the northern Nigeria’s Caliphate hypocritically preaches indivisibility of Nigeria’s federation, the Fulani herdsmen continue to unleash blood-letting orgies of destruction and often the mindless killings across the country. Mahmood Mamdani has stressed that “the birth of the modern state amid ethnic cleansing and … domination is: less an engine of tolerance than of conquest” (Mamdani, 2020;2). Therefore, if ongoing pogrom is considered an aberration, Fulani herdsmen’s intolerance has proven intractable, and may be a pointer to modernist conquest. Within the context of the long-running ethnic cleansing of the Caliphate’s Jihad of 1804 to the present Fulani herdsmen’s rampage, it bears remarking that the forging of Nigeria nation-state is exemplified by intolerance and domination—a subterranean underpinning of conquest. As such, words and memories harnessed in cadences of anguish in the selected poems in the paper, give meaning to the oddities of ethnic cleansing superintended by the killer Fulani herdsmen. Portrayed in the selected poems are images of dismembering, decapitation, displacement, and chaos, which assuredly underlie postcolonial Nigeria’s gradual slide into fragmentation. Suffice it to say that, Nigerians of liberal persuasion have always been convinced that the possibility of the nation’s rebirth and growth lies not in the elevation of one ethnic group over and above other ethnic groups, but, in the union of all ethnic nationalities (that made up the postcolonial Nigeria) in an objective recognition of their common potentials that could be harnessed for the overall achievement of the country’s greatness in the comity of nations.

4. Is Nigeria a Nation-state or Country?
Arguably, Nigeria has often been referred to as the giant of Africa due to its humongous population size. But, beyond its approximately 220 million population, of which greater percentage is marooned in economic despair at the mercy of its irresponsible political elite, postcolonial Nigeria’s eligibility to being called a nation-state is ostensibly questionable. Contestable Nigeria nation-state runs contrary to the conceptualisation of a “nation” in the notion of Ernest Renan as expressed in his seminal book: “What Is a Nation.” In the book, Renan defines a nation as “a soul, a spiritual
principle … a large-scale solidarity … a daily plebiscite” (Renan, 1990; 9). Further, Renan illustrates the essence of a nation amongst others, “that all individuals must have a lot in common and also that they must all have forgotten a great deal” (Renan, 1990; 8–22). In the same vein, Robert Thornton has reiterated that “most African countries today are countries, not nations, states, or ethnic groups” (1996; 136–61). Within the critical debate on the contextualisation of nationhood, affixing the term “nation” to Nigeria can only satirically reiterate its hypocritical status. This hypocrisy is further stressed in G’Ebinyo Ogbowei’s “A failed federation”:

A failed federation

… in a failed federation

where contentious constituents

… hurry south spreading

the language of hell (the heedless ballot box2006;42)

Recognisable in this poem, either implicitly or explicitly, is the fact that, it is no longer possible for Ogbowei in the poem to indulge in prevarication, but, to state expressly complications bedevilling the Nigeria’s federal system. Apparently, Ogbowei is of conviction that the sovereignty of postcolonial Nigeria has been repeatedly compromised by the political schism, which has continually dogged her “contentious constituents.” In the poem, Ogbowei seems to imply that, terrific as the wildness of a maniac, the downward rush of the Fulani herdsmen from Caliphate north to the southern Nigeria is poignantly marked in a blaze of killings, which have swept through a labyrinth of villages and communities passed through by these herdsmen.Enumerable evidences abound where farmers from other Nigerian federating units have abandoned their villages and settlements after the mindless Fulani herdsmen plundered their farms, burned their homes, and raped their wives and daughters at gun-points. It becomes imperative to realize that these killings are metaphorically underscored in the poem as the unleashing of “the language of hell.” Obviously, as the killing rage on with intense and obvious sorrows, Nigeria regressively descends into chaos.

Apparently, years of debilitating division among its federating units signal the degradation of Nigeria’s sovereignty and, by extension, illustrate its imaginary status as artificial creation. This inherent artificiality is bolstered by the Arnab Dasgupta and Rupayan Mukherjee’s argument for an “inclusion-exclusion” approach in the formation of a nation, which takes into cognizance that “nation states are constructed, imagined, represented, and authenticated through the principle of inclusion and exclusion, where the idioms of culture, race, history, politics, and ideology conjure what Anderson calls an “elastic space” beyond which lies “the abyss of the other” (Dasgupta & Mukherjee, 2018;153). The “other” then becomes an essential component in discourses of nation formation, as it is through a response to the other that the nation fashions its ontological identity, a “phenomenology of alterity.” Undoubtedly, there is something in this formulation that we can bring to illustrate the adversarial relationship between Nigeria’s contending north/south polarities as succinctly captured in Ogbowei’s “how many mays more”:

how many mays more

communities can’t coalesce into a nation

tribes can’t be welded into a state

wonder how many mays more

how many sacrifices more
before famished farms are refreshed (marsh boy 2013; 58)

Although the 1914 amalgamation of the northern and southern Nigeria constitutes the basis of its federation, which has notched up its diversity and accentuates, its prospect as the most populated Black nation. But its abiding, irreconcilable differences, which have manifested in religion, social values, and political interests, affirm its otherness. The otherness between the southern and northern Nigeria became immediately apparent as the country attained independence in 1960. However, the tension has been heightened by the recent upsurge in the Fulani herdsmen’s killings of farmers and villagers in the middle-belt and southern Nigeria. As the killing continues, mutual suspicion mutates into anxiety to strain the relationship between the north and south. As such, no Nigerian really has any illusions concerning a possible aftermath of the country’s faulty nationhood. This enduring dissension is strikingly reiterated in: “communities can’t coalesce into nation/tribes can’t be welded into a state.” Due to a deliberate failure of its successive leaders to acknowledge and harness its cultural diversity and social differences, Nigeria’s nationhood continues to thrive as an embarrassment and a lie. Correspondingly, if its indivisibility remains illusory, its sovereignty reflects a wishful thinking in the minds of most Nigerians and scholars of post-colonialism.

It bears remarking that, the tenuous relationship among the adversarial Nigeria’s ethnic groups emphasised in the poem, can be examined within the context of what Michel Foucault refers to as “difference and resemblance.” Within the context of rivalry, competing interests of the Nigeria’s federating units continue “existing for each other, in relation to each other, in the exchange which separates them” (Foucault, 1988;10). Hence, rivalry among the federating units requires the consciousness of explication to actually bring it into perception through a determined tasking of imagination. While competition among these units accrues animosity, the failure of the elite class continues to compromise the patriotic zeal of the Nigerian masses. This is further examined in Musa Idris Okpanachi’s poem “The delicacies of gods”:

Now we sing the anthem

Of despair and the dirge

Of our new pledge … (The Eaters of the Living 2006; 67)

The poem criticises the inherent insincerity enshrined in Nigeria’s anthem whose recitation does not deter a privileging of the country’s domination by the Fulani minority from the Caliphate northern Nigeria./Arise, O, Compatriots/Nigeria’s Call Obey/To Serve our Father’s land/With Love, and strength and Faith/The Labour of Heroes past/shall never be in vain/To serve with heart and might/One nation bound in freedom/Peace and Unity/. This is further reinforced in self-inflicted deception grounded in the national pledge/ I pledge to Nigeria my Country/To be faithful loyal and honest/To serve Nigeria with all my strength/To defend her unity/And uphold her honour and glory/So help me God/. The subversion of its national anthem and pledge in the poem, is deployed to jolt Nigerians into consciousness of a neglect of the fundamental connection obtainable in the pre-colonial relationship among its differing federating units which has now been jettisoned in the postcolonial Nigeria (Akingbe, 2017:37). Against the backdrop of historical hindsight, the pre-colonial Nigerian people are historically different in their backgrounds and in their religious beliefs as well as in their customs. While the north embraces Islam, the southerners are largely Christians and animists. In conformity with the political ecology of the country, the northerners are significantly cattle breeders against the southerners who are mainly farmers.

Hedging a subversion of Nigeria’s anthem/pledge in the above poem, political hysteria embedded in its content recalls a harrowing tale of inequitable distribution of power among its different federating units. The British colonial administrative system originally designed Nigeria as three separate territories of North, South, and Lagos. However, in 1914, Lugard collapsed the three territories and re-
christened them as Nigeria, but each maintained distinct administrations (Sullivan, 2001;72). As the political power was brazenly manipulated in favour of the Fulani minority by the British colonial system shortly before independence in 1960, the other federating units became unsurprisingly threatened afterwards. Due to the complex postcolonial Nigeria’s formation, the amalgamation between the northern and southern Nigeria has essentially benefitted the Caliphate north with more states and higher representation in the armed forces to the detriment of its southern component with limited number of states. This lapsedness has bred a lot of acrimony among the southern federating units who perceived this inequality as an impediment to the advancement of their individual and collective aspirations. Further, the south and the middle-belt federating units are apprehensive of the north’s domination, which has been described as “gods” in the title of the poem. The poem depicts the north as having a tendency to dominate the entire federation surreptitiously through its religious and political idiosyncrasies, which have repeatedly manifested in suspicious government policies. For instance, the skewed federal character clause enshrined in the Nigeria’s constitution and the civil service policy with its inherent disregard to merit is designed to legitimise the Caliphate’s mediocrity. The clause further emphasises a mandatory representation of the northern interest in the public service; the University’s unified admission, recruitment into the armed forces and paramilitary units. Viewed as oppressive, the northern Nigeria’s domination continues to attract more critical accretions in Remi Raji’s “Notes of an exiled poet”:

There’s an emptiness in our anthem
only fools can fill the pith
hear the column of sickening sopranos
and feel those flat altos
croaking in the circus
of a slumbering homeland (Webs of Remembrance 2001; 20)

Deconstructing a genuineness of its sovereignty, the poem underlies artificiality of Nigeria’s nationhood grounded in poetics of despair. The poem further interrogates the inappropriateness of a commitment to the recitation of Nigeria’s anthem: Arise,O,Compatriots/Nigeria’s Call Obey …/ as such commitment is located in the intersection of “sickening sopranos” and “flat altos.” Suffice to state that such a recitation is not borne out of patriotic zeal, but just an enactment of action devoid of conviction. Nigeria’s artificial unity further suffers a knock in the subversive rendering of its national anthem in Ademola Dasylva’s “The carrion”:

Arise compatriots, unbind the shacks,
We do ourselves a favour so bright,
Should we resist the hounds with tact,
Or chaos and carnage shall come to berth (Dasylva, 2006;105)

Here again, the poem distances itself from patriotic blackmats of the Nigeria’s anthem: Arise,O, Compatriots/Nigeria’s Call Obey … and rather calls on the compatriots to rally against obnoxious policies that have undermined Nigeria’s sovereignty. Antithetical poetics are encouraged and canvassed in “unbind the shacks,” “resist the hounds with tact” relentlessly in the poem in order to prevent against “chaos and carnage” that could ensue from the Caliphate-inspired policies, considered inimical to the continuity of Nigeria’s nationhood. Subversively, the poem enjoins Nigerians to be courageous in resisting a stranglehold of perceived domination.
Arguably, tribalism is often an enduring ideology in Nigeria's politics and a ready tool in the hands of the seemingly predatory Fulani ethnic minority's handlers-the Sokoto Caliphate, who have often taken advantage of this infamy. The damaging impact of tribalism on Nigeria nation-state has been further reiterated in Martin Meredith's remark on Nigeria's unstable politics, especially in a delineation of the nepotism identified with the government of President Shehu Shagari. Staking its own claim to the fragile nationhood, Shehu Shagari, from a Fulani minority, promoted the Caliphate's interests as his administration was characterised by tribalism between 1979 and 1983. Meredith's choice of subject matter portrays Nigeria's politics as “mercenary and violent” (Meredith, 2006;194). The tactics employed in Shagari's government are often those of the rough-house variety as observable tension in Nigeria's politics is further underlined by its rancorous political debate routinely “conducted in acrimonious and abusive language; and ethnic loyalties were constantly exploited. But the reckless manner in which Nigerian politicians fought for control during six years of civilian rule was to lead ultimately to a tragedy of monumental proportions” (Meredith, 2006;194). Since there is no fundamental identity that any Nigerian clings to in common with all other Nigerians ostensibly, it would not be hasty to describe Nigeria as a pseudo-nation. In relation to multiple considerations, the claim to nationhood by any geopolitical sphere can only be logically and morally justified when each citizen has a convincing reason to identify with the entire population of such geo-political sphere despite its inherent ethnic, religious and probable racial differences. Remarkably, the state is marked by “a tangible, observable, recognisable set of facts like borders, a central government, a population, an economy, and a bureaucracy” (Sullivan, 2001;71). The nation, on the other hand, constitutes itself through the will and the imagination of the citizens of the state. The health of a nation depends on each citizen's desire to identify with the entire population of the nation despite racial, ethnic, or religious differences. This idea of loyalty to the nation above and beyond individual differences is known as nationalism, and often competes with fervent loyalties to sub-national groups. Yet, within each nation “those loyalties differ, and thus no one determined course of action can be employed in the name of nationalism. In effect, rather than moulding itself on universal terms, nationalism shapes itself to fit the particular needs of each nation” (Sullivan, 2001;71). In consideration of the above variables within the complexity of what constitutes a nation, it becomes easier to come to terms with the understanding that Nigeria nation-state is only a falsehood. It becomes justifiable to interpret the perceived mutual suspicion and distrust explicated in these poems as reflections of Nigeria's disunity. Especially, if one considers the overwhelming vituperation encased in the tone of despair and beleaguerings anxieties embedded in Okpanachi's “Delicacies of god,” Raji's “Notes of an Exiled Poet,” and Da Sylva's “The Carrian.”

5. Is Nigeria's Sovereignty a Ruse?
Clearly, when more Nigerians are getting trapped in a whirlpool of malignant pessimism, under-ervingly triggered by the herdsmen's genocide, voices of contemporary Nigerian poets much more, hack through the geography of pervading despair to offer a backlash to official denials. As tension from the Fulani herdsmen's genocide recalls Nigeria's artificiality, the burden of Nigeria's nationhood becomes reverberated in poetics of the selected poems. Curiously, a vote of no confidence against the nation's inequitable continuity is further passed in J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's "The Sovereign":

It was never a union. It was at best
An amalgamation, so said in fact
The foreign adventurier who forged it.
Four hundred and twenty three disparate
Elements by the latest count, all spread
Between desert and sea, no trace of one
Running into the rest in two thousand

Years of traffic … (State of The Union 1985; 30)

Clark-Bekederemo's poem challenges the inherent falsehood located in the slippery Nigeria's nationhood. Readers are reminded of the one-sided sovereignty that continues to privilege Fulani herdsmen's subscription to ruinous brigandage, which has displaced thousands of indigenous people from their homelands. The displacement portends social inequality that has grown with the connivance of the ruling Fulani minority's elite, who have designed it as a herder-farmer clash, in order to undermine the sensibilities of other federating units of the country. The declamation “it was never a union” grounded in the first line of the poem, ostensibly betrays a lamentation of the postcolonial nation whose fortunes have been reversed by its rulers. These rulers have continually pursued sectional interests to the detriment of the federating units' common aspirations—a maintenance of unity in diversity. The poem most assuredly, hedges a blatant tone of cynicism to underscore the country's fragile unity (Akingbe, 2020; 115). If one juxtaposes Clark-Bekederemo's “The Sovereign” with Ogbowei's “Sovereignty,” Nigeria apparently becomes a contested public sphere, which has spurred a whirlpool of sustained pessimism:

sovereignty

here is the testament of freedom

the map of a desert-dry ideology

a map outlining the great landmarks

of our bang bang sovereignty (the town crier's song 2009; 57)

Due to the glaring inequitable distribution of power and privileges among its federating units, Nigeria nation-state has been repeatedly threatened with the possibility of disintegration (Akingbe, 2020; 115). This notion is further illustrated through the appropriation of anger embedded in the following imagery: "the map of a desert-dry ideology' and 'our bang bang sovereignty/". Given the overlapping of a description of Nigeria's sovereignty as tenuous and fragile in the two poems, it is only logical to emphasise that Nigeria's nationhood will remain threatened as long as it's sovereignty privileges the Fulani minority's domination. This blatant domination has consequently rendered the country's federation fluid, unstable, amorphous, complexly layered, and slippery (Sullivan, 2001;73). The enormity of the domination narratives draws attention to the politics of historical memory if we reflect on the Sullivan's explanation that in the 1950s Nigeria suffered a “northernisation” policy. This arose from the “combining and strengthening the religious, economic, and political ties of the north” to the detriment of other federating units. The strengthening of the north is prefaced with lengthy undercurrents that set the region's interest against that of the south. Apparently, the motto “one North, one people” ostensibly compromises and delimits regionalism, the basis of Nigeria's federalism (Sullivan, 2001;73). To strengthen her argument on the northern Nigeria's domination further, Sullivan cites Peter Ekeh who has essentially identified ethnicity as a major threat to the survival of Nigeria's nationhood, when he illustrates that “ethnicity has emerged as the foremost principle of identity formation for Nigerians and that there has been little or no transition in the loci of citizenship from an ethnic to a national centre (Ekeh, 1972; 83). In depicting cynicism about Nigeria's nationhood, there is concrete evidence to support Ekeh's assertion that ethnicity has compromised Nigeria's unity as recalled in Ogbowei's “a gated country":

a gated country

ours is a gated country
dissolving its rich tapestry of tribes

into a patchwork of disconnected nationalities (the heedless ballot box 2006; 43)

The poem aptly illustrates ethnic chauvinism as a setback for the Nigeria’s federating units. It is an anomalous and tragic mishap that has significantly escalated the Fulani herdsmen’s genocidal campaign as it diminishes Nigeria’s unity. The Fulani herdsmen’s genocide is a mayhem that started as isolated and uncoordinated attacks against the farmers in the middle-belt region of the country, but has spread out to southern Nigeria. Reports of torture and mass killings, especially in middle-belt villages, have sparked outrage within Nigeria and internationally in the past years. At this juncture, we need to look at the role of literature in the contextualization of the Fulani herdsmen’s genocide. Fulani herdsmen’s genocide marks a critical moment of recognition in the contemporary Nigerian literature to illustrates its inequitable federal system. Succinctly embedded in the words of Alexandre Dauge-Roth “literature attempt[s]to forge social recognition for the personal and collective trauma that continues to haunt the victims of … genocide, so that their loss and suffering can no longer be ignored” (Dauge-Roth, 2010;26). As a metaphor for explicating psychological-subjective import of trauma, Ogbowei’s “a grazing nightmare” strives to raise a heightened awareness of the ongoing killings in order to draw attention to the personal and collective experiences of the genocidal victims. The poem catalogues bizarre occurrences in Nigerian villages/cities to trail casualties of the Fulani herdsmen’s genocide; to further commiserate with those who have been killed; and to show empathy for those still nursing psychological trauma. In the aftermath of these attacks, communities have been devastated, individuals killed and seeds of distrust sown among the Nigerian federated units. Hitherto considered “food baskets of Nigeria”, many agrarian communities, especially in the middle–belt states of Plateau, Benue, Taraba, and Gombe, have been decimated in the course of the genocide. These attacks are explicitly captured in Ogbowei’s “a grazing nightmare”:

a grazing nightmare

in wukari

weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth

lamentation and pulling of hair

anger and rage in agatu

a feast for squabbling vultures

a feast for scavenging dogs

the fetor of putrescent corpses

announces the carnage in adagbo

awkwu ubbokwu and okokolo

makurdi in mourning

a grazing nightmare

jolts kaduna galvanises the subdued state (Matilda 2018; 64–65)

Horror embedded in “a grazing nightmare” leaves a point of tension between reality and imagination as the monstrosity of these killings now palpably threatens Nigeria’s dismemberment. Recognising the political implications of this pogrom as it affects the continuity of the Nigeria
nation-state, Ogbowei fought courageously against the domination of the northern Caliphate as his poetics ultimately protested, against the oddities of the herdsmen (Akingbe, 2022; 5). As a declamation of dissent, protest would always involve an overt response to articulations of power and authority and assumes the existence of social, political, and economic relationships in which “individuals or groups disagree with one another, and go on to express such disagreement in a variety of ways” (Akingbe, 2011;5). Invariably, Ogbowei’s turbulent condemnation of these killings becomes somewhat inseparable from his artistic commitment to equity and fairness. Consequently, his poetry audaciously engages with the unfolding calamitous recollections of an atrocious period in the postcolonial Nigeria’s history. The foregoing explains why reconstructing Nigeria’s political dilemma for its own sake is not within the immediate aim of Ogbowei in his poetry. Rather, he sees an engagement with the past, grounded in recognition of the urgencies of the present to draw upon his affective poetics for a deconstruction of complexity of the Fulani herdsmen’s violence in contemporary Nigeria. To effectively realise this, he meanders through a labyrinth of the nation’s politicised history for the delineation of rotting piles of political garbage midwifed by the British colonial apparatus. Not surprisingly, as Ogbowei’s poetry navigates the turbulent Nigeria’s landscape, its riveting affectation resonates with the possibility of a rebirth of the country’s nationalism. The poem sensitises the reader to an awareness that lies not in undue privileging of one ethnic group over the others but a pursuit of the mutual relationship among the varying ethnic groups. In a way that condemns domination by a unit, Ogbowei in the poem objectively advocates a recognition of the differences in Nigeria’s federating units’ formations and canvasses a mutual respect of its individual cultural diversity needed for the building of a stronger nation.

6. Fulani Herdsmen, a migratory killer group

West Africa is Africa’s sub-region that comprises of 16 countries. The population is estimated at about 381 million people as of 2018. The sub-region is divided between littoral or coastal habitations in the south and arid, drought-stricken areas swath in by deserts in the north. The northern part of the West Africa sub-region is often referred to as the Sahel. Christopher Wise has argued that the Sahel is one of the least-known regions, its very definition remaining ambiguous for most people. North African travel writers of centuries past used the Arabic term Sahel to designate the southern rim of the Sahara or the grassy lands of “the desert shore” (Wise & Pare, 2001;1). Historically, “the Sahel meant those territories that played a significant role in bridging North Africa and the centralised kingdoms of the Savannah” (Wise & Pare, 2001;1). The Sahel is made up of countries like Mauritania, Western Sahara, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, northern parts of Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Gambia, Cote d’Ivoire, Cape Verde, and Guinea Bissau. Ecologically, the Sahel now refers to a network of countries in the northern part of the West Africa sub-region bounded by desertification, deforestation, drought, banditry, Islamic insurgency, and overwhelming economic pressures. Surprisingly, the Sahel boasts of some accomplished writers and poets. Significantly, the ecological, political, and contemporary challenges have also been succinctly captured in Idris Oumarou’s Gros Plan (1977), Titinga Frederic Pacere’s Ainsi on assassine tons les mosse (1979), Patrick I’lBoudo’s Les carnets secrets d’une fille de jole (1988), Norbert Zongo’s Le parachute (1988) and Hawad’s Le coude grincant de l’anarchie (1998). Essentially, a beautiful evocation of the desert as a source of life in the Sahel is captured in Hawad’s “Sahara”:

Sahara, jagged teeth and hair

of our wolf-sisters,

nails of Tifinagh alphabet and pearls,

fragments of sun, of amber,

of music and the Tamazight language,
Tifinagh, letters of the wind, stars, and lightening (Le coude grincant de l'anarchie, 55)

Remarkably, the Pulo (Fulani), the Moors, and Targui (Tuareg) ostensibly makeup “white” ethnic groups of West Africa in the Sahel. Fulani is linked to cattle, Moor is more of sheep and goats herders, and the Targui (Tuareg) rears more of the camel. Indisputably, the Fulani can be found in all the savannas of West Africa. It is a migratory group numbering between 20 and 25 million people in total and one of the largest ethnic groups in the Sahel and West Africa. Widely dispersed across the region, Fulani physically has a clear hue, emaciated face, slender build, frail limbs, proud and languorous allures. Usually, nomads and shepherds, the Fulani often in the process of adaptation, inhabit a hut or a tent to live in regions within the desert in the savanna. The Fulani’s habitat is inseparably linked with that of the cattle. They are attached to the desert and the savanna where tender herbs and thistles grow that enable them to feed the cattle and far from the thick forested zones bristling with tsetse flies that could infect their cattle with trypanosome, the transmitters of the sleeping disease (Tall, 2001;13). The Fulani is traditionally believed to have roots stemming from North Africa and the Middle East, who later intermingled with the local West African ethnic groups.

The Fulani in Nigeria is found mainly in the northern Nigeria, as well as the middle belt region in Nigeria (Fricke, 1993:203). The Fulani in northern Nigeria was once famous for its competence in military efficiency and political intrigue and has maintained the subterranean complex network of political links that harnesses linkages across the Fulani enclaves across the old “Emirates of the colonial Northern Nigeria” (Nwakwama, 2017: https://doi.org/www.vanguard.com). The interplay of myth, history, and military might essentially foreground the influence of Fulani’s aura and intrigue in contemporary Nigerian politics. This notion is underscored in the words of Obi Nwakwama, who suggested that “there is certainly a Fulani presence in Nigerian politics, but quite often, as in all legends, that power is exaggerated, and given a life of its own, and it becomes, in some ironic way unconditional truth” (Nwakwama, 2017: https://doi.org/www.vanguard.com). Nevertheless, in the postcolonial Nigeria, there is an abiding architectural spread of the Fulani across most of northern Nigeria, right through the Adamawa swath to Cameroon. However, a close look would reveal that in the postcolonial Nigeria “the Fulani do not wholly control Northern Nigeria, either politically or economically, inspite of its ambitious expansionist tendency” (Nwakwama, 2017: https://doi.org/www.vanguard.com). Ironically, the Fulani’s grotesque intrusion into Nigerian politics is situated within the context of the power dialectics accomplished through an organised strategy and blitzkrieg. Although Fulani is comparatively a minority group in Nigeria, its deft use of violence and patronage has transformed it into a formidable political group imbued with the power to determine the possible permutations of contemporary Nigerian politics—as being witnessed in the country presently (Nwakwama, 2017: https://doi.org/www.vanguard.com).

But what could be responsible for the latest upsurge in the Fulani herdsmen's assault on the agrarian communities in Nigeria? With a debilitating drought setting in and triggering rumbles of downward migration from the Sahel, Nigeria is facing a serious threat of invasion by herdsmen that put extensive pressure on the fragile security architecture of the most populous country in Africa. Sadly, Iyorchia Ayu has argued that this assault is not limited to Nigeria but has been observed to have occurred in the whole of the Sahel region, which cuts across most of the West African countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, and Northern Nigeria. This assault becomes unmanageable because most of the Sahelian communities have witnessed in recent times, the increasing problem of the drying up of water resources and degradation of the forest, which has remarkably affected agricultural activities (Ayu, 2018: https://doi.org/www.sunnewsonline.com). Limited water supply in the Sahel is further compounded by the nagging problem of deforestation with a devastating backlash of the drying up of major bodies of water like Lake Chad. For instance, Lake Chad had a surface body of water of 25,000 square kilometres, which served as the bedrock of the economy of north-eastern Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. However, Lake Chad has been drying up over the years without a corresponding attention from the affected countries' authorities. Lake Chad has reduced from 25,000 square metres in 1963 to less than 1000 today.
With its over 2 million threatened population, the drying up of Lake Chad significantly implies that, the fishing economy there has crashed, the grazing collapsed and the forestry gone. Related to this is the fact that most of the Sahelian countries in the West African sub-region have experienced “tremendous political instability; Dafur, Mali, Chad are worse hit. As a result of the crises that have engulfed these countries, they have trained, seasoned fighters” (Ayu, 2018: https://doi.org/www.sunnewsonline.com). The instability in these countries, in addition to the political upheaval in Libya, has culminated in the rise of radical Islam that snowballed into the inauguration of a short-lived Islamic republic in Mali, which was successfully neutralised when the French government moved troops in 2013 into most of southern Mali. As a result of French government’s intervention, many of the Islamic radicals migrated down south towards northern Nigeria. As the migrants from Libya and the Sahelian West African countries move downward to northern Nigeria, they are recruiting people even within Nigeria, especially the unemployed youths marooned in poverty and despair. Most migrants from these troubled countries see Nigeria as a “promise land” flowing with milk and honey, and the northern Nigeria serves as a vulnerable gateway. Unfortunately, the dwindling Nigerian economy has not sufficiently provided a succour to the basic needs of these migrants.

The rapid migration of the Sahelian West Africans downward to the northern Nigeria has been further explained by Bryden and Chappuis, who have contended that the burgeoning Nigerian economy may have shifted the economic centre of the continent to the West African region. They remarked further “yet economic growth has not met the promise of a better future for a generation of young West Africans deprived of a sound education and relegated to a precarious existence in informal employment” (Alan & Fairlie, 2015;1). As these migrants enter Nigeria through porous borders, they mixed with the Nigerian local population, whose economy is tied to cattle breeding. An organisation, such as Miyetti Allah, which has strong patrons like Sultan of Sokoto, Emir of Kano, Emir of Katsina, Emir of Zaria, and Lamido of Adamawa has often served as the mouthpiece of the dreaded Fulani herdsmen (Ayu, 2018: https://doi.org/www.sunnewsonline). Again, due to their basic training in the handling of guns, these militant migrants are well armed and have constituted themselves to mercenaries hired by the Fulani brigands, do go around into areas where there is fertile land, where Nigerians practice sedentary agriculture and dislodge them so that they can move in their cattle away from the dry land of the Sahel. This is to help them relocate their economic activities to the fertile land. This is why places like the River Basin of Benue, River Basin of Niger, and most of the southern Nigeria where there is massive grass and water have become very attractive. Incidentally, these herdsmen are not just moving there with economic intention, they have a total way of life dictated by violence and subterfuge.

All over the world, terrorist organisations and pseudo-religious groups have often weaponised specific religious ideologies that have significantly empowered them to dehumanise their perceived targets in pursuit of their extremist goals (Post, 2007; 212). Reflecting this understanding, is a historical antecedent of Fulani inspired Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio’s Islamic Jihad, perpetrated between 1804 and 1810. Unarguably, Dan Fodio’s Jihadist expansionist politics, religion, economy, and notoriety for a political domination are tied together, to dismantle prosperous kingdoms of the Hausa ethnic group, in the northern Nigeria. Now, other Nigerian federating units are getting apprehensive that a continuous, mass migration from the Sahel and northern Nigeria down to southern Nigeria could spell a second wave of the Fulani’s Jihad anytime soon. This apprehension is again a backdrop of the recent call by President Muhammadu Buhari for resuscitation of the policies of northern Nigeria (Regional government’s law of 1965) on grazing reserve and cattle routes, which clearly allows the Fulani herdsmen unfettered access to the grazing routes located along the southern Nigeria’s territories. This grazing policy being touted is only embraced by the northern Nigeria federating units as it ostensibly favoured the Fulani herdsmen. Apprehension about a revisitation of this obnoxious grazing policy has now inspired a new wave of political tension in Nigeria (Ayu, 2018: https://doi.org/www.sunnewsonline). Unfortunately, the Nigerian government under Buhari of Fulani extraction is not doing enough to curb the menace of the Fulani herdsmen killings. The search for fertile land by the Fulani herdsmen
is often punctuated by the employment of violence with attendant fatalities. Violence perpetrated by the Fulani herdsman in the course of a search for grazing land has been referenced in Tanure Ojaide’s poem entitled “We Know why”:

Now is the season of foraging forays
for green foliage before another season
scorches the earth and starts famine
that must send cows out on a long trail
to fight over another country’s food
and live consumed by daily prayers
Refugees on the move, death poaches fast-
limbs worn out by sole-searing sand dunes;
crossing guarded frontiers exacts a high toll (The Tale of the Harmattan 2015; 56)

The poem aptly describes the belligerent disposition of the Fulani herdsman. Rather than negotiat-
ing endearing overtures of friendship toward other federating groups in Nigeria, for the purpose of
a lease of land for grazing, they employed violence that often culminated in the killing and
maiming of the original owners of the land. Now displaced and turned into refugees with
a bleak future, these indigenous owners of the lands now cut a pitiable sight of dejection. The
measured violence unleashed by the murderous Fulani herdsman on the Nigerian agrarian
communities has been vividly captured in Ademola Dasylva’s “The babel is here!”:

Rapid runs of wailing rifles, shooting,
Killing, looting, writhing in pain,
The bang, the pang, of infidels
In fiery baptism! Bitterness feeds
Wanton Almangeris in painful struggle! (Dasylva, 2006; 86)

The poem ostensibly places emphasis on the violent mode of operation adopted by the Fulani
herders who were forced by desertification, to forage for greener pastures down the Sahara, found
in large proportions in the middle-belt region and southern Nigeria. J.P. Clark-Bekederemo in
“Fulani Cattle” has eloquently presented incontrovertible evidence to support this assertion:

…the drunken journey
From desert through grass and forest,
To the hungry towns by sea … (Senanu & Vincent, 1976; 130-131).

The allegorical reference to foraging for pasture in the poem provides an interpretive background
to the herdsman’s downward movement from the sparse, Sahelian grasslands of northern Nigeria. Fusing intense, obvious inconvenience into a complex motif of pastoral inclination,
Clark-Bekederemo in the poem, connects a theme of Fulani herdsmen’s hardship of migration with economic survivalism. A trudge across long distances coterminous with a bucolic lifestyle only reinforces the herdsmen’s fundamental trajectory- a signature of their collective identity. Increasingly, the equivocation between a nomadic identity and attachment to a herd of cattle is lessened to make a good pecuniary sense in the poem. Submitting to the whims of mercantilism, the herdsmen’s migration attests to an indispensable obligation as they crave immediate fertile vegetation for their cattle and a good market in the southern Nigeria. Nonetheless, the inordinate desire of the Fulani herdsmen to appropriate great swathes of arable land violently from their host communities has often degenerated into clashes. Given the political context, which the Fulani herdsmen’s genocide invokes, it is significant to note that land and its ownership will always generate potent meanings in nationalist discourses. Inscribing to the political hysteria that revolves around land and its ownership in Africa, Jude G. Akudinobi succinctly suggests that to the extent that land is generally seen as eternal, “it provides a sense of rootedness as well as a veritable anchor to the construction of identities. As such, land is an effective symbol through which ‘national identities’ are proposed . . .” (Akudinobi, 2001; 135).

Similarly, Anthony Smith has enthused that “whatever else it may be, nationalism always involves an assertion of or struggle for, control of land” (Smith, 1999:149). A particular source of contention between the Fulani herdsmen and their host communities is rooted in a suspicion that the herdsmen have a grand plan to overrun farming communities across Nigeria, through brigandage and acquire their lands not only for grazing but also as booties of conquest. The refusal of the Fulani herdsmen to acknowledge and appreciate the cultural/religious differences between them and their host communities often disrupts their relationship with people from other federating units. In a wider perspective, the unabated clashes between the Fulani herdsmen and people of other federating units across Nigeria mark the fallout of irreconcilable politico-religious differences between the predominant Islamic northern Nigeria and the predominant Christian southern Nigeria.

Curiously, the tension between the Fulani minority of the northern Caliphate and other federating units in Nigeria has been long running with devastating consequences. The complexity apparently inscribes a contest for political power, which the Fulani minority is skillful at. With a tinge of hindsight, grazing and searching for arable lands are often deployed as decoys by the herdsmen and the Fulani’s political elite to advance an ambitious expansionist tendency. It is interesting to note that, between 1804 and 1810 after it successfully migrated from the less prosperous Futa djallon to the northern Nigeria, the Fulani through its leader, Shehu Usman Dan Fodiyo launched a successful Islamic Jihad, which displaced the Hausa majority’s indigenous traditional rulers and institutions. Basking in the euphoria of the past, the Fulani minority is becoming imbued with a drive to re-enact modernist Islamic Jihad across the postcolonial Nigeria through a concerted banditry. Suffice to state that Dasylva’s “The babel is here” essentially casts an eerie focus on the subsisting anxieties emanating from the scandalous activities of the Fulani herdsmen. In recent times, the herdsmen have notoriously appropriated militia for the inauguration of extreme brigandage that has displaced individuals from other federating units and robbed them of their inheritances. This unbridled anxiety has further reinforced a delusional hunger for conquest as it bears the imprint of ruination of hitherto peaceful communities. This herdsmen’s calamitous rampage is further referenced in Ogbowei’s “for femi fani-kayode”:

for femi fani-kayode

a slaughterous tribe

from the foothills of the fouta djallon

riding at its head sori’s son
a rabbit turban veiling the slaver's face (Matilda 2018; 78).

As the poem draws attention to the bellicosity associated with the Fulani herdsmen, Ogbowei deploys a mockery derived from the embedded satire to caricature a complex trajectory of the Fulani minority's migration from the poverty-ridden Fouta djallon to the northern Nigeria. Consequently, it needs mentioning that memory is poignantly summoned in the poem, to recollect the aftermath of the Fulani's military expedition that permanently altered the history of the Hausa majority who have been rendered subservient to the Fulani Emirs and Sultans till the present. Reciprocating open animosity for the Hausa majority's generosity of kindheartedness, the ignoble Fulani's military adventure harvested more deaths of the Hausa majority's populations during the Jihad. Hence, the poem describes the Fulani herdsmen as a “slaughterous” tribe who are forever preoccupied with killings wherever they make an appearance. Correspondingly, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo takes a jibe at the radical religious credo of the Fulani herdsmen killers in the “Brainwashed”:

“Brainwashed”:

Caged by anachronistic culture

With incredulous creed

Led by pedigree jihadists

Denied a share of opulence

They are the wretched of the earth (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2010; 26)

As the selected Nigerian poets navigate through the anxieties and tensions created by the killings caused by the Fulani herdsmen, memory is manipulated to re-evaluate the ostensible clash of values and cultures as they impinge on the overall wellbeing of the Nigeria’s federating units. As such, there is need to contextualise Adimora-Ezeigbo’s interrogation of the cultural background of the Fulani herdsmen, which enjoins them to kill at will as they continue with the propagation of Islamic Jihad by subterfuge. This runs contrary to the civilised practices in the contemporary world, the credo has been described as unacceptably anachronistic in the poem. In The Sociology of Religion, Bryan Turner has contended that “in the modern world, religion, contrary to the conventional understanding of modernisation as secularisation, continues to play a major role in politics, society and culture" (Turner, 2010:1). Describing fallouts of religious fanaticism, Frantz Fanon has likened all dimensions of behavioural dysfunction, psychological disorders, and other instances of psychotic or erratic behaviour of being obsessed with a violent religion to be latent manifestations of madness. Apparently, ethnic intolerance and religious fanaticism exhibited by the Fulani herdsmen lately is presumed to have notably developed into a psychosis. If religion does get mixed up with psychosis, Fanon in the Wretched of the Earth has argued vehemently that madness is one of the outlets through which the oppressed people internalise oppression and eventually launch a resistance against a perceived oppressor:

Il y a donc dans cette periode calme de colonisation reussie une reguliere et importante pathologie mentale produite directement par l'oppression

(Fanon, 1961, 301).

There is thus during this calm period of successful colonization a regular and important mental pathology which is the direct product of oppression
(Fanon, 1963; 251).

Although the herders are not politically or physically oppressed, they are burdened by the oppressive yokes of religion and culture, which have played a significant role in the creation of their collective psyche – a desire for domination. Lending credence to the identity formation of an individual, Silvia Nagy-Zemí considers that “identity may be linked to tradition, which in turn may be understood as a system of long-established beliefs and customs, which plays an essential role in creating identity” (Nagy-Zemí, 2002; 2). The thin line between psychosis and unbridled religious fanaticism is further pursued by Adimora-Ezeigbo, to illustrate that the barbaric and needless killings regularly perpetrated by the Fulani herdsmen on their host communities can only amount to psychosis in “Depraved acolytes”:

“Depraved acolytes”:

Depravity your forte
Propelled to new horizon of hate
See the glare of gutted entrails
Pulverized flesh still warm to the touch
Reddened earth smudges
Warped souls incandescent with rage
Inspired by bogus piety

murder most foul, despicable (Adimora-Ezeigbo, 2010; 82)

Adimora-Ezeigbo has effectively utilised the leitmotif of “Depravity” to interrogate a purported insanity associated with the conduct of the Fulani herdsmen who often wield dangerous weapons against hapless farmers and other innocuous people who have ended up as casualties of their assault. The apt deployment of the term piety as a marker of religious credo does not necessarily indicate a developmental advancement of an individual or a society bogged down by subscription to a primitive philosophy. Suffice it to state that the postcolonial Nigeria has been a veritable site of clashes between the Fulani herders and farmers. The recent civil war in Libya has brought chaos and devastation that have forced most mercenaries of the Sahelian Fulani to migrate to the northern Nigeria. Also, the migrants from Libya have seamlessly mixed with the Nigerian Fulani herdsmen, and these migrant Fulani have been ostensibly proven to be behind the resurgence of violent clashes between farmers and herdsmen. Recent clashes have reopened a site for the reenactment of old animosities, as clashes between the farmers and pastoralists in the middle-belt and southern Nigeria are calculated and on the increase. These clashes generally go beyond a quest for access to and competition for grazing land and water, to signify a desire for forceful dispossession of indigenous land owners through a sustained genocidal campaign by the Fulani herdsmen. “As pasture land shrinks, sequel to taking over of such lands by the Fulani herders, conflicts become inevitable” (Abbass & Mohammed, 2010; 337). In the recent time, the eruption of violent conflicts between the Fulani pastoralists and farmers, as manifested in many forms and dimensions, has wide-range of implications for the Nigerian federation. However, “the intensity, scope and frequency of such conflicts have shown the fragility of unity of ethnic nationalities in Nigeria” (Abbass & Mohammed, 2010; 340). The intensity of violence emanating from these sporadic clashes has been poignantly captured in Harry Garuba’s “Three moods, one Sunday”:

grief grips us all
clouds wrangle in the skies
the rain weary of its showers
moans ... and
darkness feeds on every face (Animist Chants and Memorials 2017; 26)
Plight of the casualties are further illustrated in Garuba’s “Memorial wish”:
Speaking the dialects of the poor, the unheard multitudes,
The thousands untongued in dungeons, caged in bondage
forgotten in graves over which no pyramids rise
and no memorials mark the landscapes with the lore of their lives
(Garuba, 2017; 44)
The pain borne by the casualties of Fulani herdsmen’s clashes somewhat appear transcendental, as thousands are forgotten in unmarked graves “/over which no pyramids rise/” and hundreds displaced are “/caged in bondage/” of uncertainties. The pains associated with the agonising experiences of these casualties have been invoiced in Elaine Scarry’s The Body in Pain, where scenario of crisis which often develops to deaths and trauma has been described as arising from “where the enemy is external, occupies a separate space, where the impulse to obliterate a rival population and its civilization is not ... a self-destruction” (Scarry, 1985; 61). Warped by prejudices, these clashes, which led to the killings of hapless men, women, and children are perceived by the victims as an unprovoked assault, whereas the herdsmen ostensibly see the invasion as justifiable and legitimate for the propagation of group’s self-assertion and values.

7. Conclusion
Within a context of genocide framework, the paper has drawn attention to how selected poets have engaged with the Nigeria nationhood’s failure. The engagement takes as a starting point and as its focus, themes that reverberate resistance to inequity, marginality, and the Fulani caliphate’s domination encapsulated in the lingering, herdsmen’s genocidal campaign. The paralyzing atrocities of the herdsmen have often manifested in serial kidnapping, rape, and wanton plundering of villages. The paper has also highlighted a symbiotic relationship between ethnic cleansing and Fulani herdsmen’s killings. If inexorable ferocity of the Fulani’s herdsmen’s killings in Nigeria is analogous to a genocide and ethnic cleansing, the rapidity of its attacks has continually raised a suspicion of concerted attempt to displace the farmers and appropriate arable lands owned by the agrarian communities occupying the middle-belt and the southern Nigeria. The horrendous devastation being wreaked by the Fulani’s herdsmen’s invasion of these agrarian communities continues to pose a threat to Nigeria’s nationhood. A deluge of condemnations has trailed these killings, while the Fulani led Nigerian government’s disposition to it is shrouded in silence. The taciturnity of the Sokoto Caliphate and Fulani minority’s political elite to the herdsmen’s atrocious acts smacks of a devious complicity. The long-running clashes between the herdsmen and farmers could perhaps be a precursor to a re-enactment of the Islamic Jihad (1804 and 1810) sponsored by the minority Fulani, who migrated from the less prosperous Guinea’s Futa Djallon to northern Nigeria. Islam was deployed as a mode of prosecuting the Jihad, which left the Hausa majority’s political institutions violently destroyed and their rulers replaced with the Fulani minority’s Emirs. In the aftermath of Usman Dan Fodio’s ruinous Jihad, the Hausa majority has been continually rendered subservient to the Fulani minority’s Emirs and Sultans in the postcolonial Nigeria. The paper has argued strenuously that colonial Nigeria was originally conceived as three separate
colonies of northern Nigeria, southern Nigeria, and Lagos. However, these three separate colonies were fraudulently collapsed into a cohesive Nigeria in 1914 (often referred to as the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates) by Lugard. Arguably, the British colonial administration manipulated power in favour of the Fulani minority shortly before the Nigerian independence in 1960. Hence, the privileging of the Fulani minority’s interests in the postcolonial Nigeria’s power equation has pitched it against other federating units, who have perceived such domination as being continually inimical to the individual interests of the differing federating units and to the overall Nigeria’s sovereignty.

In conclusion, the paper has acknowledged the emotive concern of the selected poems of the contemporary Nigerian poets as they challenge the inequitable distribution of political power between the southern and northern Nigeria, which has emboldened the Fulani herdsmen’s brigandage. Through satire, irony and poetics of resentment, the selected poems have made mockery of Nigeria’s national anthem and pledge as they no longer serve as symbols of unity, but reflections of Fulani minority’s domination that further reiterates the determination by the Caliphate northern Nigeria to keep a stranglehold on the middle-belt and the southern Nigeria’s federating units.

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Author details
Niyi Akingbe
E-mail: deniakingbe@yahoo.com
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4637-131X
1 Department of English Studies, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

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Notes
1. James Walter believes that research in genocide studies should shift from “impersonal institutions and abstract structures directly onto the Actors—the men and women who actually carried out the atrocities” (2002:7).
2. The Tutsi are believed to have migrated to the present-day Rwanda from Ethiopia or East Africa around 14th century. See https://docs.org/www.africa.upenn.edu/NEH/whtmlstory.htm and https://docs.org/sites.google.com/site/whywequal/civil-war-top-war-countries/Burundi/origins-of-tutsi-and-hutu.
3. Lemkin, Axis Rule in Occupied Europe p.79.
4. The UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide.

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