

SAMPLE PROPOSAL

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TITLE OF YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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Background and Literature review :In my MA thesis titled “Negotiating Homeland and Return among Female Bakassi Refugees in Cross River State” (Azubuike 2018), I argued that home is a place of preference where an individual or group of people are comfortable; hence people should be consulted on their place of choice in the event of relocation because displacement can be devastating. The research posits that the notion of home is linked to political agency, which explains why Bakassi people, irrespective of their displacement and dispossession, find ways to maintain their political identity as Nigerians. The Bakassi refugees are displaced Nigerians who were forcibly evicted from their ancestral land by Cameroonian gendarmes after the International Court of Justice in 2008 ruled in favour of Cameroon in its dispute with Nigeria concerning ownership of the Bakassi Peninsula, a boundary located between both countries (Tarlebba and Baroni 2010: 199). Border communities often choose their nationalities based on convenience as they try to decide which nationality is most beneficial to them. Madsen and Naerssen's (2003:64) argue that "borders are an integral part of identities since identities are not static but always in a state of flux as it is continuously being deconstructed and reconstructed." Similarly, Anderson (1991) used the term ‘Imagined Communities’ to describe nationalities and argues that borders between countries signify different identities on both sides of the borders. The fear of being a minority with no political backing and a strong grounding in Cameroon is a tougher fate than remaining Nigerians who are displaced but enjoy some measure of relevance despite their displacement. The research being proposed will study the implications displacement has on the Bakassi refugees politically, since as a result of their dislocation the host community contests elections and take up political positions, which ordinarily were meant for the Bakassi people (Azubuike 2018).

The Nigerian Government resettled the Bakassi refugees in New Bakassi, an area that was carved out of Akpabuyo Local Government Area. The name of the new place 'Bakassi' was retained to give the people a sense of home. This can be understood in the context of Hammond's (2004) place-making concept which captures the social and symbolic process of emplacement, i.e. how a people mark a place as being their own by inscribing their identity and historical existence on it. Furthermore, Turton (2005) has argued that "how people experience a place, and how it becomes inextricably bound up with their social and personal identities is a product of social activity". Hence, the place is produced through spatial practices and representations, with human beings as active agents in its construction (Turton 2005: 275). The possibility and very process of place-making go to show the fluidity and mobility of home. It debunks the idea that home is fixed or static.

A pilot study showed that the Bakassi people previously had a local government to themselves. However, in the New Bakassi Local Government Area (LGA) they share the LGA with members of their host community, a situation that appears to place the Bakassi people at a disadvantage. A part of the New Bakassi LGA is referred to as Internally Displaced Person Camp (IDP Camp). Ramadan (2011) argues that the destruction of Nahr al-Barid camp in Lebanon in 2007 was a painful experience for the 35,000 people who saw the place as home. He observes that the camp is a meaningful space to mobilise themselves for political reasons. A preliminary visit to Bakassi refugee camps revealed that violence against the Bakassi refugees has become frequent and routinized and Bakassi men have continued to protest violence against their women. The pilot study showed that violence is employed by the host community to suppress the political ambitions of the Bakassi people and destabilize them. Recently a fight broke out between the Bakassi refugees and the host community. The Bakassi refugees were harassed by the host community because they farmed on the land; the refugees whose patience had been frustrated by incessant attacks retaliated by fighting. The result was a deeper crisis and the host community forcefully arrested and detained the Bakassi people. This speaks to Horgan(2012) findings on strangership as it impacts solidarity and inequality. Bakassi people have continued to experience violence in several ways. Firstly, they were forcefully evicted by Cameroonian gendarmes, a breach of the Green Tree Agreement (GTA), a document which was signed by both countries after the ICJ ruling. The GTA states that Cameroon should not evict the residents of the peninsula. Secondly, in their new space, they continue to experience violence daily as they are bullied and attacked by their host community (Bakassi Youths Leader 2019).

The Bakassi refugee issue has recently been complicated by the influx of over 800 displaced people from the Ambazonia, the Anglophone Cameroon separatist region, into the refugee camp. Their resettlement in the region is seen by the locals as an additional crisis in an already troubled region of Nigeria. The Bakassi internally displaced persons have thus been calling the attention of the international community to their predicament. Their displacement put into question their political agency and their identity, it appears they are losing their political

rights and privileges of being Nigerians. Gwadabe et al (2018) elucidate that Forced displacement has to do with “the involuntary movement of people from their habitual place of residence to a location within their country of nationality; or across an internationally recognized border”. These people who were formally landowners have now become tenants elsewhere. A pilot study showed that since they have scarce resources, they are unable to take up political positions meant for them. The political implication of this is that they do not control their resources, and are unable to take part when making decisions that will affect them. With regards to the politics of identity, we are talking about political interest that leads to the construction of identity. Identities are not inherent, but they are constructed. A group of people can be constructed as dangerous because they constitute a threat to the current political leadership.

This research is interesting because it juxtaposes the issues of homeland and citizenship. Why do the people feel they are refugees yet they are in their home country? They are sometimes called refugees, and it is clear that they are technically in the home country but disconnected from their homeland. This is a discussion of how modernity speaks about the importance of citizenship and less about the importance of homeland for Africans. I would explore the term refugees because legally they are not refugees, yet, why do they refer to themselves or see themselves as refugees. Identity is not a question of who a person is, but also how they are perceived. This study looks at the contradiction of globalization, as well as the fluidity and mobility which it promises using the case of the Bakassi refugees. The porosity of the border, the vulnerability of the Nigeria Delta Area which is the region where Bakassi is located, the influx of other refugees from English-speaking Cameroon, amongst other factors, make this study very important.

Research Problem: There is an increasing preoccupation in scholarship with analysis of the impact of the International Court of Justice’s ruling on the Nigerian/Cameroon disputes which was in favour of Cameroon (see "The Bakassi Dispute" by Justice Mulluh Mbuh 2004). Another body of works has attempted an analysis of European conquest and division of Africa contrary to existing traditional boundaries which disrupted the organisation of kingdoms and communities along tribal/ethnic lines (Jadesola 2012). Scholars have also focused on the issues surrounding the dispute generated by the colonial construction of borders by greed and selfish interest using the divide and rule model (Inuagbuna 2017; Ogaboah et al., 2010), but little attention has been paid to the impact of displacement on the people politically in their lived experience as citizens of present-day nation-states. Hence, this study will focus on researching the impact of the displacement on the Bakassi indigenes and the political coping strategies which they employ to ensure their privileges as Nigerians are not stripped off and to protect themselves from being stateless.

Research Questions: This study will be guided by the following questions: How has the experience of dislocation impacted the political agency of the Bakassi displaced persons? How do Bakassi displaced persons negotiate their identity in the face of political exclusion in the New Bakassi? What political and economic strategies have Bakassi displaced persons evolved to stake a claim to a place for themselves in the New Bakassi?

Justification: This study is important because it is a useful contribution to the literature on contested/political citizenship, identity, politics of space and international politics. The proposed work would contribute to knowledge by offering a better understanding as to how the politicization of refugee issues is related to the Bakassi context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK : Appadurai, outlining a theory of the “Production of Localities” in his general theory of globalization, explains that localities are a product of social, cultural and political contingencies. They do not just spring up but are created to counter preexisting neighbourhoods. To understand locality, we must understand the history of their emergence and how they exist in terms of the relations between groups in a neighbourhood. The host community is confronted with what Appadurai (2006) calls ‘the anxiety of incompleteness’, which can be triggered by the influx of minority ethnic groups

METHODOLOGY The study area is New Bakassi Local Government Area of Cross River State. The study will employ a qualitative research methodology, specifically ethnography. This would grant the researcher an ability to identify and examine the political and economic implications of displacement on the Bakassi people and analyze to what extent humanitarian interventions for the refugees have caused the members of the host community to identify as refugees. Data will be collected through the qualitative methods of data collection. These techniques include direct observation, in-depth interviews with informants, informal conversations, and Focus Group Discussions. In-depth interviews will be conducted with thirty Bakassi refugees selected through purposive sampling and snowball method in the refugee camps, as well as with thirty members of the local community.

REFERENCES

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