

Historicizing refugee Crises and Internally Displacement Of persons in Nigeria

Nwachukwu, Chituru Udo, Adeleke, Odunayo O., Nwachukwu, Joel
Nnabugwu, PhD

Department of History & International Studies Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria
Department of History & International Studies Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria
Department of Political Science and Public Administration Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State,
Nigeria

Corresponding Author: Nwachukwu, Chituru Udo

ABSTRACT: : In the recent times, internal displacement of persons have become a global menace mostly in the developing and the under-developed nations. Nigeria began to experience internal displacement of persons from the late 1960s, during the Nigerian-Biafran war that ended in 1970. Generally across the globe, internal displacement of persons is due to violence meted on citizens through terrorist acts, natural disasters, conflicts caused by internal armed conflicts, boundary disputes, religious segregations and cultism. As a result of these, the number of persons seeking refuge within and outside the shores of Nigeria, running for their dear lives and seeking asylum has geometrically increased in the recent times, coupled with the number of deaths, rape cases and abuse reported on daily basis of displaced persons. The crisis has exacerbated since 1999 when democracy was returned to Nigeria due to the nefarious activities of the terrorist groups called Boko Haram. The paper which is historically qualitative in approach used secondary sources of data. In its findings, the study found that the main causes of crisis in Nigeria are leadership maladies, poverty, inter-ethnic crisis and religious sectionalism. It therefore recommends among others that the government should provide and guarantee the safety and security of citizens through a sustainable fight against insurgencies; educate the masses so that the perpetrators of conflict will be reoriented and use every means available to give terrorism a sustainable fight. The resources also should be equally distributed to enable every citizen benefit from it.

Keywords: Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons.

Date of Submission: 01-10-2019

Date of acceptance: 16-10-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

Internal displacement of persons, trans-border crossing and people seeking asylum have become top news headlines in the recent times. No day passes without some-one some-where being displaced or running to a safe haven for their dear lives as a result of conflicts caused among numerous others, by terrorist attacks. Be it in Africa, Asia or other continents of the world, people are forced each day to leave their homes and hard earned property, to unknown places to face the unknown future with little or no shelter, food, clothing and security. This development has destabilizing, distorting and destroying effects on the economy, commerce and educational activities of the affected persons.

The history of internal displacement of persons in Nigeria is being traced to the Nigerian-Biafran war of 1967-1970, which left about ten million people displaced internally and many other millions dead at the end of the war. The rippling effects of the war led to other inter-ethnic, inter-tribal and inter religious crises across Nigeria. These crises led people to flee their homes for safety (Adesota Samson Adesola and Peters Akin Ola, 2015).

In the recent years, the number of internally displaced persons has doubled with the incessant occurrence of ethnic, religious, post-election, natural disasters and herdsmen attacks on farmers in the Middle Belt Areas of Nigeria. There have been a steady increase in the number of internally displaced persons from Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states since 2009. It has been estimated that there are over 30,000 Nigerian refugees in Northern Cameroun, 1,000 Nigerian refugees in Chad (on Lake Chads Choua Island) and more than 50,000 Nigerian refugees in the Diffa region of South East Niger. This increase in number of refugees is attributed to the incessant attacks by the Boko haram sect in the North Eastern Nigeria (UNHCR report, 2014). This sect has been described as the most blood thirsty and destructive, in terms of brutality and mindless cruelty. Coupled with the increasing scope of operation and clashes between farmers and herdsmen over grazing lands in states such as Benue, Taraba, Zamfara and parts of Kaduna which have left more than 1,000 people dead since

2015. As at the end of 2014, of the global 38 million forcefully displaced by armed conflicts and generalized violence, Nigeria accounted for at least one million (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

In sub-Saharan Africa alone, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has counted more than six million displaced persons—greater than 10 percent of the region's population. In the most recent 2018 National Human Development report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Boko Haram attacks claimed 32,570 lives in Adamawa, Yobe and Bornu States in the North-Eastern Nigeria within the period of 8 years. On the number of casualties resulting from Boko Haram attacks between 2009 and 2016, the highest number recorded in the three states was 5,350 in 2016 (Sunday Punch, 2018:3).

The reports from the then United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Antonio Guterres on June 20, 2016 had revealed that almost 60 million people have been displaced from their homes as refugees due to terrorist attacks, ethnic conflicts and persecution to seek refuge and safety elsewhere. According to him, this world-wide displacement had reached its highest level ever recorded. Counting from 2014, he noted that the number of people forcibly displaced had risen to a stunning 59.5 million compared to 51.2 million a year earlier and 37.5 million a decade ago. Moreover, the report alleged that the situation was likely to worsen still further. Globally, one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum.

While the new crisis multiply the old crises seem never to die (UNHCR 2015 Global Trends Report "World at War"). The UNHCR also detailed that the number of refugees and internally displaced persons are on the increase from one region to the other. Between 2014 and 2018, about 15 conflicts have erupted or reignited and Africa is leading the way with many countries in conflict - Central African Republic, Libya, Mali, North-Eastern Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Burundi while European and Asian countries are having the least conflicts situations. What this portend for Africa is that with so many conflicts, there will be so many displaced persons. The then Secretary-General of United Nations (UN), Mr. Ban Ki-moon giving credence to the UNHCR aver that 86 per cent of the world's refugees live in the developing world, compared to 70 per cent 10 years ago. Widespread national and ethnic strife in Africa, caused by intra-state and intra-regional armed conflicts in the Balkans, the Gulf, the Transcaucasia, South East Asia and the Caribbean, Côte d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Libya, Mali, North-Eastern Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Burundi have produced literally millions of displaced persons who have been forced to flee their home areas (Viotti & Kauppi, 2001). It is against this backdrop that this study is set to find out the origin, causes and effects of displacement of persons in Nigeria and then proffer solution.

Conceptual Clarification

The Advanced Learners Dictionary (6th edition) and the Webster dictionary and Thesaurus define refugee as a person who has been forced to leave their country or home as a result of war or for political, religious and social reasons to another country to escape persecution while displaced persons are persons who are forced to flee from their homes due to war, or famine but still remain within the borders of their own country.

Displaced persons under international law are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obligated to flee or to have cause to leave their homes or place of habitual residence in particular, as a result of or in order to avoid the effect of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and they must have either remained within their own national borders as internally displaced persons (IDPs) or they must have crossed an internationally recognized state border as refugees, hence displaced persons are of two categories: Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (Ladan, 2006).

The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (CRSR) of 1951 as amended by its 1967 Protocol, defined a refugee as a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country owing to fear; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), according to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, are "persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border." (Tajudeen et al, 2016) defined the term "refugee" as applying to any person who "...as a result of fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his (or her) nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is willing to avail himself (or herself) of the protection of that country. (Ibid, pp. 252 – 3)." Hence from the above definitions, it is obvious that the refugee and the internally displaced persons are both displaced but becomes internally displaced if he/she chooses to remain within the border of that country and a refugee if he/she chooses to go beyond the border of that country.

The movement of internally displaced persons have ravaged the African continent even in the past decades – the Biafran War in Nigeria (1967-1970); the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau (1963-1973); the Casamance Independence Movement in Senegal (1980s); the Mauritanian conflict of 1989; the terrible conflict which tore apart the River Mano countries of Sierra Leone and Liberia between 1999 and 2000; the Nigeria-Cameroun Bakassi Peninsula conflict; the post electoral crisis in Ivory Coast (2010-2011); the political crisis in Mali, the on-going Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria and natural disasters too numerous to highlight have caused a devastating effects on the politics, economy, and social well-being of the African continent (Viotti & Kauppi, 2001)

1. Historical Origin of Crisis in Nigeria

The numerous crises in Nigeria has been blamed on colonialism and the activities of the British imperialists, who for their own selfish interest, wanted a united colonial territory stretching from the arid Sahel to the Atlantic Coast. By the merger of the Southern with the Northern Nigeria in 1914, the British achieved their purpose of allowing the financially buoyant south, which generated revenue in excess of its administrative expenses, to cater for the poor North which could not finance their administration. It made practical administrative sense to have one coherent British colony rather than two. It also made sense to merge a revenue-challenged colonial territory with a prosperous colonial neighbor, so the latter can subsidize the former (Ochonu, 2014), this fusion of two large regions with different religious and political ideologies has been blamed as the major cause of political disagreements and suspicions in Nigeria since colonial times.

Northern Nigeria which was the center of a pre-colonial Islamic empire called the Sokoto Caliphate is broken into several states and three geopolitical blocs. These Muslim populations look more to the Middle East and the wider Muslim World for solidarity rather than Nigeria. The South, on the other hand, an ethnically diverse region containing many states and three geopolitical units, is largely Christian. The zone is influenced by Western and Traditional African cultures. Sandwiched within these larger group of persons are groups of ethnic and religious minorities who harbor grievances against ethnic and religious majorities they see as hegemonic oppressors. These grievances are sometimes expressed through bitter political complaints, through sectarian crises stoked by political elites and provocative media rhetoric, and through violent insurgencies causing people to run away from their homes.

The effects of arbitrary colonial unification manifested itself as irreconcilable differences of aspirations, priorities and visions in religious and ethnic antagonisms between 1947-1959 and a few years after independence in 1960. Nigerian nationalist leaders from different regional, ethnic, and religious backgrounds could not agree during the conferences and parliaments to negotiate the transition to self-rule and to map out a common future for the nation, because each group never believed on the unity brought about by the white men, and each group had a different opinion about the amalgamation put together by the British. For instance, Obafemi Awolowo described Nigeria as a patch work of a nation; Nigeria's pioneer Prime Minister, Abubakir Tafawa Belewa also described Nigeria as "a nation existing only on paper". The Sardauna of Sokoto referred to the amalgamation as "the mistake of 1914" while others refer to it as the creation of the white man. With these various opinions about Nigeria, each acted according to their understanding about the union.

These separatist pretense did not only exist between the north and the south. It penetrated the politics of the ethnic groups themselves no matter how small, for instance, within the Northern Nigeria, clashes between Muslim groups—mainly ethnic Hausa and Fulani—and Christian and traditionalist communities have become a monthly affair, with devastating consequences. In this charged environment where religion is the primordial identity, conflicts over resources, cattle, land, and political offices have often taken on a religious coloration, with Muslims pitted against Christians (Ochonu, 2014), leading to conflict situation.

Colonialism did not only cause the primordial conditions and identities that have generated tensions and conflicts between Christians and Muslims, but it made them worse. The British colonial policy of Indirect Rule, a divide-and-rule system that required sharp ethno-religious differentiation among Nigerians, made religion and ethnicity the pre-eminent markers of identity and pushed exclusionary identity politics into the political arena.

Since colonization established the basis for using identity politics as a means of accessing political and economic resources, religious differences have exacerbated political crises and have been implicated in major national conflicts such as the Nigerian civil war (1967-70), in which the Biafran separatist movement initiated by the predominantly Christian Igbo people was crushed by Nigerian government which used pogroms, blockades, and starvation to exact victory. Religious animosities only grew from that tragic episode of Nigerian history (Ochonu, 2014)

The democratic opening presented by Nigeria's successful transition to civil rule in May 1999 awakened a host of hitherto repressed or dormant political grievances. Post-transition Nigeria has continued to experience the rise of conflicts across the six geo-political zones, borne out of various agitations by a plethora of movements purportedly representing, and seeking to protect, their ethnic, political or religious interests in a

country which appears incapable of providing the basic welfare needs of its citizens. The most among these are the dreaded Boko Haram sect in the North-eastern Nigeria and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta people (MEND) and a host of others (Adesote et al, 2015). From 1999, there were waves of prevailing restiveness and forms of conflicts which seemed to be inescapable response to injustice and inequity. It is in the light of the above that the late Attorney General of the federation, Bola Ige observed in a statement that all "Nigerians are thieves, stealing the property of the Niger Delta. Nigerians have stolen the treasure of the Delta people and if care is not taken, they will face the wrath of God because it is a sin to plunder the resources of the people" (Tell, 1999:18). Hence, with the amalgamation of 1914, the diverse ethnic groups put together as one, arbitrary division of the Nigerian tribes, and inequity in the sharing of the nation's wealth, Nigeria remained in an incessant turmoil till today.

2. Causes of Displacement of Persons

Different opinions abound on the sources of conflict in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. The fall out of the Berlin conference of 1884-5 was the arbitrary allotment of the African continent into various ethnic units where most ethnic groups find themselves divided into various political units and separated within two or more countries for colonial convenience. For instance, the Yorubas are split between three colonial spheres, British Nigeria, French Dahomey, and German Togo up to 1918. Similar splits are the Wolof between Senegal and Gambia, the Hausa between Niger and Nigeria, the Ashanti between Ivory Coast (Cote D'voire) and the former Gold Coast, (Ghana) and these divisions had caused disputes over traditional land boundaries, grazing and farming rights, resource sharing and equitable distribution of political and economic power. It would be argued therefore that while colonialism brought various ethnic groups together, it also created differences and intensified rivalries, and animosities between the various groups. In some ways, it was the interest of the colonialists to sustain such rivalries as part of their divide and rule policy geared towards impeding emergence of strong nationalist movements that could eject the colonial overlords (Omagu 2001:63 & Oguagha, 1994).

The Nigerian State was ill equipped for a harsh administrative policy because by 1914 when the amalgamation of the North and South took place, the Nigerian State was practically non-existent, but the different ethnic groups had already united in the sense that the nationalities took a life of their own before the Nigerian state was established; the result of this is that the Nigerian State started off weaker than its constituent nationality groups (Onyeoziri, 2002:10-13). Awolowo, affirming the consequences of the de-federalization of the nationalities aver that "under a true federal constitution, each group however small, is entitled to the same treatment as any other group, however large. Opportunity must be afforded to each to evolve its peculiar political institutions. The present structure reinforces indigenous colonialism-a crude, harsh unscientific and illogical system" (Tell, 1999:18)

Secondly, the immediate conversion of the state from a unitary state of numerous provinces to a weak federal state of strong regions further weakened the state and since the boundaries of those regions coincided with the homes of the majority nationalities, the regions became more powerful entities than the nation-state. Hence, one can agree that the weak character of the Nigerian State and the inability of its equally weak institutions to engender order and security are responsible for these conflicts and violence in the country. The other reasons adduced are poverty, military intervention in politics, citizens apathy to the state, elitist greed and manipulations, land, space and resources, jurisdictional disputes between monarchs, disregard for cultural symbols, all put together are the causes of conflicts and displacement of persons.

The return to democracy and the competition for the new political opportunities had led to increased violence. Local competition for resources has often been aggravated by "inter-elite" rivalries over privileges such as political and public service appointments, oversight of projects and admission into schools (IPCR, 2002). Additionally, the specific tripod ethnic structure (with the Hausa, Yoruba and the Igbo constituting the three major groups) in Nigeria is particularly unstable and often in conflict. The interplay between the tripod structure and communal identities has been aggravated overtime by systematic patterns of inequalities. In particular, the Niger Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states, considered the core of the southern Niger Delta region, have been the scene of violent competition for land, politics and oil wealth. Following the economic decline of the 1990s, the region became exposed to ethnic polarization, with different groups resorting to different means to fight for their rights (Irobi, 2010). In 2005, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) was created through the merger of different armed groups. In May 2009, thousands of people were displaced in one of the clashes between government forces and MEND. The Joint Task Force (JTF) charged with restoring order in the Niger Delta launched operation "Restore Hope" in an effort to uproot militant groups. The JTF launched land and air armed strikes around the city of Warri in Delta State, and later extended its offensive to neighboring Rivers State (Reuters, 2009). Number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) reported have varied, from 1,000 people sheltering in a school and hospital in the local capital in Ogbelajoh to 10,000 residents believed to have fled and unable to return home.

Nigeria as a web of ethnic, linguistic, religious and social groupings has also not helped matters, these different ethnic groups have always been at log ahead with each other. Conflicts have been triggered by disputes over access to land, kingship, cultural, residual citizenship and broader questions of identity. Identities have been particularly important in the shaping of the political and social arena in Nigeria, both during colonial and post-colonial times. Under British colonial rule, religious, ethnic and regional differences were given prominence, which eventually exacerbated divisions between Muslims and Christians, Northerners and Southerners, and Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo groups. Such differences, particularly between people considered indigenous to an area and those regarded as settlers, became instrumental after independence in the manipulation of identities for political ends (Okpanachi, 2010).

Jakob Kellenberger, (President of the ICRC) one of the main causes of forced displacement in armed conflict remains, undoubtedly, violations of international humanitarian law – and this is where the ICRC has a specific role to play in reminding all parties to a conflict of their legal obligations.

Humanitarian law provisions of particular relevance here include the prohibitions on attacking civilians or civilian property, conducting indiscriminate attacks, starving civilians as a method of warfare, destroying objects indispensable to their survival, and carrying out reprisals against civilians and civilian property. Violations of these rules by parties to a conflict often cause civilians to flee their homes.

There are also deep-seated factors underlying this phenomenon of mass displacement. For instance, under-development, poverty, unequal distribution of wealth, unemployment, ethnic tensions, political and economic subjugation of minorities, intolerance, absence of democratic procedures, and many other factors have been cited as causes (Oduwole Tajudeen et al, 2013). Closely linked to these are the issues of natural disasters such as flooding or soil erosion. In conflict – affected states, natural disasters have complicated displacement and return patterns and have in some cases been difficult to distinguish between people displaced by conflict and other causes.

Another trend of displacement is the fact of protracted and neglected situations: Many of Nigeria's IDPs are believed to have been displaced for years due to conflicts, generalized violence and/or natural disaster and they have continued to live as IDPs without adequate standard of living because of the things they face when they return home-destruction of property, crops, hunger, poor sanitation, dilapidated infrastructure and acute ethnic and/or religious tensions, particularly in central and northern Nigeria. These adverse conditions prolong their situation of hardship, render them unable to access durable solutions following their displacement, and regain the full enjoyment of their rights (Tajudeen et al, 2013)

Government development programmes and innovations, constructions which are usually carried out in the name of security and urban renewal programmes are the other causes of displacement in Nigeria. In Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt, more than two million urban Nigerians, particularly slum-dwellers and other marginalized people have been forcibly evicted from their homes since 2000. In 2012, tens of thousands of people were forcefully evicted in Abonema and Makoko slums in Rivers and Lagos States respectively. Further demolitions took place in 2013, mostly because of development programmes. The list of the causes of displacements of persons can be endless and found everywhere around our globe. But suffice it to say that if the government is ready to take the bull by the horn, these can be checked within a short period of time.

II. FINDINGS:

From all the literature reviewed, the study finds that;

- ❖ Colonialism is forever to be blamed for the troubles of Nigeria, especially the troubles of displacement of persons because of the seed of discord among Nigerians that they planted.
- ❖ The crisis are caused by aggrieved persons who are not satisfied with themselves and the government due to the unequal distribution of wealth, unemployment, ethnic tensions, political and economic subjugation of minorities and the absence of democratic procedures.
- ❖ Conflicts had impacts on practically all aspects of livelihood such as food security, nutrition, health crisis, and total collapse in education.
- ❖ Terrorism has caused more deaths and dislocations in the north east than any natural disaster in the same area.
- ❖ The brutality of the terrorists increased with the number of casualties and as the years progressed.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, therefore, this paper has looked at the issues of refugee crisis and internally displaced persons in Nigeria and found that the seed of conflict was sown by the colonialists in their greed to control the politics and economy of Nigeria. It highlighted to a great extent the numerous causes of conflicts as the major causes of displacements as follows -ethnic conflicts, political disagreements, boundary issues, poverty, the sharing of the nation's wealth and natural disasters. This study has highlighted that these problems make the displaced persons to lose their hard earned property, crops and farmlands, dislocated and relocated from their

ancestral homes. It also established that conflicts that lead to displacements abound all over the world. This study also found that as far as humans continue to live together, with all the causes abated or unabated, the issue of ending conflicts in Nigeria in particular and the world in general will be like the mirage chase since conflicts are bound to exist.

IV. SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

- That the government should be intentional in the approach to sustainable eradication of terrorism in the affected areas. Since the military approach has failed to get the needed result, the government should have a dialogue with the aggrieved youths to know what their grievances are.
- The creation of job opportunities to engage the jobless restive youths all over the country will enable them get busy and focused.
- Ethnic politics should be replaced with a true national politics where the interest of every tribe is protected.
- The true federal system should be implemented in Nigeria to enable the minorities evolve their peculiar political institutions.
- Supports in the form of rehabilitation and reparations should be offered to the displaced persons to enable them resettle fast after returning from IDP camps.
- Education which is the key to every success should be made free at the primary and secondary levels to help re-orientate the lower class all over Nigeria
- The Nigerian Government should be people oriented and not elitist oriented to carry the masses along in the sharing of the national wealth. The wealth of the nation is just circulating among the very aged ones who got free education in their times.
- Community based counselling by community based organizations should be developed and encouraged by the government and non-governmental bodies to catch the youths young against crime of all types.

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Nwachukwu, Chituru Udo" Historicizingrefugee Crises and Internally Displacement Ofpersons in Nigeria" International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI), vol. 08, no. 10, 2019, pp. 38-44