## RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE AND MIGRATION CRISES IN NORTH EAST NIGERIA

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#### Abstract

Violence and migration crises are serious social problems in contemporary Nigeria. While volumes have been written on violence and migration of Africans, there is dearth of literature on the religious perspective to the issues of violence and migration. Available literature has also shown that violence have affected migrant Africans' identity in time past and even now. Up till the present, globalization has also been one of the major factors responsible for migration of many Africans in contemporary society. In present day Nigeria however, the narrative is different. Violence, and in fact, religious violence, is, the main cause of migration crises among Nigerians. This is especially the case in the North East of Nigeria where a decade old religious violence has continued unabated, resulting in the total displacement of over 3.3 million Nigerians, who now face migration crises. This is a serious social problem that this paper addresses. The main aim and objective of this paper is to show that religious violence in the North East of Nigeria has caused migration crises. The paper used a qualitative method of research. The study leaned on normative theory of social exclusion which was used as the theoretical framework. The paper concluded that the crucial issue that has taken prominence is that a decade old religious violence in North East Nigeria, remain the main cause of migrant crises in the aforementioned region. It was also discovered that migrantophobic discrimination, displacement and loss of personal identity, economic hardship, denial of fundamental human rights and sexual abuses, health and hygiene, poor housing conditions and a host of others are the major humanitarian crises migrants faced in the geopolitical zone. Concluding, the paper recommended that if the basic tenets of the normative theory of social exclusion is strictly adhered to and applied by all Nigerians and the stakeholders in the North East, migrant crises would be reduced to the barest minimum.

## Introduction

Human migration is the process whereby people move from one place to another. This movement could be for the purpose of settling there permanently or temporarily, depending on the reason for migration. According to macro theorists people's movement could be attributed to structural or systematic situations which act as push or pull factors. Typically, in situations where people move for economic reasons, the push factors may include economic situations such as poverty, low income, unemployment rates, or as Boswell (2002) says, people move as a result of "low per capita income relative to the country of destination" (p.3). Macro theorists also stress pull factors. These include factors such as migration laws, economic or labour conditions in the intending countries of destination.

While internal migration means the movement of people within a state or country, or even a continent, external migration involves the movement of people from one country to another different state or country. Emigration on the other hand, means leaving one state or country as it were to another country or state. Immigration means the movement of people into a new country.

Internal migration in Nigeria, especially in Northern, or more specifically in North East Nigeria is occasioned by a number of factors which include: deprivation of basic human needs, human rights violation, economic underdevelopment, repressive state legislation (as is the case in present-day Kaduna State, under the administration of Governor Nasir El-Rufai), mismanagement and misappropriation of the state funds and projects, intercommunal and intra-communal land disputes, unequal distribution of legitimate resources and rights, ethnic cleansing and clientelistic ethnic relations or patronages.

While the above factors are some of the reasons for migration in Nigeria, this paper argues that it is the ferocious and horrendous religious violence orchestrated by the activities of Boko Haram terrorists and its various splinter groups, the Jihadi Fulani herdsmen and various criminal agents and kidnappers in Northern Nigeria that is the main cause of migration crises in the region. While there is superfluous literature on economic migration and other sociopolitical aspects of migration, this paper contends that there is a dearth of literature on religious violence as the main cause of migrants' crises in the aforementioned region. It is in line with the above assertion that this paper seeks to find out if the evidence so far, are anecdotal, suggesting a contrary position to A Publication of Association for the Promotion of African Studies

the situation on ground. Suffice it to also note that migrants in this paper, are also those who have been internally displaced by religious terrorism in Nigeria.

### Theoretical framework

This paper leans on the normative theory of social exclusion which emphasizes choice, fairness and welfare as ultimate concerns or goods. This theory has Brian Barry as it main proponent. In 2002, Barry argues that there are "facts" of exclusion and "cause for concern" with respect to social exclusion. This situation is occasioned, according to Martin (2001), by the fact that there are two forms of migration – the voluntary and involuntary migration. Migrants may therefore move as a result of factors that are beyond their control or move as a result of deliberately moving out in search of better economic pursuits.

Whether voluntary or involuntary migration, Barry (2002) supposes that there is need for those who are socially marginalized to be attended to. Since normative theory hinges on what ought to be done, in terms of what is right or wrong, desirable or undesirable, just or unjust in any given situation or society. These suppositions by Barry are noble, and fit the description of those displaced population in North East Nigeria. However, Barry has been heavily criticized for upholding such suppositions. One of such criticism is that of choice. People may be socially ostracized and thereby face migrant crises as a result of choice. Nevertheless, this framework is tenable and finds acceptability and applicability in this paper because, the migrant crises in Northern Nigeria, especially within the North East is basically not as a result of choice.

Furthermore, Le Grand's (2004) criticism of Brian Barry's supposition that individuals may choose to voluntarily excludes themselves, thereby exposing themselves to migrant crises is also untenable. This is because it behooves on human beings to naturally be humane and normatively prone to helping those in need. Thus, whether those that face migrant crises do it as a result of choice or other external factors, humans are suppose to in fairness to the human race, attend to the welfare of those in crisis situations. The strengths of the normative theory of social exclusion in addressing the crisis of migrants in Northern Nigeria cannot therefore be overemphasized. The acceptability and applicability

of this theory in this paper, is therefore as a result of its basic tenets which include concerns on what is right, desirable and just in society.

# Causes of religious violence in Nigeria

The causes of religious violence in Nigeria, and specifically in North East are myriad. What is rather suggested here include some of the causes, but not an exhaustive list of the causal factors. Religion, which has both positive and negative functions in society, has remains one of the portent forces of social disintegration and violence within the Nigerian polity. Studies such as those of Ott (2011), Emasuen (2015) and Oladeji (2015) all agree that religiously motivated violence has continuously and persistently caused disunity, disaffection and conflict situations in Nigeria. To corroborate the above assertion, Fatile and Bello (2015) assert that these violent religious crises have caused many people to be displaced and homeless. These studies therefore lend credence to the fact that the crave to Islamize the whole of Nigeria, by some fundamentalist Muslims remain one of the basic reasons for religiously motivated violence in Nigeria. This Islamization ideology dates back to the 1804 Usman Dan Fodio Jihadi movement that failed to Islamize the whole of Nigeria. The historical trajectories of this phenomenon are, however, beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that, this caliphate ideology by some fanatical Muslims has remained the driving force behind the Islamization agenda.

Consequently, this Jihadi or caliphate ideology has given rise to the Boko Haram terrorist group and its splinter factions within the North East and elsewhere in Northern Nigeria. According to Buba (2015), Islamic extremists believe that terrorist acts are not only accepted by God but sanctioned. This doctrinal teaching has remained one of the factors encouraging religious violence in Nigeria. Ome and Casimir (2015) opine that this doctrinal teaching is what has given the Boko Haram terror group the impetus to continuously unleash severe violent acts on innocent Nigerians. Lending their voices to religiously motivated violence in Nigeria, Omilusi (2016) and Abdulazeez (2016) maintain that creating an Islamic state is one of the main ideologies that have birthed Boko Haram as a violent terrorist group. Miles (2019) also hold similar views in terms of religious doctrine(s) influencing Jihadi Islamist agenda. This shows the strong effects of doctrinal teachings on adherents of any religion. Saiya (2019), Egger and Magni-Berton (2019), in their empirical studies, using a survey data collected in more than twenty-one European countries, reveal that Islamist ideology shapes Muslims belief on terrorism.

The Islamization and/or Fulanization agenda in Nigeria has not only drawn criticisms and negative reactions within the country's religious leaders and political top-notches, but the international community as well. In fact, within the country, some Christian religious leaders under the aegis of the Nigeria Christian Elders Forum (NCEF), have heavily criticized the Buhari led administration and the Muslim Rights Concerns, (MURIC) over the Islamization agenda. The media, both print and social, is awash with comments and response by some top-notch Nigerian political leaders and ethnic groups. Figures such as former Nigerian president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, ex-military defence Minister, Lt. Gen. T. Y. Danjuma, General Zamani Lekwot, Chief Solomon Asemota (SAN), had not only accused the Buhari-led Federal government of Fulization and Islamization agenda, but have practically dragged him to the United Kingdom, UK parliament over the burning issue on ground.

In addition, the Igbo nation has not relented on the call for proper consideration of, and critical examination of the threat to Islamize Nigeria. A group under the aegis of the South-East Enlightenment Network (SEEN), had, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June, 2019, drawn the attention of the general public to the threat to peace, development and security of the Igbo within Alaigbo and elsewhere. These criticisms and more, point to the fact that the Islamization agenda is a serious social problem that needs to be address and nipped in the bud.

Poverty and economic deprivation in the Northern region is yet another reason for religious violence in Nigeria. Saggar (2019) asserts that of all causative factors of religious violence in contemporary society, poverty remains one of the main factors. He holds the position that poverty is a strong motivation. In a similar line of thought, Baumgart-Ochse and Wolf (2019a), also declare that apart from the religious factor, social and economic deprivations are key factors to consider when examining causes of violence or any act of terrorism in contemporary times. To many scholars, such as Buba (2015), hash economic circumstances are some factors that necessitate violent actions from most terrorist groups like the Boko Haram insurgents. As noted earlier, this is not an exhaustive list of causes of violent acts of terrorism in Nigeria. It is therefore, beyond the scope of this paper to examine several other evidential causal factors of violence in Nigeria.

# Migrants' crisis in North East Nigeria

Having establish the fact that migration crises in Nigeria, and especially in the aforementioned geo-political zone is predominantly caused by religious violence, and while it has also being noted that migrants in this paper, are also displaced A Publication of Association for the Promotion of African Studies

persons in North East Nigeria, this section now presents the crux of the mattermigrants crises in North East Nigeria. Religious violence in North East Nigeria has many detrimental consequences on these persons who, now, are forced to migrate from their comfort zones, seeking refuge in host communities and leaving in make-shift settlements called internally displaced persons camps. These internal migrants face a number of crises among some of them are:

Migrantophobia: This concept should not be understood in the light of the Russian society in which case, it means the inability and refusal of migrants from other countries to adapt and assimilate the cultural norms of Russian society, and thus end themselves criticisms from the local or indigenous people of Russia. In this paper, migrantophobic discrimination means the ill-treatment and rejection internal migrants in the North East faced or received as a result of their disadvantaged circumstances. This discrimination has been noticed by victims who are treated as 'refugees' in their home country. Surveys carried out by scholars such as Alobo and Obaji (2016) and the Norwegian Refugee Council - NRC (2016) lend empirical evidence to the fact that most host communities see them as nugatory elements that are not wanted or welcomed in their communities.

The attendant consequences of these kinds of treatments by host communities have caused the internal migrants some kind of psychological traumata. Apart from these psychological problems associated with this migrantophobic discrimination, emotionally, migrants are left depressed and see themselves as socially alienated and as social destitutes, with no value to add to human society. This situation has brought about feelings of resentment among migrant populations in the North East.

Displacement and loss of identity: This is one of the major crises encountered by internal migrants in North East. These migrants, who hitherto lived in the comfort of their homes, carrying out legitimate businesses of farming, fishing, herding, trading, public service work, wielding etc cetera, are now forced to seek "asylum" in host communities and in internally displaced persons camps. Empirical studies such as Jelili and Olanrewaju (2016), Eweka and Olusegun (2016), Badau and Ndagana (2016) lend credence to the fact that one of the main crises faced by internal migrants in Nigeria, and in the North East in particular, is the issue of displacement. Most of these displaced population are socially excluded from the affairs and activities of main stream society. In fact, this situation is one of the reasons why this study contends that the normative theory

of social marginalization be applied, since this displaced migrants now perceive themselves as second class citizens and are socially ostracized from main stream events in society.

It is worthy to also note that in addition to the problem of displacement migrants in North East Nigeria also suffer huge lost of their personal or human identities. The fact of being who or what they are is lost in this crisis situation. The personalities also suffer huger setbacks. Some of the migrants may have been community leaders, household heads, medical practitioners, teachers, lecturers, big business men and women, herders, farmers, wielders etcetera. All these personalities or celebrities as it were, now face hash situations beyond their control. Their identities and personalities are thereby lost because they have been dislodged from their ancestral homes.

Economic hardship: Another difficult situation internally displaced migrants find themselves is economic hardship. Most of them flee from their homes during attacks by the Islamist jihadists. This flight comes with a huge price-unprepared and forced movement. In these difficult circumstances, the internal migrants are left with no option than to flee, first and foremost, for safety of their lives. This unprepared and forced movement put them under tough economic situations, leaving them with opportunity to carry money, certificates, property or other valuables that may have helped in future. Ituma and Nwobashi (2016), maintain that economic hardships faced by internal migrants in Nigeria "exposes the complexity of the persistent powerlessness arising from systemic deprivation, humiliations disempowerment, alienation and hardship" (p.29).

This economic situation is further aggravated by the fact that these internal migrants who have lost all other means of livelihood, are now left at the mercies of host community members who may be distant relatives or in many cases unrelated to them. Another challenge faced by internal migrants is the feud that usually ensues as a result of misunderstanding that arise among the 'immigrants' family members and those of host communities. In another case, unfamiliar people in internally displaced persons camps could also put up attitudes that could jeopardize or cause bad blood among them. All these feuds and bad blood are basically as a result of economic hardships. It is necessary to point out that host communities also have a share of this economic hardship, as a survey by the Norwegian Refugee Council-NRC (2016) shows that more than 80% of host communities are under pressure. This kind of experience makes host communities to be hostile to, and see migrants as nugatory elements.

Human rights and sexual abuses: Internal migrants in North East face a huge setback in terms of denial of their fundamental human rights and sexual abuses. This situation is peculiar with those who find themselves in host communities and in internally displaced persons camps. A survey by Mohammed (2017) and Baumgart-Ochse and Wolf (2019b) attest to the above assertions. Mohammed in particular confirms that:

The issue of human rights violations and sexual abuse of IDPs, particularly younger, vulnerable IDPs, was confirmed through a survey carried out in the several formal and informal camps in the northeast where about 7% of IDPs indicated that they know someone who had been sexually abused on the camp. The IDPs confirmed that abuse was perpetrated by camp officials (66%), members of host community (28%), and elders (6%). (pp.24 – 25).

The above study has shown that internal migrants who find themselves in such circumstances are usually abused. It is pertinent to note that those who are at the receiving end are women (both lactating and single mothers) and young women who during pre-flight, flight and post-flight circumstances lost their spouses and parents as the case may be. This position is also held by Alobo and Obaji (2016) who maintain the view that migrants have a huge problem in terms of fundamental human rights and sexual abuses.

Hygiene and health challenges: These internal migrants in the North East, who, according to a study conducted in the geo-political zone by Fatile and Bello (2015), shows that migrants in the zone find themselves in this difficult situation as a result of 91.98% of insurgency. Hygiene and health remain the major concerns of internal migrants in the region. In a reviewed study carried out by Owoaje, Uchendu, Ajayi and Cadmus (2017), it was discovered that information on the health of internal migrants in the zone is grossly inadequate. Thus, the study concludes that since these migrants are not leaving in their original places of abode, they are prone to all kinds of illnesses. It should also be added that given their peculiar circumstances, they find themselves in difficult situations where accessing health benefits becomes an extremely huge problem. They could also face the issue of non-indigeneship where they are perceived as strangers. This further hinders their ability to access drugs given by government, or even being attended to in government hospitals, given that some of them may not have any credentials/papers or medical cards as evidence. All these situations lend credence to the aptness of the normative theory applied in this study.

On hygiene, most of them live in make-shift settlements like internally displaced persons camps. These camps are often not adequately taken care of and could be open settlements which further expose these migrant populations to all kind of snake and insects bites and other bad atmospheric conditions. Majority of them suffer from pneumonia, neurasthenia, malaria, typhoid, diarrhea, dysentery and stomach upset all as a result of the kind of water and unhygienic conditions that meals are prepared especially in camps. These views also find empirical evidence in studies such as those of Martin (2001), Abdulazeez (2016), Mohammed (2017) and Owoaje, Uchendu, Ajayi and Cadmus (2017).

Other factors deserving of attention include: poor housing conditions, unfriendly and inhuman living circumstances, poor food and nutrition, insecurity of life and property, lack of education, lack of social activities, marital issues and lack of love, the incapacity to be gainfully employed and lack of freedom to practice one's religion (religious vilification). These are some of the crises faced by migrants in North East Nigeria.

# Applying normative theory of social exclusion as panacea to migrants crises in North East Nigeria

Given that most of the circumstances internal migrants find themselves in North East Nigeria are tied around issues bordering on social exclusion, this paper contends that the normative theory of social exclusion remains one major way to address the crises that migrants faced in the aforementioned zone.

Social exclusion is both a social, political and economic term that has undergone some kind of social Darwinism and evolutionary processes. The concept has also been used as a theory as can be seen in the works of scholars such as Emile Durkheim's 'social solidarity', Hilary Silver (1994, 2007b), Pacione (1997), Black and Muddiman (1997), Walker (1997), Hills (1998), Klasen (1998), Muddiman (1999) Levitas (2006), Stanley (2007) Itumo and Nwobashi (2016). If these studies made use of this framework in their empirical investigations, its use and applicability in this study is commendable and apt.

As mentioned above, the variant of the social exclusion theory used in this paper is the normative theory. It is so chosen amongst others basically for its presuppositions that stress on the need of socially ostracized migrants in North East. Klasen (1998), affirms that in discussing issues on women and child policies or welfare schemes, one is left with no option that to turn to the basic tenets of this framework since it emphasizes welfare. This whole idea of welfare is also

resonated and emphasized in the works of Jehoel-Gijsbers and Vrooman (2007) in far away Netherlands. If this framework worked there, its applicability should also be appreciated and stakeholders in particular those in North East should examine this welfare principle and see how internal migrants in North East could be helped.

Keller (2014) writes that the theory is important in social relations especially when one looks at the plights of internal migrants and the challenges they face. He corroborates thus: "It correspond with the spirit of French sociology that has been emphasizing social integrity on the macro social level and the existence of social bond on the level of interpersonal relations since the time of Durkheim" (p. 7). Its relevance can be seen in any kind of social relations, including, Stanley's (2007) social policy in transports. Stanley affirms that this theory is very crucial in understanding poverty, which he says could be absolute or relative. Thus, it is necessary that one turns to this theory when examining migrants crises, be they cases of absolute or relative poverty.

Silver (2007a), sees social exclusion as:

A rupturing of the social bond. It is a process of declining participation, access, and solidarity. At the societal level, it reflects inadequate social cohesion or integration. At the individual level, it refers to the incapacity to participate in normatively expected social activities and to build meaningful social relations. (p.4419).

The above Silverian description, definition and categorization of the socially excluded is not only analogous, but fits the unpleasant situations faced by migrants in North East Nigeria. Since fairness is one of the suppositions of the normative theory of social exclusion, it therefore behooves on Nigerians to naturally respond to the plights of migrants in this geo-political zone.

The Silverian model is, therefore, an eye-opener in one's understanding of migrants' crises since this includes a rupturing of social bonds and their incapacity to participate in the affairs of main stream society. It is this single fact that makes Silver (2007b) to conclude that the relevance of using this framework cannot be overemphasized since the concept helps in one's understanding of the dynamics of micro, meso and macro levels of processes of understanding social exclusion.

Muddiman (1999), exposes the relevance of this theory further by revealing how this socially marginalized migrant population can be understood. From his examining of some theories of social exclusion, one becomes familiar with terms such as social deprivations dispossessions destitutions and a host of others. All these terminologies only serve as a further proof of the relevance of the normative theory in understanding the dynamics and plights of migrants in North East Nigeria, thereby suggesting that if Nigerians and all the stakeholders, especially those involved in caring for these internal migrants, hold unto these basic assumptions of the normative theory of social exclusion, migrant crises would be drastically reduced to the barest minimum.

#### Conclusion

The crucial issues that have taken prominence and come to the fore, from the available literature on religious violence and migration crises in North East Nigeria include: Jihadi ideology as the main cause of religious violence in the geo-political zone; poverty and economic deprivation in the Northern region. The available literature also indicates that migrants' crises in North East Nigeria are migrantophobia, displacement, (without which they would not have found themselves in such circumstances); economic hardship, denial of fundamental human rights and sexual abuses; hygiene and health challenges.

This study also discovered that migrants face loss of personal identity; poor housing conditions, unfriendly and inhuman living conditions, poor food and nutrition; insecurity of life and property; lack of education; lack of social activities; marital crises and emotional problems; incapacity to be gainfully employed and religious vilification. The paper concluded by suggesting that applying the basic assumptions of the normative theory of social exclusion as advanced by Brian Barry (2002), by Nigerians and various stakeholders would reduce the magnitude of the crises faced by internal migrants in North East Nigeria.

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