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Forced Migration: The Displacement of Tiv People of Central Nigeria in Contemporary Times

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Abstract

In recent history, the Tiv people of central Nigeria has become an endangered specie been forced out of the present homeland of Benue, Nassarawa and Taraba, often displaced, taking refuge in displacement camps. The reasons for such a force migration are not far fetch often factored on the existing political relations between the Tiv rural populations with nomadic Fulani herdsmen backed by the Hausa-Fulani-ruling class in northern Nigeria. This paper resolved the following research questions: Why has the Tiv man become a refugee in his own country? What are the forces that seek his emasculation? What is the citizenship status of the Tiv man in central Nigeria? What efforts by state and private organizations have been put in place to redress the Tiv question? In doing so, this paper employed the use of oral interviews as well as written sources in the discussion of the Tiv forced migration and displacement in central Nigeria as from the colonial to the present.

Introduction

As far back as the colonial era, as from the beginning of the 20th century, Tiv society came under British colonisation of the northern protectorate. The Tiv population of central Nigeria were divided under different divisions and pitched against

their neighbours, the Jukuns, Alago, Fulani and Hausa as strangers and enemies, not integrated into one nationhood.

This was evident in the naming of the Tiv by Jukun elements, using the Jukun derogative term “Munchi”, an aberration of the term “mitihsi” meaning stranger. During the colonial era, the Tiv population were divided under the Wukari Division, Lafia Division, Keana Division and Tiv Division. In all these divisions, the citizenship status of the Tiv person was not properly and clearly defined but rather, the Tiv were regarded as strangers and settlers in the respective divisions. This was the beginning of the Tiv trouble, not just in the affected divisions but throughout the central Nigeria region. While the Hausa-Fulani enjoyed citizenship status in the same divisions, the status of the Tiv remained questionable. The colonial heritage and perceptions of the past were carried over into the post-independence era. As from the 1960s up to the 1980s, the citizenship status of the Tivman still hanged in the balance as a result of old prejudices and perceptions, inherited from the historic pasts.

Beginning from the 1990s, the combination of the forces of ethnic prejudice together with politicising of ethnicity, had adverse effects on the forced migration of the Tiv people out of the states of Taraba, Nassarawa and Benue with the mass displacement within the region.

Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

J.I. Inikori, in his book, *Forced Migration*, captured the experience of the export of black African slaves across the Atlantic to the New World society by using the concept of forced migration. The concept implied the use and the application of force, through the mobilization of guns and ammunitions, in the capture as well as export of black African slaves to the New World. The export of black slavery to the New World was not a voluntary exercise but one that was induced by the use of force. Subsequently, the application of brute force, the slave raids and wars, that provided the pivotal stage in the slave recruitment among black Africans, adversely, led to the mass displacement and dislocation of both local population and economic activities. The concept of forced migration as it relates to population displacement and demographic impact can be used in studying the case study of the Tiv forced migration in central Nigeria with the attending consequences of the displacement of population. Like in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, force and brutality have been employed from time to time in displacing the Tiv people out of their present home land in central Nigeria.

Mabogunje, Todaro and Authur, used the concept of migration to explain the movement of people or population both within a nation as well as across transnational lines. These scholars focused more with particular reference on the case studies of forced migration of black African population in Southern Africa and Eastern Africa during the colonial era and in the post-independence era. Black African population in

these parts of Africa, through the enactment of racial laws were forced out of their ancestral land to provide cheap labour on European farm settlements as well as mines. Large population of black Africans were displaced as well as dislocated from their traditional existing economic activities. This model also fits our discussion of the Tiv forced migration and displacement in central Nigeria.

The experience of the Tiv people of Central Nigeria which began as far back as the colonial era, through the “Ring fence Policy” can be likened to a forced migration of the Tiv out of central Nigeria which lead to the displacement of large population of the Tiv people. The ring fence theory provided the impetus for the British colonial system to forcefully curb Tiv population migration into the districts of Wukari, Keana, Awe, Obi and Lafia Divisions, thus, laid the cornerstone for understanding the conflict between what is termed indigenous population and stranger-settlers. From 1992 to the present, the Tiv population in the states of Taraba and Nassarawa have been victims of a systematic forced migration using the mobilization of guns, ammunitions and militia force by nomadic herdsman or other ethnic militia forces such as the Alago and Jukuns. Using the historic background of the slave trade and black migration in Southern Africa, the Tiv of Central Nigeria has been subjected to a similar experience in recent contemporary Nigerian history.

In theoretical terms, the forced migration or any kind of migration is often rooted in push and pull factors which are often voluntary or involuntary and often dictated by centripetal and centrifugal forces. In the case of a forced migration, the factors are usually involuntary, often factored in the use of political persecution and organized state violence against certain groups. The use of violence, the instrument of coercion is often central in a force migration experience, often characterised by institutionalized racism (ethnicity), controlled by the state or individuals.

The idea of institutionalized racism or ethnicity brings this paper discussion as to how racism, racial stereotypes and prejudice can be employed in studying the forced displacement of people across space and time. In Nigeria, what exists is ethno-centricism which is similar to institutionalized racism. In the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, racial stereotype was employed against the black African to justify his export to the New World as a chattel slave. The central idea of chattel slavery was that the black African was regarded as the biological inferior of the white races. Okon Uya pointed out that racial stereotype defined the black African as a subhuman creation, ordained by God, to be the slaves of the Europeans. This racial stereotyping provided the foundation as well as the impetus for the forced enslavement of the black African as well as the conditions of the dehumanization and degradation of the black African slave in the New World. Black African slaves were regarded as less human, only fit for servile labour and exploitation.

Racial stereotyping had deep undertones in economic factors. It is important to note that Europeans used racial stereotyping to justify black slavery; however, the roots of black slavery were deeply economic. Philip Curtins pointed out that the South Atlantic system with its plantation economy was the foundation of the slave economy. Economic factors were overriding but racial stereotyping provided the zeal as well as the moral justification for the brutal enslavement of Africans in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

In the same way, ethno-centricism alone cannot provide answers as to why the Tiv people have been subjected to near conditions of servitude in central Nigeria. There are also deep economic considerations by the Hausa-Fulani class, as well as the indigenous “populations of central Nigeria” in reducing the Tiv population to a chattel. As far back as the era of the Usman Dan Fodio jihads, the Islamic expansion viewed the other non-Muslim population such as the Tiv as infidels and pagans. This perception and worldview, reinforced, the relations of the Hausa-Fulani with the Tiv. Studies by R.A Sergeant and Palmer suggest that the Hausa-Fulani raided the central Nigerian area, the Tiv in particular, for slaves which were recruited for the Trans-Saharan export. The Tiv population were viewed as the slave reservoir, recruitment centres of the Hausa-Fulani slave drivers. As earlier on indicated, stereotyping and prejudice provided the moral justification for slavery, but the real motives were rooted in zeal to reap economic and material benefits.

The colonial era in the Northern Province reinforced the ethnic prejudice and stereotyping the Hausa-Fulani group employed against non-Muslim groups in central Nigeria. This is because the Hausa-Fulani emerged as the political ruling elites of the northern protectorate through the Emirate System, thus subjugating the Tiv population to their hold and domination.

Using the indirect rule system, the Hausa-Fulani ruling class continued the expansionism of Islam into central Nigeria both by peaceful and militant approaches. Islamic expansionism, at the expense of the Tiv population in central Nigeria, had both spiritual and real economic benefits for the ruling political class of the Sokoto caliphate.

Ethnic hate and prejudice based upon ethno-centricism, provided an important cornerstone in explaining the conflicts between the Tiv and their neighbours like the Alago and Jukuns in Central Nigeria. The Jukun and Alago have often employed the indigene-settler dichotomy syndrome in pushing out the Tiv from the states of Taraba and Nassarawa. Charles Jacobs, Iorwuese Hagher and Avav Terlumun pointed out that these past colonial policies, re-enacted in the present by the politicization of ethnicity in central Nigerian politics, provides the basis in the explanation of the forced migration and displacement of Tiv population out of Taraba and Nassarawa since 1992 to the present.

However, despite the use of ethno-centricism, the fundamental motives are economic and material. Justin Apev shows that the underdeveloped states of the rural population as well as the traditional means of farming and grazing, in addition to pressure exacted on land are the fundamental explanations of the ethnic communal crises experienced in the central Nigerian states of Taraba, Benue and Plateau. After all, racial and ethnic prejudices, like the apartheid system in South Africa, have their deep roots in economic factors.

Tiv Migration and Displacement in Central Nigeria; 1992 to the Present

According to Avav, Terlumun, the Tiv people migrated and settled in the central Nigerian states of Taraba, Nassarawa and Benue as far back as the 16th and 17th centuries. This was long before British colonial rule that began in the area as from 1906. The Tiv were spread side by side with the population of Alago, Jukun, Etulo, Hausa as well as Nupe elements. As far back as the pre-colonial era, Tiv clans of the Sherev, Nongov and Utyondo had spread and established settlements at locations such as Keana, Awe, Obi, Lafia and Wukari in present day Taraba and Nassarawa states.

During the pre-colonial era, Tiv relations with Alago and Jukun was cordial, peaceful and friendly as the Tiv often allied with the Alago against Hausa –Fulani incursion in the region. At Abinsi, Tiv allied with the Jukun in the fight to protect the Jukun enclave of Wukari from attacks and domination of the Hausa-Fulani jihadist expansion. In Lafia, evidence by colonial anthropologist, indicates that Tiv population had settled alongside with the Koro, Gwandara, Eggon and Beri Beri as far back as the pre-colonial era. The Tiv entered into series of partnership with the Koro and Eggon in the fight against Hausa-Fulani expansion in the area.

British colonial rule as from the beginning of the 20th century had both positive and negative impact on the Tiv migration, expansion and settlement in the districts of Lafia, Keana, Awe, Wukari, Obi, etc. On one hand, the British imperial system attempted to integrate Tiv population in these districts through the appointment of Tiv representatives in the districts of Keana, Lafia and Wukari. However, such attempts at the political recognition and representation of the Tiv people into the expanding political units of these districts were opposed by the Hausa-Fulani elites who often instigated the Alago and Jukuns against the Tiv. This was because, overtime, Alago populations embraced Islam as a religion and became more affiliated and sympathetic to the cause of the Hausa-Fulani. The same thing also happened to some Jukun elements who were converted to Islam. Through the Emirate systems of Lafia, Awe, Keana, Obi, etc, Alago and Jukun elements were instigated and mobilized against Tiv population resident in these districts.

Furthermore, ethnic groups like the Alago, Jukun, Egbira were welded together in a common fraternity called the Kwararafa confederacy. The idea of the confederacy

reminded these ethnic groups that the Tiv population were intruders who had expanded and occupied their land and territory. The land question thus became very pivotal in the rising tension and hostility between the Tiv populations with their neighbours in central Nigeria.

To further compound the perception of the Tiv as “intruders” or “strangers” or settlers in the affected areas, British colonial policy as Jacobs pointed out through the “ring fence policy” encouraged the Alago and Jukuns to curb a new wave of Tiv migration that began as from the 1920s. The ring fence theory encouraged the use of the perception of the Tiv as settlers-stranger in which the Tiv were not viewed as citizens of the affected areas but intruders. This was the beginning of the politicization of ethnicity by the political class in Nassarawa and Taraba states against the Tiv exploiting land and population variables.

Therefore, beginning from the 1930s and the 1940s, there was the gradual beginning of skirmishes and hostilities between Alago element and the Tiv as well as the Jukuns and the Tiv. These hostilities, factored upon the land question, were often politicized by the political elites of the Alago and the Jukuns who perceived the Tiv population as their competitors in the share of political and economic resources. This growing hostility was a kind of xenophobia in which there were elements of suspicion and mistrust as to who will dominate, by sheer population, the politics and economy of the central states.

As from the 1960s, the emergence of partisan politics with political participation in Nigeria changed a little tone of the hostilities between the Tiv and their neighbours. The formation and emergence of the United Middle Belt Congress by Joseph Tarkaa united all the minority ethnic groups in Central Nigeria against the ruling Northern People’s Congress led by the Sarduna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello. The UMBC became a vehicle for opposition politics unifying the Tiv people together with their neighbours such as the Jukuns, Alago, Eggon into a common bond of solidarity. However, the NPC working through the Emirs and chiefs adopted a divide and rule tactic which led to the outbreak of hostilities within the region. The era of minority political solidarity did not last.

As from the 1970s up to the 1990s, following the creation of the states of Taraba, Benue and Nassarawa in central Nigeria has witnessed one of the highest peaks in the escalation of ethnic hostilities against the Tiv population in central Nigeria by their neighbours the Alago and the Jukun. In 1993, a communal crisis broke out in the Keana and Awe Emirates where Tiv population were compelled on a forced migration and also were killed in thousands. The conflict which began by the killing of the district ruler of the Alagos, sparked off the killings and forced migration of Tiv population out of the districts of Keana, Awe, Obi and Lafia of Nassarawa State. Some Alago elements arising from the land question, embarked on a militant and aggressive campaign of

driving out the Tiv population from Nassarawa State. In what was referred to as “operation go back to Benue State”, several Tiv towns and settlements in Keana and Awe as well as lives and property were destroyed. In an estimate put together by Human Rights Commission, in the crisis involving the forced migration and killings of Tiv people in central Nigeria, not less than three million people have been affected since 1993 to 2003. There is no gainsaying the fact that feelings of xenophobia played an important role in the killing of the Tiv population at Lafia, Keana and Awe in both the 1993 crisis as well as in the 2012, 2013, and 2014 crisis. The 2012, 2013 and 2014 crisis was a combination of nomadic Fulani herdsmen attack on Tiv population at Keana, Obi and Awe. These attacks led to the internal displacement of Tiv population within Nassarawa and Benue states. Internally displaced camps were established at Agyaragu, Udei, Daudu, Yelewata and Makurdi towns respectively. The refugee crisis became endemic to a point where the former President, Goodluck Jonathan ordered a military intervention in suppressing the crisis in 2014.

In Taraba States, the same xenophobic feelings led to the displacement of Tiv population from Wukari and Jalingo by Fulani herdsmen. To contain the attacks, the Tiv and Jukun population formed an alliance which provided a solid defence against the Fulani nomadic invasion. However, a substantial Tiv population was displaced by the crisis leading to the establishment of displacement camps at Zaki-Biam, Katsina-Ala, Gboko, etc.

There is a great deal of controversy as to why nomadic herdsmen of the Fulani extraction would mobilize military force thus leading to the mass displacement of Tiv population in central Nigeria. The militancy of Fulani nomadic herdsmen is not just restricted to the Tiv people alone but an episode which cut across the entire central Nigerian belt. As argued earlier, the nomadic Fulani aggression maybe a manifestation of the age long traditional belief that peoples of central Nigeria are the servant class of the ruling Hausa-Fulani class in the north. It is therefore, the manifest destiny of the Hausa-Fulani to appropriate the economic and political resources of the Central Nigeria people at national, state and local government levels. This view seems plausible in explaining the nomadic Fulani insurgency in central Nigeria against Tiv, Eggon, Biron and several other groups. But as earlier argued, all racial and ethnic prejudice and stereotyping have roots often deeply rooted in concrete economic and material gains. It is the position of this paper that the Fulani nomadic conflict with the Tiv represents an attempt to displace the Tiv people in both demographic and economic terms. The nomadic expansionism may also reflect an important phase in Islamic expansion in central Nigeria, although, this is contestable. What has happened as a result of the nomadic incursion has been the forced displacement of Tiv population into internally displaced settlements. Iorwuese Hagher has demonstrated in his book *Refugee in One's own Country* that despite the federal might of Nigeria, the constitution and the liberty it confers, the Tiv people of central Nigeria have been reduced to destitute, as refugees

in their own country. This kind of development is strange in modern and civilized democratic nations of the world.

Against this backdrop, between 1992 to 2014, the Tiv population of central Nigeria witnessed mass displacement due to a forced migration imposed by Fulani-nomadic expansion as well as the revival of the Kwararafa confederacy hate against the “Tiv Intruders”. Statistics below shows the displacement of Tiv population as found in internally displaced camps as well as the loss of property by the Tiv population.

Table 2: Showing Internally Displaced Population of Tiv in Nassarawa State

Agyaragu centre 2013-2014		Kadoroko centre 2013-2014		
Men	Women	Children	Men	Women
5,000	8,000	6,000		8,000

Table 2: Benue State

Makurdi Centre 2013-2014		Guma Centre 2013-2014			
Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children
30,000	50,000	35,000	40,000	60,000	28,000

Table 3: Showing distribution of refugee materials

Nassarawa centres of Agyaragu and Kadoroko

Mattresses	Detergents	Rice	Flour	Cooking oil
2000	500 cartons of detergents	800 bags	60bags	10 gallons of cooking oil

Table 4: Showing distribution of refugee materials

Centers of Makurdi and Guma

Mattresses	Detergents	Rice	Flour	Cooking oil
1000	1000 cartons of detergents	500 bags	50bags	20 gallons of cooking oil

In the internally displaced camps at Kadoroko, Agyaragu in Nassarawa State, the distribution of relief materials was carried out mostly by philanthropic organisations and the national emergency centre as well as other disaster, aid and relief agencies of the state, federal and international governments. The figures captured in table 1, 2, 3 and 4 were field survey carried out by the researcher of this paper in the crisis involving the forceful displacement of Tiv population in the crisis of 2012, 2013 and 2014 respectively. The displacement of Tiv population in these crisis was of two

fold; that of Nomadic herdsmen and that of the Alago militant aggression against the Tiv.

It is important to note that the figures in the tables may not correspond with that of official records of state and national institutions. The reason for such a disparity is not farfetched in that the distribution of relief materials to displaced persons suffered a number of setbacks and shortfalls namely; first, it was often politicized along ethnic lines with some ethnic groups discriminated upon in the sharing of such relief materials, secondly, relief materials were often delayed and came late; thirdly, sharp practices on the part of government officials denied internally displaced persons' access to relief materials. Fourthly, relief materials became a business for political elites to amass wealth. Arising from these contradictions, even refugees, officials' records are often a distortion of what reflects the reality as what existed in the field.

Therefore, collecting field data, for the historian is the most viable approach to cross-check official versions of the distribution of relief materials to the internally displaced camps. What the figures shows is that the forced migration of the Tiv in Nassarawa and Benue, caused by involuntary forces, displaced thousands and millions of the population of the Tiv. In addition, the displaced persons, through the shortcoming of the state, were not properly rehabilitated or integrated during and after the crisis. The challenges of internally displaced persons are of three major folds; rehabilitation, reconciliation and integration. The reason for this apparent failure is obvious. First, states like Nassarawa often deny the Tiv of citizenship right in the state. This is also applicable in Taraba state. Secondly, the selfish and nefarious politics of the political elites who exploit crisis to their advantage, not genuinely interested in the collective wellbeing of their people.

Conclusion

There has been a systematic, well organised, orchestrated forced migration of Tiv people, by state and individual action, in Nassarawa, Taraba and Benue, forcing the Tiv people out into internally displaced camps. This is evident in the history of the area beginning from the colonial era and into the post-independence era. The central issues in the forced migration of the Tiv and subsequent displacement are factored upon political hate, ethno-centricism and institutionalized genocide. In addition, the contradictions of underdevelopment, the conflict between what is tradition and what is modern, in the productive forces of the central Nigeria people, are the roots of explaining the forced migration.

National governments, state and individuals, instead of implementing policies aimed at the rehabilitation, reconciliation and integration of the internally displaced persons, have rather, exploited the crisis to their own advantage. This negative approach to the management of the crisis opens up new areas of conflict rather than

healing up the wounds of the conflict or close up the areas of conflict. While ethnicity and religion are normal phenomenon endowed by creation, the politicization of these social variables is often dangerous and destructive in the challenge of nation building. This is the challenge of the modern Nigerian state, how to management and engineer the diversity and complexity of her ethnicity and religion. Nigeria is not an exception of a multi-facet ethnic society but the challenge is how to harness the ethnic factor, or mobilize the ethnic factor to enhance national development and transformation.

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