

Exiles In Their Own Home: Internal Population Displacement In Nigeria

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Abstract

This essay examines the causes and other factors which induce internal population displacement in Nigeria. It argues in opposition to traditional explanations that population displacement is a complex problem most often arising when the rights of a group are violated or denied; or when the physical security of members of the group is threatened. The nature of the state is a major causal factor inducing population displacement, especially where it is unable to ensure access for all its citizens or accord them adequate physical security.

Introduction: Tracking A Recondite Population

Since the Biafra-Nigeria civil war (1967-1970) in which an estimated two million people died and another ten million were displaced, internal population displacement has been on the increase. Paradoxically however, the existence of displaced people, who normally are a very visible group, conspicuous in their isolation and appalling material conditions tends to be concealed by the Nigerian state. The reasons for this are quite obvious. First of all, governments have a penchant for downplaying the magnitude of population displacement generally, and internal population displacement in particular. In few cases where they reluctantly admit the existence of displaced people, they tend to announce low numbers, make pretences of providing assistance, and quickly claim the successful resettlement of affected people. Second, wider Nigerian society indirectly masks the internal displacement of people. As a result of the effectiveness of familial and communal networks, displaced people are quickly and easily absorbed and rehabilitated. Of utmost importance in this process are community, clan and multi-ethnic organisations, which support their members materially and provide an efficient

network for communication between their members in urban and rural areas (Ibeanu, 1997a).

Above all, the proclivity among the displaced is rarely to contest their predicament. Only in a few celebrated cases, like that of the Bakolori peasants who were displaced by a dam in the 1980s and the Ogoni whose livelihoods are threatened by oil exploration, have internally displaced people organised and effectively put their condition on the political agenda. The lack of organisation among displaced people generally serves to keep their plight concealed.

In spite of the tendency on the part of the Nigerian state to conceal internally displaced populations, their existence still remains a serious problem. In a 1988 survey, we estimated that about 300 000 people were internally displaced as a result of communal conflicts in the south-eastern region of the country alone (Ibeanu and Matthews, 1988). Since then, internal population displacement has escalated as old conflicts became entrenched and new ones emerged; and as economic decline and political despotism heighten state violence against restless sections of the population and against the political opposition which continues to press home its demand for better conditions of life and an open political space.

This essay examines the causes, contexts and contests which affect the problem of internal population displacement in Nigeria. It also enquires into the manifestations and magnitude of internal population displacement, as well as the role of the state.

Population Displacement: Some Theoretical Considerations

The dominant theoretical perspective on population displacement defines this problem as one of "forced/involuntary migration". This perspective is based on a force-subject-migration reasoning. Implicit in this is the idea that force (war, conflict, drought, etc.) being an external factor affecting a person (subject) acts as a push factor leading to a rational, albeit coerced, decision to relocate. This type of migration is usually distinguished from "voluntary migration" in which the force-subject-migration matrix is mediated by a "positive motivation" to move based on a rational assessment by the subject that life will be better in a new place. Here, force acts on the subject as a pull factor, this time from the destination (Kunz, 1973: 1981; Hansen, 1981: 190; Suhrke, 1983: 164-5).

The force-subject-migration perspective on population displacement has many inherent weaknesses. In the first place, at a purely theoretical level, it treats force as being of the same magnitude in all cases. It is not clear whether a different quantum of force or the same amount of force in all circumstances or in different circumstances yields the same result which is migration. Secondly, it does not consider the varying capacities of subjects to absorb or contain force generally. Finally, it treats all displacements as being of the same spatial dimension.

The epistemological principles of subjectivism and the "rational actor" which inform this perspective are also flawed. Taking a subjectivist approach, it treats displacement as an individual decision, rather than a group one, which ignores the fact that individuals act principally as agents of social forces manifesting contradictory interests. Related to this is the problem of the rational actor as the basis of social action. Thus "voluntary migrants" are distinguished from "displaced populations" on the basis that, unlike the latter, the former have time to assess the situation rationally. This leads sociological enquiry to search for eschatological (ultimate) explanations founded on the motivations for individual actions, rather than on the conflicting interests of social ensembles.

On the contrary, subjective behaviour and motivation need not take precedence over, or be divorced from the objective instances in which individuals are rooted. The fact is that individuals are distributed into social groups with definable interests and practices, the sum total of which is not equal to the interests and practices of all individuals composing them. Furthermore, it is not particularly correct to assume that decisions are ever made with the benefit of full information in which all possible alternatives are considered in a "rational-comprehensive" manner. Thus, neither displaced people nor so-called voluntary migrants have full knowledge of "conditions" and "alternatives" in the destination before relocating. Also, to suggest that displaced people lack a "positive motivation" to relocate does not help very much. There is always a threshold for any threatened group (and individuals as their agents) beyond which continued stay in the current place of abode becomes intolerable. Whether it is ten minutes before an invading army arrives or five years within which a wage sinks below the poverty line is immaterial. Above all, the distinction between "push forces" and "pull forces" as motivations for migration is inadequate. It overlooks the dialectical relationship between push and pull factors. A push factor could also be a pull factor; for invariably, negative and threatening developments in one's place of abode are assessed in terms of expectations and the belief that life will be better and more secure in the destination. Therefore, we cannot distinguish displaced populations on the basis of the push-pull matrix.

In opposition to these conventional views about population displacement, we try to show that population displacement expresses a social relation in which a group loses control over the resources of society and the physical protection of its members. It manifests the inability of a social group to realise its interests, especially the basic needs of its members, in relation to other groups. Any social group that is consistently unable to attain such needs, usually because it is socially disadvantaged, is in the process of being displaced. There is a strong tendency for such a group to move either *en masse*, in small groups or as individuals. Although such a group is prone to migration, relocation is only an "extreme" manifestation of the long process of displacement. Other manifestations of displacement include

starvation, mass suicide, identity crisis and vagrancy. Indeed, displacement begins long before relocation can take place, if it occurs at all.

Viewed in this way, we may surmise that first, a central issue in population displacement is that of group security: security of livelihoods, food security, security of identity, environmental security and, above all, physical security. Second, conflict is a principal factor in understanding displacement. The contradictions inherent in populations mean that social antagonisms would erupt from time to time into violence, and other forms of social unrest. When this happens, relocation inevitably becomes an option. Finally, population displacement is a problem created by a particular state. In all modern societies, it is the state that mediates social antagonisms. Its role is always to keep such antagonisms from exploding into open conflicts and physical violence. To achieve this, the state must always rise above the interests of social groups, forging consensus and acting as a guarantor of the security of every group within its jurisdiction. By so doing, the state appears as an impartial arbiter, the representative of the collective and of the corporate interests of all groups within the nation. Population displacement is most likely to occur in situations where the state is unable to perform these functions.

In contrast to this ideal state, the Nigerian state has become an instrument used to pursue regional, ethnic, religious, class, clan and other special interests. As a result, it has become deeply embroiled in social struggles as an instrument of some groups acting against others. In particular, it has become authoritarian because the groups that control it resist demands to broaden the base of power and participation in it. This has had a profound impact on the character of conflict. First of all, social relations have become extremely conflictual and violent as a privatised state becomes the instrument for waging private struggles. Second, state violence has become a principal variable in the management of social conflict. Consequently, the repression unleashed by a privatised state against selected groups has become a major cause of conflict. Third, since the Nigerian state has become essentially an instrument of violence used against specific groups, instead of being the repository of all the interests of the people and the nation, the violence that it inflicts in conflicts is devastating in terms of social cost. Finally, state violence has made conflict resolution very difficult. The privatisation of the state has compromised the essence of state security so that increasingly the security of private individuals and groups has become subsumed in the security of the state. Consequently, the maintenance of internal order has degenerated into a cycle of conflict and violence as state violence provokes more resistance by affected groups. All this has rendered the provision of social security for all almost impossible. This is what distinguishes the Nigerian state from others. Conflict and insecurity characterised by state violence constitute a principal factor in population displacement in Nigeria.

To be sure, conflict and insecurity are two sides of the same coin for conflict always arises in contexts in which groups and states perceive their security to be under threat. Here, security should not be seen exclusively in the realist tradition that predicates security solely in terms of the state and military power. Instead social security which predicates the security of groups and individuals should be emphasised. In this regard security from poverty, hunger, disease, ignorance, arbitrary power, fear and want, for both groups and individuals/households, constitute cardinal issues in the security discourse. Nigeria is currently ranked 137th out of 174 countries in terms of the Human Development Index (UNDP, 1997: 3). According to the UNDP:

Life expectancy at birth is still extremely low. One-third of the country's population are still without health services, while two-thirds are without safe water and sanitation, 47.5 per cent of the population are illiterate. Thus, for a very large population of Nigerians, life is still short and brutish (1997: 3).

Without social security, conflict becomes endemic and a threat to the security of the state. This tendency constitutes a major risk in countries like Nigeria where the quality of life has been declining precipitately and social security is abysmally low.

Conceptualising Internal Population Displacement

The plight of internally displaced people (IDP) is only recently receiving serious attention. Hitherto, attention was principally focused on refugees as defined by various international conventions and protocols. Thus, even though the United Nations Convention dealing with aspects of the refugee problem has been in effect for nearly half a century, there is no global instrument yet to deal especially with internally displaced people.

This neglect is attributable to political-ideological positions during the Cold War which greatly affected social theory. The Left shunned the theorising of internal population displacement because Communist countries were major producers of internally displaced people, while the Right avoided it because the third world allies of the West were easily the worst culprits. In addition, the Right was concerned about the economic consequences of extending protection to the so-called internally displaced. It is not surprising that the international refugee regime, influenced as it were by liberal, if not right wing, scholarship preferred to ignore the problem of internal population displacement.

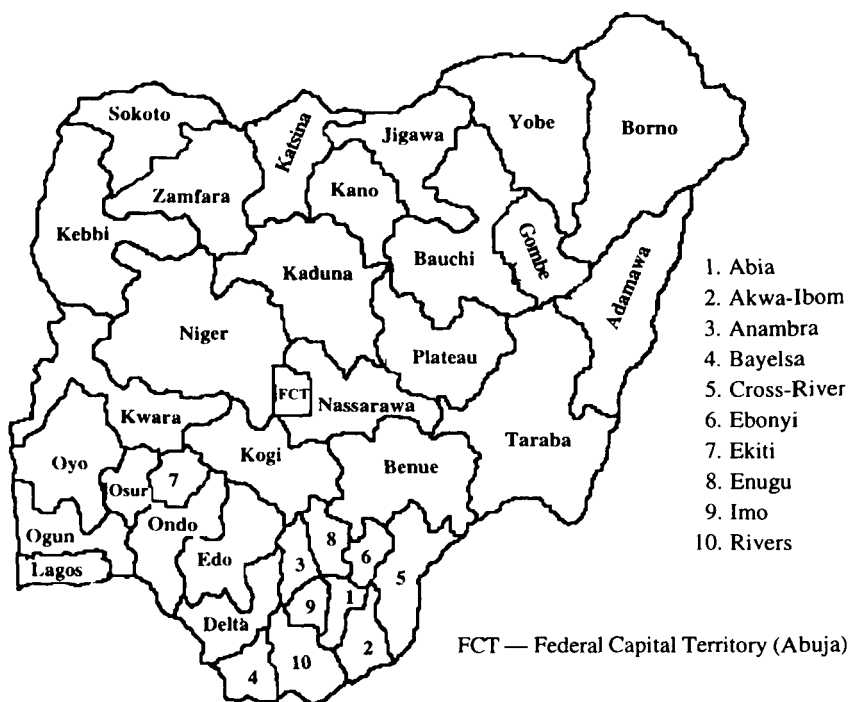
The current interest in internally displaced people is still conditioned by the traditional misconceptions about refugees which insists on the need to separate the former from refugees. In its legalistic form, for example, the traditional view

considers that people must cross an international boundary before they are classified as refugees; otherwise they are "internally displaced". Also, analysts are almost unanimous in attributing internal displacement to inter-group conflicts within states, the reason being that conflicts in the post Cold War era have been less between states than they have been within states (Evans, 1994; van de Goor *et al.* 1996). In contrast, this paper (re)conceptualises "internal population displacement" as an integral part of a single general theory of population displacement. I argue that what is needed is a *general theory* of population displacement. *Internal* should *not* be understood as defining a category of displaced persons as in *IDP (internal)* distinct from *refugees (external)*. Neither should it be understood as a formulation of a *regional theory* of internal population displacement. Rather, it should represent an attempt to build into our general theory of population displacement the purely secondary parameter of the *exact location* of a displaced population. What is important is to correctly conceptualise the social relations involved in the displacement of people. Whether the displaced population remains within the boundaries of a state or moves across it should be secondary to our main theoretical frame.

We also question the claim that the state is an external factor in displacement-inducing conflicts. Instead, by its very nature and history the Nigerian state is central to these conflicts, not a neutral party. It is itself the embodiment of violence. State violence in Nigeria is expressed through the interplay of three factors namely, petroleum, military rule and ethnicity. These three factors summarise the economic, political and socio-cultural forces that currently propel the Nigerian state to abuse its own citizens. Petroleum as the dominant source of national wealth has raised the political stakes to unprecedented heights. Consequently, it has intensified the struggles among ethnic groups to control a state that has amassed wealth and power but acquired little legitimacy. Under these conditions, politics becomes war of all against all, making it possible for the masters of warfare and violence, the military, to intervene to dominate politics and society. Meanwhile, social groups that become the target of state violence and repression find their condition so life-threatening that they consider physical relocation away from their habitual homes as the ultimate solution.

Survey of displacement-generating conflicts in Nigeria

In the past few years, social relations across Nigeria have been marked increasingly by conflicts, some of which are old conflicts re-emerging in new circumstances, while many others express recent developments in the country's political economy. A survey of these conflicts shows that they resolve into three major types: conflicts surrounding the oil industry (exploitation, mining and refining); communal conflicts, including ethnic and religious conflicts; and conflicts thrown up by the democratisation process, especially over decentralisation and political representation.

Fig. 1: Map of Nigeria showing the 36 States

Conflicts in oil-producing areas

In the recent past, Nigeria's "oil belt", which lies along the Guinea coast and several miles inland to the south-east and south-west of the country, has literally become a hot-bed of war. Conflicts have arisen between oil prospecting multi-national companies and local communities; between the state and local communities; and among local communities. Many of these conflicts have been going on for as long as ten years and still remain unresolved. Hence, in many oil-producing communities there is a strong presence of military and police detachments; and systematic state repression, sometimes taking the form of extra-judicial killings, has remained a fact of life.

On 1 November 1990, Nigerians woke up to the news that the village of Umuechem in Rivers State had been destroyed by the para-military Mobile Police Force, killing at least twenty villagers in an early morning carnage. The killings were a reprisal against the villagers for demonstrating against the multi-national oil giant, Shell over the destruction of their environment by Shell installations. In fact,

the Umuechem problem is only one of many cases in which local people protesting against environmental pollution from crude oil mining and refining have been confronted by the repressive organs of the state. Between 1976 and 1980, official records show that Nigeria experienced 784 incidents of oil spillage, involving over 1,3 million barrels of crude oil. In one incident at the Texaco- Funiwa-5 installation, about 421 000 barrels of crude oil were spilled, polluting about 1 200 square miles of coastline, mangrove swamps, rivers and creeks from which 230 000 people of 321 villages made a living. In the Ogoni case, which has become well-known, it has been recorded that 30 million barrels of crude oil were indiscriminately discharged on farmland from Shell installations in 1970 alone (Earth Action, 1994). A document released by the Shell Oil Company itself claims that "in Ogoni from 1985 up to the beginning of 1993, when we withdrew our staff from the area, 5 352 barrels of oil were spilled in 87 incidents". (Shell, 1995). But other independent sources give much higher figures. According to Earth Action (*op. cit.*), for example, there had been more than 2 500 minor and major oil spills in Ogoniland between 1986 and 1991, including a major one in which Shell dallied for forty days before patching a ruptured pipeline.

These incidents persist in spite of the negative environmental impact of crude oil mining and refining. Pollution arising from crude oil spillage destroys marine life and crops, makes water unsuitable for fishing, and renders many hectares of farm land unusable. Brine from oil fields contaminates water formations and streams, making them unfit as a source of drinking water. At the same time, gas flaring in the vicinity of human settlements, and high pressure pipelines that criss-cross farmlands are conducive to acid rain, deforestation and destruction of wildlife. In addition, dumping of toxic, non-biodegradable by-products of oil refining is dangerous to both flora and fauna, including man. For instance, metals that at high concentrations are known to cause metabolic malfunctions in human beings, such as cadmium, chromium, mercury and lead, are contained in refinery effluents, which are constantly discharged into fresh water and farmlands. They enter the food chain both by direct intake in food and drinking water, and indirectly. For example, fish are known to store mercury in their brains without metabolising it. Human beings run the risk of eating such contaminated fish (Nwankwo and Irrechukwu, nd).

The affected communities have often reacted violently to such horrific ecological damage and life-threatening risks. In July 1981, 10 000 villagers in Rukpokwu blocked the routes to 50 Shell oil wells, while the inhabitants of three villages in Egbema seized Agip installations at Ebocha. In October, 1989, oil drilling equipment worth ten million Naira (\$1 million) belonging to Elf Aquitaine, was destroyed by angry villagers at Oboburu in Ahoada area of Rivers State. Two expatriate engineers were among 22 people seriously injured in the fracas (Ibeanu, 1993).

As a result of the centrality of crude oil production to the survival of the Nigerian state and its privileged classes, state violence is unleashed on protesting communities in reprisal. The Ogoni case, which culminated in the killing in 1995 of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders after a fraudulent murder trial, has been widely reported (Ibeanu, 1997b). A secret memo titled "Operation Law and Order" from one Major Paul Okuntimo chairman of a state internal security task force, to the Military Administrator of Rivers State shows that state violence against the Ogoni was well-orchestrated and directed at protecting Shell. According to Okuntimo's memo, "Shell operations are ... impossible unless ruthless military operations are undertaken for smooth economic activities to commence" (Mitee, 1997: 17). Since then systematic repression of Ogoni people by the Nigerian state has continued unabated. A strong military presence in many Ogoni communities is a pointer to the high state of insecurity in the area. In November 1996, Ogoni youths attempted to mark the first anniversary of the hanging of Saro-Wiwa and the other Ogoni activists. The security forces immediately stepped in and brutally stopped the celebration. In the process, two people were killed and 70 injured. More recently in August 1997 an Ogoni villager was shot and killed by a soldier, ostensibly as a result of an "accidental discharge". Reliable estimates put the number of Ogonis killed in these confrontations during 1991 and 1997 at over 5 000. Another ten thousand have been forced into exile in other parts of Nigeria and abroad, including 1 000 who are in a camp in Benin Republic.

Many other communities in the Niger Delta continue to suffer the same fate as the Ogoni. In 1995, Human Rights Watch/Africa documented the case of systematic repression and violence in four communities of the Delta namely, Obagi, Brass, Nembe Creek and Rumuobiokani (Human Rights Watch, 1995: 34-38). More recently in August 1997, over 10 000 youth from across the Delta demonstrated at Aleibiri in Ereremor Local Area of Bayelsa State to demand an end to all Shell activities in the Niger Delta. Aleibiri was chosen as the focus of the demonstration because, according to the youth, Shell had refused to clear an oil spill which occurred there on 18 March 1997. In spite of repeated claims by government that peace has returned to the area, the future points to an even higher incidence of conflicts between the state and oil companies on one hand, and local communities on the other. Thus at the Aleibiri demonstration, a community leader and retired navy Lieutenant, Chief Augustine Anthony could warn that "the people would fight until there is freedom in the Niger Delta because we have been exploited for so long" (Guardian, 18/08/97).

Communal conflicts

Rural economic transformation in Nigeria, which centres on large-scale agricultural projects and oil exploration, has led increasingly to the displacement of many more peasants from the land. In oil-producing areas, the wanton appropriation and

abuse of the indigenous people's land by petro-business companies have led to widespread land and water pollution, squeezed peasants off the land, and heightened land hunger among the people. The net result has been an unprecedented rise in violent conflicts among peasants in different villages and regions over borderlands and fishing waters. In the oil-producing areas, monetary compensation paid by oil companies and government has also fueled violent conflicts as villagers contest the ownership of land on which crude oil is mined.

Virtually all the states of the country are recording increasing numbers of such conflicts, usually in rural areas. Some of the conflicts take on an ethnic character, for example the Jukun-Tiv conflict in the Wukari Local Government Area of Benue State; the Zangon-Kataf conflict involving the Kataf and Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups in Kaduna State; the Bachama-Hausa conflict in Adamawa State, as well as the conflict between the Agila of Benue State and Igbo of Enugu State. This rural manifestation of ethnicity is unprecedented; for ethnicity in Nigeria has historically been an urban phenomenon (Egwu, 1997). Its rural manifestation, especially in the form of violent communal conflicts, has led to a rising tide of internally displaced persons.

In some cases, the conflicts have been among members of the same ethnic group, living in the same state. For instance, among the Igbo of Anambra State, there have been conflicts between Achina and Akpo; Adazi-Nnukwu and Nri; Amawbia and Awka; Onitsha and Nkpor; Unubi and Uga; as well as Aguleri and Umuleri which led to many deaths. But if the conflict assumed an ethnic character where the communities in conflict belong to different local government units the degree of violence was likely to be high (Table 1).

In effect, we can hypothesise that conflicts involving communities belonging to the same ethnic group and living in the same State and Local Government Area (LGA) are likely to be less violent and generate fewer displaced people. On the other hand, conflicts involving communities of different ethnic origins, located in different states and different LGAs are likely to be most violent and displace the greatest number of people. Still, there have been instances in which conflicts among communities belonging to the same ethnic groups have been of "high intensity". For instance, the conflict over Otu Ocha land, between the two Igbo communities of Aguleri and Umuleri, both in Anambra State and Anambra Local Government Area has been waged with utmost fierceness as would be found in conflicts involving people of different ethnic origins.

In the oil-producing areas, such as the Niger Delta, land areas in which crude oil deposits have been found are increasingly the source of conflicts. For example, the conflict between the Ogoni and Asa-Ndoki; Nembe and Kalabari, as well as Ogoni and Okrika are directly or indirectly related to the "politics" of oil exploitation in the area, particularly competition for monetary compensation for land acquired by oil prospecting companies.

Table 1: A Matrix of Communal Conflicts in Nigeria

	Ethnic Group {3}**	State {2}	Local Govt. {1}	Total Conflict Score (T)	Conflict Rating
A.	Same (1)*	Same (1)	Same (1)	6	6th (Lowest)
B.	Same (1)	Same (1)	Different (2)	7	5th
C.	Same (1)	Different (2)	Different (2)	9	3rd
D.	Different (2)	Same (1)	Same (1)	9	3rd
E.	Different (2)	Same (1)	Different (2)	10	2nd
F.	Different (2)	Different (2)	Different (2)	12	1st (Highest)

** Conflict coefficients (Xi) are given in { }:

Ethnic group has a conflict coefficient of 3, State has a coefficient of 2 and Local Government has a coefficient of 1. In other words, issues involving ethnicity are likely to be more conflictual, followed by those involving State and Local Government respectively

* Community coefficients (Yi) are given in ():

Same community has a community coefficient of 1, while different community has a coefficient of 2. In other words, disagreements involving parties in the same community are likely to generate less conflict than those involving parties in different communities.

The conflict score is derived from:

$$T = X_i Y_i \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Long-standing disagreements over land and other resources among communities are always the remote cause of these conflicts, even if other immediate causes exist. A few cases will illustrate the point. In Akwa-Ibom State, the two communities of Ashanti in Ibinono-Ibom LGA and Ekpemiong in Ikono LGA clashed over a contested area of land on 24 December 1996. In the conflict in which guns, machetes and explosives were freely used, at least 12 persons were killed and property running into millions of Naira was destroyed, including 17 residential houses. This Christmas eve "war" was the renewal of a fifteen-year old conflict over land. On 9 April 1997, in Geno village near Bukuru in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, a violent conflict broke out between the indigenous Berom villagers and the immigrant Hausa farming community. The immediate cause was the killing by a Hausa farmer of a Berom boy whom he had accused of stealing from his farm. However, the more fundamental cause was a long-standing struggle over control of the land between the immigrant Hausas and the indigenous Beroms. Twenty-five people were killed in the fray, 120 others were seriously injured, while over five thousand were displaced. In July 1997, in

the recently created State of Bayelsa, a communal clash, described as being of "warfare proportions", ensued between the three communities of Beletiamia, Liama and Igbabelen. Even though the immediate reason for the conflict was given as the death of a Liama woman suspected of having been murdered by unknown people from the two other communities, there is a long history of disagreements over fishing waters among the people of the area.

One important variant of communal conflicts involves ethno-religious groups. Such conflicts have often occurred in the Northern parts of the country between Moslems and Christians. Since the North is predominantly Moslem their adversaries tend to be Christian, members of other ethnic groups, and from the Southern parts of the country. The result is that these conflicts, though primarily religious, also take on an ethnic character. In recent years, there have been major religious conflicts in Kano, Bauchi, Yola and Kaduna, among many other cities in the North. Sometimes, radical Moslem sects like the Maitatsine group have instigated these conflicts, targetting both Christians and other Moslem sects. There is little doubt that worsening social security conditions in Nigeria are leading more and more people into these revivalist and millenarian sects of both the Muslim and Christian religion. They are not only ultra-conservative in approach but accept holy wars as a divine duty. The future points to even more population displacement from ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria.

Conflicts linked to democratisation

Among the most common conflicts in Nigeria today are those linked to the process of transition from military to civilian rule. Not only has the state targetted many individual opponents; there have also been many confrontations with opposition groups. The most significant, however, are numerous conflicts associated with decentralisation of government, particularly the creation of new local administrative areas (Local Government Areas – [LGA]). The creation of new LGAs has opened a number of old inter-communal rivalries, some dating to the colonial era. The enormous power that people have come to associate with government, especially the tendency for people who occupy political position at all levels of the state to amass personal wealth and influence, has made "government", even at the very local level, a highly contested terrain. In addition, because of the tendency of governments in Nigeria to focus attention only on certain areas, generally the urban centres and administrative capitals to the neglect of the rural areas, the location of administrative capitals for any new local government area is hotly contested. This contest is particularly fierce if communities belonging to different ethnic groups are involved. There are other considerations which tend to make the location of such administrative capitals extremely contentious. For example, some local communities and/or ethnic groups see in the creation of new LGAs an opportunity to realise their dream of local self-determination from a neighbour. Others see it as

an opportunity to get back at their rivals. The situation is worsened by the manipulation of old inter-communal rivalries by politicians who aspire to office in the newly created local councils. It was therefore to be expected that the creation of 181 new LGAs in the country in late 1996, as part of the transition to democracy, would unleash a new round of communal violence across the country.

In Ondo State, the relocation of Akoko South West local government capital from Oba-Akoko to Oka, a neighbouring town, almost resulted in violence in April 1997. Oba-Akoko inhabitants fiercely protested against the move, and the women held a protest march stripped to the waist chanting war songs. The government's quick positioning of military forces in the area forestalled a potential disaster. The people of Warri were not as lucky. The relocation of the capital of the Warri-South local government, which was created in October 1996, from Ogbe-Ijoh, an Ijaw town, to Ogidigba, an Itsekiri town, provided an instant spark to light the tinder-box of a long-standing ethnic conflict between the Ijaw and Itsekiri ethnic groups in the Warri area in April 1997. After close to one month of war in which between two hundred and one thousand lost their lives on both sides, another 50 000 took refuge in neighbouring towns and states like Sapele, Bayelsa, Rivers and Ondo.

In Osun State, the Ife and Modakeke have been bitter rivals since the 19th century. This old animosity has flared into violence now and again over the past twenty years. However, the creation of a new Ife East LGA in October, 1996 and the location of its headquarters, set the stage for new carnage among these two Yoruba ethnic sub-groups. The first announcement by government located the capital of the LGA at Enuwa, which is in Ile-Ife and close to the palace of the Ooni (traditional ruler) of Ife. When the Modakekes protested to government and the capital was relocated to Modakeke by a decree, further protests by Ife followed. Subsequently, government sent the headquarters to a supposedly neutral place, Oke-Ogbo. The Modakekes continued to protest claiming that this area is in fact in Ife. What then followed was months of carnage in which at least 500 people died or were reported missing, over 100 houses razed by fire, and at least 10 000 reported to have taken refuge in nearby communities.

Early in 1997 in Benue State, the Mbagwaza and Utange communities in Ushongo Council area engaged one another in a bloody conflict, ostensibly as a result of a dispute over a locust bean tree. It began as a quarrel between persons from the two communities concerning rights to the tree. Within hours the conflict had become a full-blown war. A closer investigation however showed that the remote cause of the carnage was the recent local council election in which the candidate of the United Nigerian Congress Party, the party supported by the Utanges and widely seen as having the blessing of the military government, won against a Grass Roots Democratic Party candidate who was supported by the Mbagwaza. At the end of the "war", the two communities had been virtually

destroyed. It is estimated that in Utange alone, 400 compounds were razed to the ground and 10 000 people displaced to the neighbouring towns of Katsina-Ala and Adikpo.

Magnitude of Internal Population Displacement in Nigeria

The magnitude of population displacement in Nigeria has increased tremendously in the past few years. Not only have the contexts in which people are displaced increased, but the number of displaced people has also grown many fold. In the early years of this decade, population displacement was limited to occasional religious conflicts in the North, conflict over the distribution of rural development projects, communal boundary disputes as well as land and environmental degradation, especially soil erosion in the southern States (Ibeanu, 1992). Not only have these old contexts persisted, but new ones such as conflicts arising from crude oil production and the transition to democracy have increased the problem of population displacement in Nigeria.

It is very difficult to ascertain the exact numbers of displaced people in Nigeria. Apart from the reasons we have already mentioned in the introduction, there are very few empirical studies of such populations. Even in the widely publicised case of displaced people in the Bakassi peninsula, the oil-rich area contested by Nigeria and the Cameroons, few studies have been conducted to establish an accurate count of the populations displaced by the conflict. What we have are, therefore, mere estimates of the humanitarian crisis in this area. In addition, the fleeting character of the contexts of population displacement makes exact numbers a "moving target". For instance, many of the people displaced in the Warri conflict between the Ijaw and Itsekiri have since returned to the town following a return to normalcy, even if temporarily, in the area. As a result, the number of people displaced in that context would depend on when one starts and stops counting.

Taking all these factors into consideration, what we have tried to do is to first, limit ourselves to a number of major contexts in which people have been displaced in the last few years. Second, we compare estimates from various sources with our own direct experience, and finally locate what we consider the "best fit" estimates. This is summarised in Table 2.

Meeting The Needs Of Internally Displaced People In Nigeria

Nigeria's social security system is undoubtedly underdeveloped. The poor, unemployed and disabled are not provided for by the state. Much of the work is left for the extended family system, which has been under extreme pressure in recent times. Over the years, however, a number of non-governmental agencies have come to the aid of internally displaced persons. The traditional ones like the Red Cross and Red Crescent and the Cheshire Homes have been quite active. An array of new NGOs have also come on board. Still, resources are generally inadequate.

Table 2: Contexts and Estimates of Internally Displaced People in Nigeria

Cause of Displacement	Most affected States of the Country	Number of Displaced	Number Currently Receiving Formal Assistance
Oil Production	Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers	50 000	10 000 (20%)
Transition to Democracy	Bayelsa, Delta, Ondo, Osun	700 000	7 000 (1%)
Land and Resource conflicts	Abia, Anambra, Benue, Cross-River, Plateau, Taraba	400 000	nil
Ethno-religious conflicts	Adamawa, Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano	20 000	nil
Environmental degradation (natural and man-made e.g. soil erosion)	Abia, Anambra, Bayelsa, Imo	50 000	nil
International conflict (Bakassi Peninsula)	Akwa-Ibom, Cross-River	50 000	10 000 (20%)
Total		1 270 000	27 000 (2.1%)

Internally, displaced people are in an even more difficult situation. Although there is a Nigerian relief organisation working together with external humanitarian agencies and other NGOs, the humanitarian needs of internally displaced people remain largely uncatered for. Funds and accurate statistics are the major obstacles that are cited. But the absence of a clear-cut government humanitarian policy is a major hindrance to the provision of humanitarian assistance to internally displaced people.

Given this state of affairs, philanthropic individuals, family and other social networks continue to provide the bulk of humanitarian assistance to internally displaced people in Nigeria. Spontaneous resettlement of displaced people, assisted by friends, family, churches and ethnic group members, is a common, almost natural, hospitality offered to groups that are displaced. This explains why, for instance, there are virtually no camps or formal settlements of internally displaced people anywhere in Nigeria. In the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta area, oil companies have also been prominent in providing relief materials to people displaced by communal strife and the environmental effects of oil explora-

tion in recent times. For instance, in the conflict between the communities of Bassambiri and Ogbolomabiri in Bayelsa State over the location of the headquarters of the newly created Nembe Local Government Area, the Shell Petroleum Development Corporation provided relief materials worth one million Naira.

But in most cases, because of the inadequacy of relief materials provided, conflicts have deepened as communities accuse one another of monopolising relief materials, and the government of favouritism. For instance, regarding the Bassambiri and Ogbolomabiri conflict, new violence erupted on 28 April 1997 when the people of Bassambiri accused their rivals of "hijacking" their share of the relief materials provided by Shell. Again, in being given humanitarian assistance displaced people are treated as if they were a monolithic group. There is rarely any sense of the needs that are specific to different groups; nor is there any knowledge of the power relations prevailing within the various groups. For example, the special needs of women and children are not considered; also the fact that these are essentially patriarchal societies in which men dominate, and therefore tend to monopolise relief materials, is completely overlooked.

The major burden of meeting the needs of displaced people has therefore fallen on the extended family and communal networks. A strong sense of reciprocal obligation which family and clan members owe one another provides the impetus for the resettlement of displaced people. In many cases, people facing internal displacement simply relocate to other towns and communities to join other family and clan members. Where displacement occurs in the rural areas, people relocate to neighbouring communities, especially where they have existing ties, e.g. marriage or blood relations. Others relocate to the urban areas to join relations. Where displacement occurs in urban areas, especially where the displaced are mainly members of other ethnic groups, the trend is for the displaced to return to their "home" villages, where they either resettle permanently or remain until things normalise in their place of abode.

Conclusion

We have tried to show in this paper that social insecurity mediated by state violence (in this case by the Nigerian state) gives rise to group conflicts which in turn leads to internal population displacement. Now the problem which requires urgent attention hinges on who should protect the rights of internally displaced people in Nigeria. Is it the Nigerian state? If we consider that the state is the primary cause of population displacement, we should not place too much weight on the Nigerian state's ability and willingness to provide the necessary protection, and guarantee security, for the affected population. For a number of reasons, this cannot be otherwise. In the first place, the partisan character of the Nigerian state in conflict management means that some groups, and not others, will be protected. Second, the economic crisis facing the state at the moment means that even where it is

obliged to give protection, such protection is bound to be inadequate. Third, since the state has a proclivity to even deny the very existence of internally displaced populations, protecting them cannot be one of its priorities. Fourth, because displaced people usually lack any form of organisation, they are unable to compel the state to give them protection. Their condition is worsened by the fact that the state often prevents them from benefiting from the protection offered by the international community; and where such protection is available, the state acts as the conduit for distributing it. In fact, it monopolises and manipulates the distribution of foreign humanitarian assistance to enhance its capacity to seek obedience from the populace, especially where those concerned have been displaced as a result of demands for the restructuring of the state.

Notes

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