

## Internal Migration, Exclusionary Politics and Crises of Nation-Building in Nigeria

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### **Abstract:**

The article examines the crises of nation-building in Nigeria from the perspective of internal migration, exclusionary discourses and politics. Population movement has been a constant feature of human interactions and relations. One of the major constant features of internal migration interpretation has been its continuous intersection with economic considerations and social security. However, in Nigeria, the internal migration of different ethnic groups within the territories has witnessed the interplay of exclusionary discourses and politics or a series of policies and debates directed toward profiling the migrant population to achieve certain objectives. In Nigeria, the Igbo migrants and politics of Lagos State and the Fulani herders' pastoralists fit into the broad spectrum of this thesis. However, the task of nation-building in Nigeria is a continuous process that involves a careful dialogue on matters that border on national questions. Hence, the reality of the Nigerian nation-building project is the crisis of managing various ethnic and religious identities towards national integration. The article builds on these two cases to shed light on understanding ethnic tension, suspicion and its implications on nation-building through the prism of internal migration. The article relies on secondary data sources.

**Keywords:** Internal Migration, Exclusionary Politics, Nation-building, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

The political and economic dimension of migration has continued to garner attention across various climes (Castles, 2010; Betts, 2011; Ani, Oyeweso and Olawale, 2021; Arhin-Sam, 2019). The increasing number of people living outside their place of origin, embarking on official migration, irregular migration, seeking asylum and facing deportation has placed migration governance at the centre of both national and international discourse (Adeleke & Olawale,

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2023). Across internal and global migration, the desire for upward social mobility and the primacy of economic forces often shape migrants' decisions to migrate (De Hass, 2021; Adeleke & Olawale, 2023). However, scholarly discussions on migration in Nigeria have paid significant attention to international migration (Dimkpa, 2019; Ob-Ani, Anthonia & Isiani, 2020; Carling, 2020), while limited attention is paid to internal migration dynamics (Adepoju, 1998; Adepoju, 2017; Smith, 2006). The perceived localisation context of these internal migration patterns influences the limited attention it has garnered over the years. However, internal migration is of significant importance given the multiplicity of movements that occur with less securitisation process (Oyeniyi, 2013; Adepoju, 1998). Hence, the article comes on the heels of emerging scholarship that focuses on how internal migration shapes nation-building and further examines how internal exclusionary discourses and practices targeted at the migrant population often lead to crises such as indigene-migrants dichotomy and alien and strangers' appellations.

Nigeria has a rich history of internal migration (Ani, Oyeweso and Olawale, 2021). In the pre-colonial period, internal migration was central to state formation, agricultural economy, trade, and market system. In the pre-colonial period, village settlements, towns, and empires served as points of destination, origin, and transference depending on the aspiration of migrants (Adesola and Olaniyi, 2023; Eborka, 2022; Osoba, 1969; Daniel and Olawale, 2024). For instance, Hausa migrants from the northern region migrated to towns and villages under the auspices of the Oyo Empire as part of trade expansionism (Cohen, 2013). Also, the collapse of the Oyo Empire in 1837 witnessed the internal migration and reorganisation of the empire's population (Adesola, 2017). The advent of colonial rule in Nigeria contributed to the increasing patterns of migration. Colonial urbanisation, administrative centres, a cash crop economy, and transportation (railway and road) contributed significantly to the dynamics of internal migration in Nigeria (Osoba, 1969; Coleman, 1969; Adesola and Olaniyi, 2023; Ojo, 2009; Adeyemi, 2010). During the colonial period, migration to urban centres (cities) such as Ibadan, Lagos, and Port Harcourt was shaped by colonial socio-economic policies, employment opportunities, infrastructural facilities, and opportunities for upward social mobility (Osoba, 1969; Coleman, 1969; Adesola and Olaniyi, 2023; Ojo, 2009; Adeyemi, 2010).

Internal migration since Nigeria's attainment of independence has featured rural-urban, urban-urban and urban-rural migration conditioned by socio-economic, security and political forces (Sani-Ibrahim, Ozdeser, Cavusoglu & Abdullahi, 2021; Agbonlahor & Phillip, 2015; Mberu, 2005). Several Nigerians have migrated to cities such as Lagos and Ibadan in search of gainful employment, while others have migrated to rural areas as part of the agricultural economy diversification (Agbonlahor & Phillip, 2015; Mberu, 2005). Also, the widespread insecurity in the northern region caused by the Boko Haram insurgency has shaped internal migration patterns (Onyiekachi, 2018; Mukhtar, Rose, Choy & Bibi-Farouk, 2018; Oghvbu, 2024). The increasing number of internally displaced persons has also contributed to the dynamics of forced internal migration in Nigeria (Mukhtar, Rose, Choy & Bibi-Farouk, 2018; Oghvbu, 2024).

Nigerian citizens' rights and opportunities for free movement have been enshrined in various legal and constitutional documents. Section 41(1) of the 1999 constitution provides that every citizen of Nigeria is entitled to move freely throughout Nigeria and to reside in any part thereof, and no citizen of Nigeria shall be expelled from Nigeria or refused entry thereby or exit therefrom. Despite the position of Nigeria's constitution, there have been a series of exclusionary discourses and politics leading to clamour for internal deportation (Iguh, 2016). However, these exclusionary politics and crises are manifestations of Nigeria's ethnic problems sown since the amalgamation of Nigeria's territories in 1914, the contemporary manifestation rooted in political gains and the securitisation of ethnic positions on political influence and security matters. A major outcome of these development has been a series of exclusionary discourses, policies and the profiling of ethnic groups, leading to the clamour for their return to their communities or states of origin. In this case, the Igbo people in Lagos State and the Fulani pastoralists illustrate the scope of internal exclusionary discourses, practices and politics. The article, however, examines the profound implications of these internal migration governance crises on nation-building, national unity, and integration. Due to the nature and implementation of exclusionary politics and profiling of ethnic groups based on political gains and securitisation, it becomes the bedrock of disunity, ethnic conflicts and suspicion, which makes the task of nation-building difficult.

The article employs a qualitative research methodology. The methodology relies on secondary data. Secondary data is gathered from books, peer-reviewed journals, internet publications, and government reports. The data was collected through a consistent and focused library search at the Department of History, University of Ibadan, Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan and internet searches.

### **Internal Migration, Exclusionary Politics and Nation-Building**

Several scholars and policymakers have delved into conceptualising internal migration. The Nigeria National Migration Policy (2015) sees migration as "the process of temporary or permanent relocation of a person from his or her place of primary abode to another place, in search of better living, family reunification, further studies, or other reasons." The Nigeria National Migration Policy (2015) defines internal migration as "the movement of persons within the country, resulting in a long-term temporary or permanent stay away from the usual place of abode. Migration is not a homogeneous phenomenon in Nigeria. Internal movement is an important component of mobility in Nigeria, influenced by the geographical size and demographic statistics of over 216,783,381 (NBS, 2022). Across various epochs, internal migration has been influenced by Nigeria's ecological and resource diversities, lopsided infrastructure, and urbanisation (Oyeniyi, 2013; Ikonne, 2025; Ikwayatum, 2016). However, internal migration in Nigeria is largely perceived as an urban phenomenon (Ikwyuatum, 2016), often denoted by rural-urban migration or urban-urban migration; rural-rural migration is also shaped by agricultural and trade processes or otherwise ecological factors. The preeminence

of the urban context and upward social mobility has led to the difficulties faced by cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt, and Enugu in providing services, housing options, and employment opportunities to meet migrants' needs (Ikonne, 2025).

Exclusionary politics and policy concepts are used to understand the relationship between host communities and migrants. Exclusion refers to a situation in which individuals and groups are usually denied access to the goods, services, activities and resources guaranteed by full citizenship, public good or communalism (Adida, 2011; Adida, 2014). The concept of exclusion falls within the purview of the integration of migrants in host communities. As Honig (2016) argued, exclusionary politics and policies are not homogeneous; they vary in form and target a particular set of groups through the lens of scapegoating. The opposite of exclusion is inclusion, which means "the process by which efforts are made to ensure that everyone, regardless of their experiences and circumstances, can achieve their potential in life" (United Nations Division of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). It can be perceived as an exclusionary alternative. The exclusion or inclusion of migrants borders on the position and categorisation of migration at various points of destination. Due to the economic undertone of migration and the desire to attain upward social mobility, migrants contribute to social relationships, urban restoration, and economic development (Çađlar & Glick Schiller, 2018). However, migration-related diversity also exists, which creates tensions and conflicts between indigenes and migrants (strangers or aliens) that need to be negotiated among different stakeholders including local government, civil society, private actors and migrants themselves. Indeed, migrants may negotiate these conflicts through contestation, collective mobilisation, or silence.

Exclusion of migrants in place of destination is a process that often begins from the sphere of discourses to practice, implementation and eventual deportation. In the discourse sphere, emphasis is placed on debating issues that border on indigeneship and rights, creating a space of alienation that makes it difficult for migrants to integrate into mainstream society (Duffy, 1995). Walker & Walker (1997: 8) note that exclusion "involves the dynamic process of being shut out ... from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society." Exclusion from discourse space enters practice and implementation through the practice of 'othering' becomes the thrust of relations (Moyo, Nshimbi & Gumbo, 2018). Hence, in the space of othering, "the person or group being 'othered' experiences this as a process of marginalisation, disempowerment and social exclusion," and the process itself effectively creates a binary distinction or separation between 'us' and 'them' (Grove and Zwi, 2006: 1933). The 'otherness' in exclusionary practices is constructed and maintained to ensure that migrants and their stories 'remain distant and strange' and enables indigenes to remain unconnected to them (Grove and Zwi, 2006).

The concept of nation-building encompasses the sphere of national development, national integration, patriotism and institutionalisation of national unity. Nation-building has been observed as a critical policy, particularly in such heterogeneous societies as Nigeria (Miguel, 2004; Collier, 2009; Ogu, 2022). Ajayi (2013) sees nation-building as a "conscious and

deliberate attempt to forge a common and mutually agreeable identification with a nation by multiethnic and disparate communities.” Egharevba and Iruonagbe (2015) identified three core concepts of nation-building, which include building a political entity that corresponds to a given territory based on some generally accepted norms, rules, and values, and common citizenship; building institutions that symbolise the political entity—bureaucracy, an economy, the judiciary, universities, civil service, and civil society organisations; and providing quality leadership anchored on transparency, accountability, and openness. Egharevba and Iruonagbe’s core concept reveals that nation-building is all about promoting the collective well-being of the people through meeting their needs, interests and aspirations and its hallmarks would be the pursuit of liberty, social justice, progress and prosperity for the people by government and its institutions. Gambari (2008) also reiterated a similar perspective of nation-building, centering on “building a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny, a collective imagination of belonging.” The primary objective of nation-building is to foster unity in the population’s inherent diversity and build imaginings of a nation-state with which all can identify and to which there is a subsequent sense of allegiance. In other words, nation-building is a process by which a sense of national unity and cohesion is fostered within the political unit of the state.

### **The Case Study One: Migrants and Exclusionary Discourses and Politics in Lagos**

Lagos, located in South-Western Nigeria, remains one of the most important destinations for internal migrants in Nigeria (Faluyi, 2001; Adagun, 2021; Afolayan, 1985). It is located on the Atlantic coast of West Africa and occupies a geographical land area of about 1,800 square kilometres. It is bounded on the West by the Republic of Benin, to the North and east by Ogun State, with the Atlantic Ocean providing a coastline on the South. Lagos is one of the world’s major cities and is the most populous city in Africa, with a population of 16,536,000 (Macrotrend, n.d.). Lagos is the seventh fastest-growing city in the world. Lagos, across various epochs, has been an important destination. In the pre-colonial period, Lagos witnessed the migration of Yoruba, such as Ijebu and Egba, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Faluyi, 2001). The advent of British colonialists and the designation of Lagos as a crown colony in 1861 made Lagos an important destination. As a colony, Lagos was the centre of colonial politics and nationalism, infrastructural development and socio-policies (Adagun, 2021). Hence, Lagos has been a space destination for internal migrants in Nigeria seeking to participate in colonial economic structures. Lagos also received a substantial influx of Saro (Sierra Leonean), Brazilian repatriates and liberated slaves after the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Hence, from 25,083 persons in 1866 to 37,452 in 1881 and 41,487 in 1901. By 1921, Lagos population had reached 98,303, 126,474 in 1931, 230,256 in 1950 and 655,246 in 1960 (Coleman, 1969).

The economy of Lagos, in terms of opportunities for trade and available markets in the colonial period, was a primary pull factor. Lagos history vis-à-vis the Atlantic Slave trade and the legitimate trade (palm oil trade) attracted both Europeans, indigenous merchants and

traders. The completion of the Lagos–Ibadan–Kano railway line in 1911 contributed to the migration chain to Lagos, while the Lagos port was an important economic interface. From the 1920s, Lagos expanded remarkably as its population increased, particularly with the influx of Yoruba and non-Yoruba groups, such as Igbo, Izon, Edo, and Hausa (Adagun, 2021; Coleman, 1969). Also, European and non-European populations established their presence in Lagos. Lagos also received migrants from the hinterland of Yorubaland from towns such as Ibadan, Ogbomoso, Igbomina, Osogbo, Ede, Offa, Iseyin and Ilorin. By the 1952 Western Region of Nigeria Census, the number of migrants in Yoruba, including Lagos, had increased significantly. In 1952, 7,335 Igbo and 5,538 Hausa lived in Ibadan, while 31,887 Igbo and 4,132 Hausa lived in Lagos (Coleman, 1969: 334).

The need to regulate the increasing population of Lagos has been central to its socio-economic and political development. For instance, colonial Lagos witnessed the implementation of exclusionary policies and programmes against migrants leading to deportation. Given the increasing population growth vis-à-vis unemployment and accommodation scarcity due to rent increase, the Chief Secretary of Lagos confidential Letter no. 24243/206 of January 12, 1935, on the problem of Lagos unemployed recommended (a) Compulsory Repatriation (b) Land Settlement and (c) A Lagos Labour Bureau (Muritala, 2019). The implementation of compulsory repatriation led to the labelling of migrants as “undesirable” and was considered a nuisance to the new urban environment (Muritala, 2019). In 1945, the Lagos Town Council forwarded to the Superintendent of Police name of thirty non-able bodied people to be repatriated under section 78 (1) and (2) of the Township ordinance, Chapter 57 and ordered them to leave the township of Lagos within fourteen (14) days. On November 1, 1945, about thirty-three beggars were repatriated (Muritala, 2019). The colonial exclusionary policy was designed to address the rising problem of unemployed migrants from the hinterland and the growing destitute economy in Lagos.

The exclusionary dimension of politics in Lagos prior to independence has also been linked to the controversy surrounding indigenes and migrants (Lawal, 1994). The contestation over the status of Lagos, especially between indigenous Lagosians and migrants, occurred during the process of colonial transfer of power (Lawal, 1994; Olugbemi, 1987). The status of Lagos, which was the seat of power and political administration, constituted a debate, especially between 1953 and 1960. The controversy stems from whether Lagos should be regarded as part of the West or categorised as a separate and autonomous entity. One of the group debates included individuals who see Lagos as separate and autonomous (Lawal, 1994). This category contends that the independence of Lagos from the West is germane so as to enable it to carry out its function of local administration effectively. However, the second category of groups is those who reject the autonomous position of Lagos. These groups opined that in view of the geographical continuity of Lagos to the west and cultural affinity with the Yoruba people of South Western Nigeria. Hence, Lagos belongs to the West. The controversy and debate were pronounced when Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe argued that “Lagos

primarily belongs to the Lagosians, secondarily to the West and lastly the whole country (Daily Time, October 1953).” Hence, the outcome of this position has been the question of “who is a Lagosian.”

The contestation over the status of Lagos and who owns Lagos has also become a socio-economic and political issue. The major contestations have often been between the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups in Lagos. Coleman (1969) reveals that the Igbo people have occupied an important position in ethnic exclusion and profiling in Lagos, dating back to the colonial period. The relationship between the Igbo and Yoruba populations was not cordial, especially within the framework of Nigeria’s nationalist movement. As early as 1911, the Igbo ethnic group began to migrate to Lagos, and the population in Lagos increased from 264 to 26,000 in 1951 (Coleman, 1969). In Lagos, the Igbo dominated the National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC), the Zikist Movement and the National Church (Coleman, 1969). The Igbo element in Lagos also supported the political goals of Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe (Coleman, 1969). In 1935, Sir Francis Ibiyam – the first Igbo doctor- returned from Europe and established the Igbo Union- an endeavour that set the path for the pan-Igbo movement in Nigeria (Coleman, 1969). In 1944, the Ibo Federal Union was formed. The creation of Egbe Omo Oduduwa in 1948 – a pan-Yoruba cultural organisation that later metamorphosed into Action Group led to a series of animosities between the Igbo and Yoruba in Lagos (Coleman, 1969). The deep animosities between the Yoruba population and Igbo people have emphasised the categorisation of the Igbo people in Lagos as migrants based on the traditions of origin and question of the indigeneship identity of Lagos state.

Since the attainment of independence, the animosities between the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups remain profound. The involvement of the Yoruba people in the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) has been a source of tension and animosities (Ojoye, 2018) and the controversy over the status and role in Lagos has been a source of controversy. Since independence, Lagos has been at the center of post-colonial socio-economic and political politics. In terms of internal migration, Lagos has been a major destination, given its capital status and socio-economic opportunities associated with employment, social amenities, and urban livelihood. It has concomitantly attracted – and continues to pull – major migration streams. However, mainstream migrants-host relations have emerged within the broader problem of ethnic politics (Adagbami & Uche, 2015; Isiaq, Adebisi & Bakare, 2018). An evidential case was the 2023 General election. In the 2023 General election, ethnic identity and exclusionary discourse became the thrust of the election process. Furthermore, exclusionary politics in the context of migrants and indigene relations begins from the sphere of discourse through the phase of practice.

The 2023 General election witnessed widespread exclusionary discourses and practices rooted along ethnic identities at the presidential and Lagos State Governorship elections (Towoju & Asiyanbi, 2025; Chineyemba, Chukwudi & Exebulo, 2024; Muhammed, 2023). In the presidential election, the ethnic identity of major contestants generated national

controversies and debates. Bola Ahmed Tinubu (All Progressives Congress (APC); Peter Obi (Labour Party); and Atiku Abubakar (Peoples Democratic Party) campaign and supporter politics largely followed the path of ethnic identity. Regional and ethnic identity dominated the campaign process through the manifesto criticism and the eventual voting system. Also, in the Lagos Governorship election, the major contestants - Babajide Sanwolu and Gbadebo Chinedu Rhodes-Vivour ethnic identity became the fulcrum of politics. During the campaign period, the person and ethnic identity of Peter Obi and Gbadebo Chinedu Rhodes-Vivour became a defining feature in the politics of the 2023 presidential and governorship election. The Labour Party flagbearer – Peter Obi and the Labour Party Governorship Candidate - Gbadebo Chinedu Rhodes-Vivour, with Igbo affinities, was a cornerstone of ethnic animosities between the Igbo and the Yoruba.

Hence, as part of exclusionary discourses and agenda defined the need to trace the ancestry history of Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour with the middle name “Chinedu,” who married an Igbo lady and his mother, being Igbo, was considered unfit for the Lagos Governorship Seat. In the case of Peter Obi, the ethnic identity of Peter Obi (Igbo extraction) influenced the presidential support from various stakeholders, especially across the south-western region. For instance, Yoruba stakeholders under the pan-Yoruba socio-political organisation, Afenifere, Pa Ayo Adebajo, and former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Chief Olu Falae, supported Peter Obi despite Igbo ethnic affiliation. Afenifere Group emphasised that its conclusion was based on the need to foster justice, equity and inclusiveness as part of the true principle of federalism and nation-building. However, the Yoruba Council of Elders, YCE, Afenifere Renewal Group, ARG and leader of the Ilana Omo Oodua, Professor Banji Akintoye, argued that the Yoruba people must support the presidential ambition of Bola Ahmed Tinubu – a Yoruba man. The ethnic alliance and animosities were further deepened through the use of social media, especially X (formerly Twitter), which expanded the space of animosities. The growing influence of Peter Obi, Gbadebo Chinedu Rhodes-Vivour and Igbo people in Lagos’ political space led to the use of social media to initiate exclusion practices and deportation campaigns against the Igbo in Lagos. In fact, an X (formerly Twitter) handle @Lagospedia, a page claiming to be proclaiming the virtues of Lagos State, gave Igbo living and doing business in Lagos and other South-western states 30 days to vacate the region. The Lagospedia posted on X (formerly Twitter) page thus:





Also, the question over the status of Lagos as part of Yorubaland was reiterated by Bayo Onanuga during the Igbo must leave Lagos campaign. One of the tweets of Bayo Onanuga read thus:



Post-exclusionary politics have led to ethnic-based interpretations of Lagos State Government policies and programmes. In July 2023, the Lagos State Government demolition of “distressed buildings” in the Alaba International Market in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State market to “prevent disaster and save lives was perceived by the Igbo socio-cultural organisation, Ohanaeze Ndigbo as scapegoating event targeted to “victimise” Igbos in the state (Ugwu, 2023). Also, the demolition of trading plazas belonging to Igbo businessmen at Ebute Ero Market in Lagos on Friday, February 14, 2025, by the Lagos State Government was perceived as a calculated attempt to expropriate the Igbo from their legitimate businesses and manifest within the goal of anti-Igbo brigandage (Nwankwo, 2025). Also, in the political sphere, in the aftermath of the 2023 election, the Igbo people of Lagos have emphasised the post-election exclusion in the governance of Lagos state after Babjide Sanwolu appointed twenty-three (23) Commissioners and Fourteen (14) Special Advisers to his cabinet. The

Ohanaeze Ndigbo of Lagos considered such exclusion as a product of the 2023 presidential and governorship ethnic politics (Samuel, 2023).

The exclusionary discourses of the Igbo people of Lagos case borders on the question of citizenship and its construct. National and local level political and ethnic relation questions are framed alongside citizenship rights. Hence, despite nationality by birth, Nigerians, such as the case of the Igbo people, are confronted with the citizenship question outside their paternally determined ethno-territory within Nigeria. Isumonah (2016) argues that although Nigerian nationality may automatically confer the status of citizen on the individual, it does not guarantee citizenship status outside of the autochthonous home. The product of this citizenship contestation is evident in indigeneity and is used to define the relations between indigenes and migrants. Hence, from the cultural theory of citizenship, the dominant attitude of indigenous claimants of a homeland or political community, its nationality and citizenship, determines the indigeneity (nationality) and citizenship of immigrants or later settlers (Isumonah, 2018). The exclusionary discourses in the Igbo case stem from perceived competition by host communities from migrants over relevance, control of political affairs or competition over scarce economic resources (Olzak & Nagel, 1986). In other words, exclusionary discourses and politics are used to project the unbelonginess and non-integration of migrants in the host society or the inability of the host community to accommodate the ‘overbearing’ presence of migrants, thereby making them strangers in their space (Awosola, 2021).

### **The Case Study Two: Fulani Pastoralist and South West Security Agenda**

The Fulani ethnic group’s origins are largely attributed to their pastoral identity and migration across Africa in search of cattle resources (Bukari and Osei-Kufor, 2021). However, the Fulani presence in Nigeria gained attention in the 18th century through their connections with Islam and the Uthman Dan Fodio jihad of 1804 (Cline, 2023). This holy war entrenched the Fulani ethnic group’s presence in northern Nigeria, leading to economic activities and political participation. Despite their political influence, many Fulani groups continue their pastoral and cattle herding lifestyle, with the term Bororo now used to describe their cattle herders across Nigeria (Clime, 2023). However, Fulani pastoral mobility in Nigeria has become synonymous with insecurity due to the complex nature of ethnic, religious, and political crises. These crises are not recent but have become more prominent in recent years. The 2004 Central Plateau crisis was a significant conflict involving Fulani pastoralists, leading to President Olusegun Obasanjo’s declaration of a state of emergency.

Since then, Fulani pastoralists have become a prominent part of Nigeria’s insecurity, with death tolls and displaced persons (Adebajo, 2022; Umoh and Nwinkol, 2024). Fulani pastoralists have become pronounced with the context of farmer-herder conflicts, primarily driven by environmental and ecological factors (Nnaji et al., 2022; Sule, 2021; Madu and Nwankwo, 2021; Chukwuma, 2020; Ugwueze et al., 2022). Resource scarcity, political identity politicisation, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons among the pastoralists

have contributed to the conflict (Nnaji et al., 2022; Sule, 2021; Madu and Nwankwo, 2021; Chukwuma, 2020). The group emphasises the need to protect themselves from armed bandits, insurgents, criminal syndicates, and ethnic militias that exploit cattle raids and rustling (Sahara Reporters, 2021). However, despite this, they have also been involved in farmland destruction, leading to persistent crises with farmers across Nigeria. The conflict has escalated due to the politicisation of ethnic identity and the use of AK47s to protect themselves and their herds (Naziru, 2018).

Nigeria's internal migration governance process faces challenges in managing the complex interlinks and events involving Fulani pastoralists, who have been engaged in conflicts leading to death tolls, displaced persons, and refugees, making it difficult to manage their affairs and identity. On June 25, 2018, the Nigerian military deployed 300 soldiers and seven helicopter gunships to Benue, Plateau and Taraba States in response to growing Fulani violence (Delue, 2018). In fact, the propensity of Fulani pastoralists has been perceived to cause national insecurity beyond the dreadful Boko Haram insurgency. From January through June 2018, Fulani attacks against civilians occurred at a rate 47.5% higher than those of Boko Haram (Charles, 2018). Moreover, Fulani attacks throughout 2018 have spanned the geographic width of the country, whereas Boko Haram attacks are mostly focused on eastern Borno and north-east Adamawa States (Charles, 2018). The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a US-based project, reports that between 2005 and 2021, at least 8,343 people were killed due to farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria (Oluwole, 2021).

The involvement of Fulani pastoralists in Nigeria's kidnapping crises has garnered significant attention, with cases linked to them across all geo-political zones. The emergence of kidnapping for ransom and killings after ransom has led to community detestation and ethnic profiling of Fulani pastoralists, resulting in suspicions across Nigeria against them (Saminu, 2022; Omitola et al., 2021). The narrative of Fulani pastoralists being linked to kidnapping, robbery, and cattle rustling in Nigeria has led to widespread resentment. However, reports suggest that the crisis extends beyond these pastoralists, as the issue extends beyond profiling all kidnappers, robbers, and cattle rustlers as Fulani (Saminu, 2022; Omitola et al., 2021). The Fulani people's involvement in arrests across all geo-political zones has led to an existing narrative and identity construction affecting their group status and relations with other ethnic groups in Nigeria (This Day, 2021).

The negative profiling of the Fulani pastoralists across Nigeria vis-à-vis various insecurity crises led to the emergence of exclusionary policies and politics across Nigeria targeted at the Fulani pastoralists. The exclusion process of Fulani pastoralists witnessed national debate, especially during the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari (2015-2023) designated as a Fulani man with the goal of promoting the Fulani agenda and also shielding them from various criticisms (Mojola, 2016). The response of President Muhammadu Buhari, considered by multiple States' political and communal leaders as inappropriate and inadequate, further fuelled their view of the Fulani pastoralist-involved crisis as an agenda targeted towards taking

their ancestral land and putting these communities under the auspices of Fulani pastoralist domination (Isaac, 2021). This construct continued to generate ethnic cum regional backlash across all geo-political zones in which the Fulani ethnic group is perceived as a threat to other ethnic groups, particularly in the southern part of the country (Sahara Reporters, 2021).

As the relationship between the Fulani pastoralists and communities in various Nigeria's geo-political zones continued to deteriorate, it was followed by widespread agitation, especially in the southern geo-political zone, with the emphasis on expelling all Fulani pastoralists in various geo-political zones. The South Western region, comprising six States, namely Oyo, Ogun, Lagos, Ekiti, Ondo and Osun state, witnessed mass reactions from the citizens pressuring the State government to implement security policies targeted towards checkmating the activities of Fulani pastoralists in this geo-political zone and expelling them as a means to protect human rights and the public good. One of the major results of addressing the incessant crises of insecurity involving Fulani migrants is the establishment of a Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) known as the Amotekun (Omitola, 2024; Olubade and Ogunnoiki, 2020). Despite the controversies and debates that surround the establishment of Amotekun within the prism of unresolved State police creation in Nigeria, the governments of South Western States except Lagos were able to establish the regional security architecture. Lagos State, prior to the establishment of the Amotekun security outfit, already had an operational Lagos Neighbourhood Safety Corp with the same function as Amotekun. However, Lagos State House of Assembly unanimously passed the bill to establish Amotekun – an attempt to unify the proposed law that would guide the security outfit jointly established by the South-West governors (Anjorin, 2021). The task of Amotekun was to conduct security operations, especially in South West villages and border communities, forest reserve areas and rural areas, to capture Fulani pastoralists jeopardising the security of the region.

The Amotekun security outfit received significant support and has continued to witness profound growth and development, especially in terms of recruitment and operation training. In Oyo State, the governor of the State, Engr Seyi Makinde, inaugurated 480 Amotekun Forest Rangers (AFR) – a sub-group of the Amotekun security outfit with specialised training in forest protection in Oyo State (Ademola, 2024). Across the South-West geo-political zones, there have been a series of clashes between the Amotekun operatives and the Fulani herders (Babtunde, 2021). Also, the Eastern Security Network (ESN) – a security outfit also saddled with the responsibility of protecting the South-Eastern region of Nigeria conducted a series of operations targeted at expelling the Fulani herders from their geo-political zone. In 2021, the Eastern Security Network (ESN) destroyed the Fulani herders camp in Isiukwuato, Abia State, expelling them and killing dozens of their cows (Sahara Reporters, 2021).

Also, in the North-West geo-political zone, the Yan sa kai vigilante group conducted a series of operations targeted at Fulani communities (Okoli, 2024). As the lives and properties of the Fulani pastoralists become endangered due to the establishment of vigilante groups, the activities and objectives of some of these were also questioned. The Yan sa Kai vigilante

group has been accused of extra-judicial killings, torture, unlawful arrests and cattle confiscations (Okoli, 2024). The Yan Sa Kai conducted series of operations targeted at destroying Fulani settlements, forcing the pastoralists to flee into the forests. This strategy has exacerbated the relationship between the Hausa farmers and the Fulani pastoralists. In response, the Fulani pastoralists also established a counter-militia known as the Yan Bindinga to counter the operation of Yan Sa Kai (Okoli, 2024). The illegal operation of Yan sa kai has also led various governments of North-western states to ban the operation of the vigilante group (Yusuf, 2020).

The exclusion of the Fulani pastoralists was also more pronounced in the South Western geo-political zones with the activities of the Yoruba activist, Sunday Igboho, campaign against the Fulani pastoralists. Sunday, Igboho embarked on an expulsion of Fulani pastoralist campaign across all South West states by issuing an eviction ultimatum to Fulani pastoralists to leave the forest region of South West State (Laolu 2024). A series of security operations and political crises followed the eviction order of Sunday Igboho in the South Western region. One of the theatres of operation was in Igangan town, Oyo State. Sunday, Igboho and his operatives stormed the Fulani communities to eject Seriki Fulani, Salihu Abdukadir and herders accused of perpetrating crimes in the town (Bayo, 2021). Also, Iskilu Wakili - a notorious Fulani warlord in Ayete, in the Ibarapa area of Oyo State, was also arrested during the period of anti-fulani campaign. Also, in the middle-belt region, one of the major hotspots of the Fulani pastoralist crisis, Benue State issued an eviction order to Fulani pastoralists (Agency, 2017a). Gov. Samuel Ortom of Benue gave Fulani herders in Tombo-Mbalagh, Buruku Local Government Area of the state, a two-day ultimatum to leave the area following a herder's attack on the town, leaving 10 people dead (Agency Report, 2017b). The post-ultimatum also witnessed the use of the Anti-Open Grazing Law to evict Fulani and their cattle from Benue State. Also, the current governor of Benue state has further upheld Samuel Ortom's legacy regarding Fulani's eviction. Governor Hyacinth Alia also gave two two-week ultimatums to herders, asking them to leave the state or comply with the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (National Accord, 2024).

The implication of the campaign witnessed the expulsion of several Fulani pastoralists. The Daily Trust (2021) reported the return of about 107 herders to the Ladduga community in Kachia Local Government Area of Kaduna State following an eviction order that targeted Fulani herders in the South West and the destruction of the Fulani pastoralist homes, properties and killing of cattle. Also, in 2019, the complexity of the crisis led the Members of the Northern Elders Forum and the Coalition of the Northern Groups to urge Fulani herders to leave the southern part of Nigeria and return to the North where their (herders) safety and that of their property could be guaranteed (Olusola, 2019). The eviction and destruction led the Amalgamated Union of Foodstuff and Cattle Dealers of Nigeria decision to stop the movement of food items from the North to the South (Sahara Reporters, 2021c).

### **Exclusionary Policies, Migration and Nigeria's Nation-Building**

Nation-building in Nigeria is a complex task due to diverse interests and agendas across socio-political and economic strata. Hence, nation-building requires unity among all ethnic groups by overcoming suspicion and fostering cooperation among various ethnic groups despite the complexities of heterogeneity. The expulsion of the Igbo from Lagos in contemporary times remains politically motivated. Its implications for Nigeria's nation-building stem from the problems of disunity and suspicion. The relations between Igbos and Yoruba in Lagos is a clear case of how ethnicity impedes nation-building. However, at the height of the expulsion campaign, the Lagos State Government and the Pan-Yoruba socio-political organisation, Afenifere, denounced the call for the forced departure of Igbo people from Lagos and the South-west region of Nigeria (Adedayo, Sunday and Ehigior, 2024). Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu countered the narratives of Igbo-must-go through a statement signed by his Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Gboyega Akosile, that such threats are "reckless, divisive, and dangerous rhetoric," emphasising that Lagos remains home to all Nigerian citizens regardless of their ethnic nationality while the Afenifere group called Nigeria security forces to investigate and arrest those behind expulsion call considered unpatriotic." (Adedayo, Sunday and Ehigior, 2024).

Also, the Fulani pastoralist-farmers conflict in Nigeria, which has become a national insecurity crisis, has led to several dialogues targeted towards finding a sustainable solution to the causes of the crises. The implication for nation-building stems from the challenges faced by the Federal Government over the implementation of the Rural Grazing Area implementation and the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) (Okpara and Onwuchekwa, 2023, Stephen 2024). The Federal Government muted the idea of creating additional grazing reserves and settlement camps as palliative to the problems facing herders, which led to series of resentment against the government, especially from the Southern States who saw the establishment of grazing reserves for the Fulani as President Muhammadu Buhari's attempt to allocate their lands to Fulani migrants considered kinsmen. As RUGA witnessed ethnic resentment, the NLTP was also faced with the absence of institutional political will and support towards implementation. However, several states affected by the activities of Fulani pastoralists have restricted open grazing (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin 2018a; Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin 2018b).

Also, Fulani herders across Nigeria have focused on reforming the identity of the Fulani ethnic group vis-à-vis Nigeria's insecurity crisis. The reformation is hinged on the position that any ethnic group member in Nigeria can perpetuate insecurity. Hence, that a Fulani pastoralist was caught in the act of farmland destruction or kidnapping case does not mean all Fulani pastoralists are involved in such events. The goal of reforming the identity of the Fulani pastoralist has become the goal of various actors. In Nassarawa State, Mohammed Hussaini, Chairman, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, Nasarawara State chapter partnered with security agencies to expose criminals (Fulani and non-Fulani elements) in the State towards rebuilding the destroyed identity of the Fulani pastoralist. Also, in Nassarawa State, despite

the controversy over the establishment of Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore, a Fulani socio-cultural and vigilante group, the vigilante group numbered 1,144 Fulani youths selected from various communities in the 13 LGAs of the state to engage in informal security operation towards identifying Fulani pastoralist causes widespread insecurity in the State (Daily Trust, n.d.).

Fulani pastoralists have also focused on establishing cordial relationships with various host communities through formal cooperation with traditional leaders, local government and State governments. In the West geo-political zone, there was a signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote peaceful coexistence between the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria and the South West Commodities Farmers Organisation (Punch 2024). Also, several states in Nigeria, especially the Middle Belt States, including Plateau, Kaduna, and Adamawa, set up peace commissions between 2016 and 2018 to stem the tide of violence and promote peace (Babatunde and Ibnouf, 2024). However, these commissions suffered from a lack of credible state and non-state actors to spearhead the peace process, poor funding, undue interference from the state government, and a lack of sustainability of the peace agencies by successive governments.

Overall, the paramount implication of exclusionary discourses and politics is intense ethnic polarisation that focuses on protecting ethnic members and neglecting the interests of strangers or aliens. The protection transverses all strata of socio-economic and political affairs. Strangers' conformity to the laws (written and unwritten) is strictly monitored and excluded from political or leadership positions irrespective of years of residence in the community. As played out in the case of Lagos, political positions are evaluated from the standpoints of an indigene perspective, leading to the clamour that Igbo must go. Hence, rather than focusing on disintegrative forces of ethnic relations, the task of nation-building requires a multi-stakeholder approach to addressing problems of growth and development. Also, exclusionary politics affects the depth of citizenship belongingness in Nigeria, thereby dividing citizenship along ethnic lines with disaggregated interests.

## Conclusion

The article examines the interconnectedness between internal migration, exclusionary policies and the task of nation-building in Nigeria. Internal migration has been a distinct feature of Nigeria's history across various epochs. Internal migration in the pre-colonial period was an important aspect of the agricultural economy, trade system and inter-group relations. In the colonial period, migration was repeatedly featured amidst various socio-economic and political systems that were put in place to make up the whetstone of the colonial economy. Since the attainment of independence, internal migration in its voluntary and forced form has contributed to a series of socio-economic and political challenges. In the voluntary migration form, the growing exclusionary discourses and politics have led to ethnic tensions and animosities, making the task of nation-building difficult to attain. In Nigeria, the case of the Igbo people in Lagos

and the Fulani pastoralists in South Western Nigeria illustrates the nexus between internal migration, exclusionary discourses and its implications on nation-building.

In the case of the Igbo people, the ethnic tension between the Yoruba people (indigenes) and the Igbo people has not been recently developed. In the colonial period, the Igbo and Yoruba people had ethnic tension rooted in nationalist agitations, the status of Lagos and the level of migrants' role in the politics of Lagos. However, animosities have become a defining feature of post-colonial Lagos State with a contested citizenship crisis. The 2023 general election in Nigeria brought to the forefront the problem of contested citizenship rooted in the exclusionary clamour, discourses and politics rooted in ethnic politics. Cultural and ethnic nationalism became the thrust of presidential and Lagos State governorship elections, leading to ethnic-based politics and insecurity challenges. In the case of the Fulani ethnic group, the centrality of land, security and ethnic politics shaped exclusionary discourses, campaigns and politics against the Fulani ethnic group. The widespread insecurity crises involving the Fulani people vis-à-vis the insecurity of South Western Nigeria federal government politics over the acquisition of land for the Fulani people for grazing spurred ethnic agitations and exclusionary discourses. The two cases analysed above reveal the absence of internal migration governance in Nigeria, which is considered a major challenge in the process of nation-building. As nation-building involves unity and integration of citizens for the agenda of the prosperity of all, irrespective of ethnic identity, the increasing ethnic exclusion discourses and politics make the process of constructing inclusive citizenship and nation-building difficult. However, the problem of indigeneity citizenship will persist unless its underlying factors are addressed, such as downplaying ethnic identity (cultural determination of citizenship) for Nigerians through inclusive citizenship that sees heterogeneity as an asset rather than a problem.

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