

Research Article

Choosing to Stay: A New Perspective on Immobility Amidst Adversity

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Current migration studies inadequately explore the staying behaviour and experiences of those in conflict or disaster-stricken regions, especially those who choose voluntary immobility. This paper introduces the 'Resilience-Accessibility Framework', a novel framework developed by integrating existing frameworks with insights from a qualitative study in a conflict-affected region. The study involved focus group discussions with 54 participants living in communities exposed to violent conflicts in the Middle Belt of Nigeria. The framework serves as an analytical tool for exploring the staying behaviour of individuals or community members who stay put amidst adversities. Additionally, it broadens the scope of (im)mobility categories to include a broader range of migratory experiences. By introducing this framework for studying immobility, this paper enriches academic discourse by offering analytical tools for exploring immobility in adversity. Comprehending people's (im)mobility amidst adversity requires assessing their agency and (in)actions, resilience, accessibility to resources, and the structural conditions prevailing in their environment.

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Introduction

The perception of migration as a normative aspect of human life has led to a bias towards non-movement, resulting in scholarly resources predominantly focusing on studying mobility over immobility (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Schewel, 2020). Immobility is the continuous and habitual act of residing in a specific location at a particular time, whether for short or long durations, within a country or across international borders (Schewel, 2020, p. 329). The 'mobility bias' (Schewel, 2020) is

pervasive in ‘forced migration’ and ‘refugee studies’, even though more people remain in conflict zones than is widely assumed (Biehler, 2023).

Despite the ‘compelling call to investigate immobility’, the decision-making processes guiding the choices of individuals to stay put rather than migrate have garnered scant scholarly attention (Bogdan, 2024, p. 2). Furthermore, within immobility studies, this gap is exacerbated by an overwhelming focus on individuals and non-inclusion of non-Western perspectives (Salazar, 2021, p. 16). Salazar (2021, p. 16) critiques the ‘Western-centric’ focus of scholarship on immobility and argues for including non-Western perspectives to enrich our comprehension of lived and physical aspects of immobility. Consequently, investigating immobility, particularly at the community and collective levels, in areas where community members are indigenous and opt to remain, especially in regions affected by violent conflicts, adverse climatic conditions, and natural disasters, promises to bridge these research gaps.

However, a more pressing gap identified in the literature is the absence of a theoretical framework or model for analysing people’s staying behaviours (Stockdale and Haartsen, 2018; Mallick, Priovashini and Schanze, 2023). As Mallick, Priovashini and Schanze (2023, p. 1) pointed out, ‘So far, there exists hardly any conceptual and methodical guidelines to study environmental nonmigration’. Various cultural, psychological, and emotional aspects affect people’s ability to move or stay put in ways that often do not seem logical or ‘defy generalisation’ (Adams and Kay, 2019, p. 130). Nonetheless, we must have a blueprint used in studying the staying behaviour in a conflict-affected environment that could serve as a starting point for exploring these (im)mobility processes elsewhere. In response, this paper addresses this gap by introducing the ‘Resilience-Accessibility Framework’.

The new framework integrates insights from existing frameworks and concepts and is enriched by contextual realities and empirical findings from a study with 54 participants across seven focus groups in different rural communities in the Nigerian Middle Belt. The Middle Belt region, or North Central region of Nigeria, is the most affected part of Nigeria by the violent conflicts between these two groups over access to and control of land, water, and other agricultural resources, which have left millions displaced, thousands dead, and entire communities destroyed (Ajala, 2020; Nwankwo, 2023; Olumba, 2024). The violent conflicts are still ongoing; a cursory search of ‘killings in Benue, [insert the month and year]’ will generate results of the killings for the week of your search.

Based on a combined deductive-inductive approach (Park, Bahrudin and Han, 2020), this paper develops the Resilience-Accessibility Framework as a tool for analysing (im)mobility in adversity,

especially in locations where those involved are indigenous to the land they inhabit. The aspiration-capability framework, a seminal model in migration studies, initially underpinned this study due to its incorporation of structure and agency in the analysis of immobility, making it suitable for exploring and analysing factors that influence immobility. However, it later became apparent that the aspiration-capability framework was not adequately suited for examining the migratory experiences of communities in conflict-affected areas, specifically the factors that sustain their immobility in conflict. To address these limitations, the Resilience-Accessibility Framework was developed as an adaptation of the aspiration-capability framework.

This paper contributes to the study of (im)mobility by presenting the Resilience-Accessibility Framework, which could facilitate studies within local communities exposed to adversities where the inhabitants are indigenous populations who desire to stay put. The fundamental premise of the framework suggests that understanding people's staying behaviour in times of adversity requires considering multiple factors, including the level of their resilience capacities, agency, and accessibility to specific resources, as well as the influence of structures and adversities on their decision-making process. Additionally, this framework presents broadened (im)mobility categories that capture a spectrum of migratory experiences not accounted for by existing categories, thus illuminating previously neglected dimensions of (im)mobility.

The subsequent sections of this paper are structured as follows: Initially, there will be an overview of the prevailing theories and frameworks within migration studies; after that, I provide a detailed description of the methodological approach utilised in this research. Subsequently, I conceptualise the components of the proposed framework, laying the groundwork for its development. The ensuing section introduces the framework, elucidating the empirical data that underpins its formulation. It explicates the inclusive (im)mobility categories, and some excerpts from the study's respondents will illustrate the contextual realities. Thereafter is the conclusion.

Understanding Immobility: The Scope of Migration Theories in Conflict Settings

Despite the plethora of frameworks available, there remains a lack of unified understanding as to why some individuals migrate and others do not, as well as how affected societies perceive and interpret these phenomena and their wider implications (Castles, 2010, p. 1566). This knowledge gap becomes

particularly significant regarding the migratory experiences of those who choose to remain in locations facing crises (Blondin, 2021, p. 291; Erdal, Mjelva and Tollefsen, 2023; Mallick, Priovashini and Schanze, 2023).

Scholars argue that functionalist theories of migration, such as the push-pull model and Neoclassical migration theories, posit that migration is motivated by the desire to maximise income and overcome economic opportunity deficits (de Haas, 2014; de Haas, Miller and Castles, 2020). These theories depict individuals as 'passive actors' primarily responding to economic factors, thus limiting their agency (Richmond, 1993; de Haas, 2014, p. 17), and overlook the influence of non-economic factors on migratory decisions and experiences (de Haas, 2010, 2014; Schewel, 2015, 2020).

Historical-Structural Approaches to the study of migration such as the dependency and world system theories have offered determinants of migration (Arango, 2000; de Haas, 2014). Historical-structural approaches to studying migration suggest that international migration is influenced by global hegemonic and economic structures and processes, which create conditions for the flow of people between the South and North (Massey *et al.*, 1993). The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) suggests that households, not individuals, make migration decisions as a risk-sharing strategy to diversify income and reduce risks (Arango, 2000; de Haas, Miller and Castles, 2020). While NELM explains why some family members migrate while others stay behind, it does not account for the desire to stay amidst adversity. Migration theories are plentiful; Massey (2015, p. 6) used over five theories to describe Mexican migration across two decades; those theories, likewise functionalist and historical-structural approaches (Arango, 2000; de Haas, 2014), inadequately address structure and agency in explaining migration determinants.

Only recently, it was impossible to combine the concepts of *structure* and *agency* in migration theories to analyse the migratory process (Bakewell, 2010; de Haas, 2014, p. 22). By arguing that people exercise their own decisions (*agency*) in deciding whether to migrate and acknowledging that migration involves not only income maximisation but also structural constraints (*structure*) – such as physical or border barriers – which can impede movement, the Aspiration-Capability Framework addresses the issues associated with the duality of structure and agency that extant theories struggle with (Carling and Schewel, 2018; Mata-Codesal, 2018).

The Aspiration-Capability Framework (de Haas, 2021; Schewel, 2022), evolving from the Aspiration-Ability Framework by Carling (2001), provides an analytical distinction between the desire (aspiration) to migrate and the capability to realise this ambition; it theoretically explains the

variables that influence migration desires and the constraints that prevent the actualisation of migration (Carling and Schewel, 2018; Mata-Codesal, 2018). The Aspiration–Capability Framework posits that immobility is either due to a lack of capability to move, that staying put is a voluntary choice, or that individuals have acquiesced to immobility (Schewel, 2020, p. 338).

The Aspiration–Capability Framework, a seminal contribution, is gaining scholarly attention and application. However, its use in understanding migration processes in crisis-affected areas remains underexplored. The framework lacks the analytical tools to fully articulate the migratory experiences of those who decide to stay, including their capacity to adapt during adversity. There is a lack of insight into why people in these challenging environments might choose not to migrate and how they manage their daily lives amidst such adversity (Biehler, 2023; Erdal, Mjelva and Tollefsen, 2023). Previous calls have highlighted the need to explore mechanisms influencing and sustaining immobility in conflict environments (Esparza *et al.*, 2020, p. 246; Marston, 2020, p. 1999). There is a greater emphasis on displaced persons in secure areas, such as Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, resulting in the exclusion of those in host communities (Bakewell, 2008; Lubkemann, 2008; Chatty and Marfleet, 2013, p. 8), which leads to skewed findings (Bakewell, 2000, p. 370; Chatty and Marfleet, 2013, p. 8). Consequently, such neglect hinders our understanding of why and how people choose to stay put in adversity.

Apart from security concerns (Biehler, 2023), which can hinder research in disaster areas, Mallick, Priovashini and Schanze (2023) argue that a significant barrier is the absence of frameworks for studying ‘environmental non-migration’, which extends to various forms of immobility in adversity. Understanding factors that drive and sustain immobility in adversity enriches knowledge and policymaking; nuanced insights into migration determinants in conflict settings are crucial to address better the challenges of those affected, whether they stay or migrate (Erdal, Mjelva and Tollefsen, 2023). The necessity for analytical tools to understand the factors driving and sustaining people’s pursuit of immobility in adversity led to the creation of the *Resilience–Accessibility Framework*.

Methods

The paper draws from a comprehensive doctoral study conducted in May 2022 with agrarian farmers living in conflict-affected communities in Benue and Nasarawa states in the Nigerian Middle Belt; it involved seven focus groups with 54 respondents in conflict-affected communities. This paper employs a multi-site approach to data collection to investigate the staying behaviour of sedentary

farmers in three categories: I conducted focus group discussions with indigenes and displaced persons in the ¹O community and with returnees in IG; as such, the O community is a host community for people displaced by the violent conflicts from nearby communities in the Agatu local government. The IG community is situated in the Nasarawa-Eggon local government area of Nasarawa State. The violent conflicts affect both the O community and the IG community.

These communities are affected by ongoing eco-violence² or conflicts between sedentary farmers and nomadic Fulani herders across many villages in the Sahel of Africa. A purposive sampling research method (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016) was adopted to select a community of sedentary farmers whose community members have experienced severe eco-violence. The reason for selecting farmers as the focus of this study was their sedentary nature, which contrasts with the mobile nature of the nomadic herders.

I inquired about their migratory experiences and how the conflict influenced them. Each session lasted about 50 minutes, and the men and women were separated into different groups. Pidgin English was the medium of the discussions, and for confidentiality reasons, I anonymised the names of the towns. The respondents were assigned numbers instead of their names, and informed oral and written consent was obtained. The Ethics Committee of the Royal Holloway, University of London approved the study.

This paper was analysed using the thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The analysis began deductively with the aspiration-capability Framework as a foundation aimed at answering the research question, which was, in a nutshell, to understand the factors that influence and sustain staying behaviour in conflict settings. According to the aspiration-capability framework, people's staying behaviour or immobility ambitions result either from their inability to move or their voluntary decision to remain, or they acquiesce to stay. I used this framework to guide my study's methodical strategy with the hope that it would explain the contextual realities and empirical data I generated from the field.

The inability of the aspiration-capability framework to capture the migratory process associated with the measures people adopt to sustain their chosen staying behaviour in the context of crisis migration necessitated adopting an inductive approach to examine the specific cases of the studied community members to identify and unpack patterns related to their lived experiences and migratory decisions.

This inductive approach led to the emergence of the framework, which effectively took into account the specific circumstances surrounding the measures that community members implement to maintain their stability in an environment impacted by conflict despite the lack of support from the state. The framework was termed the 'resilience-accessibility framework' due to the significant influence that access to certain resources and resilience capacities have on people's agency in making migratory decisions, especially in the face of structural factors and adversity within their environment.

The Resilience-Accessibility Framework: Conceptualisation

According to de Haas (2021), the intrinsic dimension of migration pertains to the freedom of mobility or immobility as it relates to people's well-being. This freedom allows individuals to derive well-being from the choice to migrate or stay put, regardless of whether actual movement transpires; what is paramount is the awareness of the freedom to either stay or relocate according to one's volition (de Haas, 2021, p. 20). As observed in the study locations, immobility is correlated with the intrinsic dimensions of migration, as outlined by (de Haas, 2021). The respondents perceive immobility as a the 'freedom' to choose where to live, where they believe is best suited to them. When individuals are compelled to leave due to war or distant work, they feel deprived of a vital 'freedom', which can detrimentally affect their well-being (de Haas, 2021, pp. 20–22).

In addition, de Haas (2021, p. 21) posits that the instrumental dimensions of migration encompass the utility derived from migration. To the respondents, the notion of remaining in their villages, rooted in a sense of belonging and access to a level of comfort unattainable elsewhere, aligns with the instrumental dimensions of immobility. To the respondents, displacement endangers their livelihoods, identity, and sense of place, leading them to prefer immobility over mobility; therefore, the propensity of community members to desire to remain puts a cap on *aspiration*.

Accessibility

In areas exposed to adversity, such as the Middle Belt, the decision to stay or migrate is often influenced by resource accessibility, particularly access to transportation, firearms, human resources, communication, and money, which significantly influence migratory decisions. Understanding the barriers or opportunities related to resource accessibility is crucial for analysing their impact on decisions to stay immobile.

An excerpt from the focus group underlines the importance of accessibility to these resources:

Moderator: when the attacks happen, what's the nature like?

#2-OIU-Y: Some times they use motorbikes, but most of the motorbikes were the one abandoned by their owners on hearing the gunshots. The Fulani militias use the motorbikes to increase their mobility during the attacks.

Moderator: what sort of ammunition³

#3-OIU-Y: They used to attack with AK47 and no RPGs were used.

In areas affected by crises, access to resources is vital for those determined to stay; its absence can lead to displacement, even among those who prefer to remain. Insights from respondents indicate that successfully sustaining their chosen staying behaviours depends on their resource accessibility and the ability to utilise personal attributes to overcome the challenges they encounter. To overcome those challenges must require them having agency. Hence, accessibility refers to the ease of accessing economic resources, weapons, transportation infrastructure, telecommunication services, and financial resources, which can enhance resilience and influence staying behaviour in times of adversity. By examining how access, or lack thereof, to human and material resources, affects decision-making during conflict, we can better understand the challenges faced, how people utilise their agency, the outcomes of their actions or inactions, and how such *accessibility* enhances their resilience and consequently sustains their immobility in crises.

Resilience

There is a lack of clarity about the precise definition of resilience (Cutter, 2020, p. 205). In essence, community resilience refers to a community's capacity to utilise its resources in adversity to survive and thrive (Magis, 2010). Resilience is a process of adjusting to internal or external shocks, and it exists on a continuum, varying according to context and societal interpretations (Chandler, 2012; Bourbeau, 2015, p. 377).

Spiegel *et al.* (2021) identified three resilience capacities: robustness, adaptability, and transformability. Drawing from Spiegel *et al.* (2021), resilience capacities can be referred to as the qualities that aid individuals in adapting to challenges. In this paper, resilience is conceptualised as a process encompassing community members' actions and behaviours that involve leveraging strategies (their assets) and family and community networks (their resources) to adapt and adjust to

internal and external vulnerabilities (Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005; Magis, 2010; Bourbeau, 2015). This study assessed the resilience of community members in conflict-affected areas who chose immobility, employing nine capacity areas from the Subjective Self-Evaluated Resilience Score (SERS) by Jones and d'Errico (2019) and incorporating context-related issues in the assessment.

Resilience is a two-dimensional construct comprising *adversity* – difficult life circumstances like violence – and *positive adaptation* – competence at rebounding (Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858). Vulnerability is the pre-event, inherent characteristics or qualities of social systems that create the potential for harm (Cutter *et al.*, 2008, p. 559). It was argued that vulnerability and resilience are inversely related: the more resilient, the less susceptible (Handmer and Dovers, 1996, p. 487); both are conceptually related and are not diametrically opposed (Cutter, 2016, p. 111).

A resilience study should explore the vulnerability and protective variables that may influence life situations and then determine the processes underpinning the discovered connections (Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858). Vulnerability and protective factors aid in elucidating the circumstances in which people find themselves and how these impact their decision-making (Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000, p. 858). Therefore, since the aspiration-capability framework uses three factors to explain people's (im)mobility (Schewel, 2020), exploring and explaining people's staying behaviour in adversity requires the inclusion of vulnerabilities and protective factors (ideas from resilience) within any model used to analyse migratory processes in such contexts; the framework introduced in subsequent sections adopted this approach. Thus, integrating resilience concepts with the aspiration-capability framework provides essential analytical tools to understand people's (im)mobility experiences, especially the interplay of vulnerability and protective factors on their immobility decisions in challenging environments.

Agency & Structure

Comprehending the dynamics between structure and agency has been a longstanding issue in social sciences, persisting for decades (Bakewell, 2010, p. 1689). Therefore, engaging in this debate is beyond the scope of this paper; instead, our focus will be on explicating how both concepts are applied within this paper.

According to de Haas (2019, p. 26), to exercise their migratory agency, people need access to 'social (other people), economic (material), and cultural or 'human' (ideas, knowledge, and skills) resources'. He further asserts that agency is '...the limited but real capacity of individuals to overcome

constraints and potentially reshape structure' (de Haas, 2010, p. 241). In other words, it entails the limited but real ability to overcome obstacles. Similarly, Giddens (1984, p. 9) posits 'Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place ...'. Therefore, possessing agency extends beyond mere wishful thinking, which is critical in adversity.

In addition, '... genuine agency arises not in the context of mere choices freely made (as in shopping) but rather, somewhat paradoxically, in the context of submission to things that have their own intractable ways ...' (Crawford, 2015, p. 28 italics added). In other words, genuine agency requires not just a selection of available options but engaging with situations in ways that are risky. Thus, *accessibility* to resources and *resilience* (as earlier discussed) to surmount *restrictions* are vital to human agency in adversity; however, possessing *genuine agency* is critical in such environments. Hence, genuine agency is essential for successfully utilising *accessibility* and *resilience* components in actualising immobility aspirations in adversity, and equally, the *accessibility* to resources and *resilience* can enhance one's genuine agency.

At the heart of social life lie human agency and social structure, which are mutually constitutive and exist as a 'duality of structure' (Giddens, 1984). Structure is the 'medium and the outcome of the social practices they recursively organize' (Giddens 1984: 25). The duality of structure, introduced by Anthony Giddens, is rooted in the intrinsic nature of agency and structures, explaining their interdependence and how they concurrently influence and reconstruct each other; both serve as the medium and result of various practices (Busco, 2009, p. 250). In essence, the structure refers to the broad political, institutional, socioeconomic, and cultural context in which migration occurs, which can be restrictive or enabling (de Haas, 2010, p. 241). It is acknowledged that this paper adopts a stance aligned with the theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984), which has faced extensive criticism from scholars such as Margaret Archer (see Archer, 1982). Nonetheless, the framework of structuration theory has been applied in other migration studies (Wright, 1995; Morawska, 2001). Moreover, the dualism inherent in this conceptualisation of structure and agency is particularly well-suited for analysing the contextual realities in local communities.

The Resilience-Accessibility Framework: Emergence of the Framework

Recognising the Aspiration-Capability Framework's limitations in encompassing the migratory process and respondents' experiences, an inductive approach, as well as integrating resilience factors (Luthar et al., 2000; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000) and the concept of structural duality (Giddens, 1984), was adopted to capture and analyse the migratory experiences and contextual realities of community members in the Middle Belt. This effort aims not to challenge but to complement and expand upon this seminal framework, particularly in detailing the experiences of community members who choose to remain amidst adversities like violent conflict or natural disasters.

Therefore, possessing qualities and assets, such as resilience and access to resources, is crucial for developing immobility capacities to overcome adversity and sustain desired staying behaviour. Immobility (Stay-put) capacities are people's strengths and strategies to remain in place rather than fleeing war-torn or crisis-stricken environments. By analysing the staying behaviour of community members through the lens of the aspiration-capability framework, along with their resilience capacities⁴ and the duality of structure, we better understand their interaction with adversities in their environment and the role these qualities play in their decision to stay put.

The framework provides analytical tools for examining the migratory decisions of community members who stay put or flee in adverse situations, such as violence or natural disasters. These tools support the exploration of the factors influencing and sustaining their preference for immobility or why these preferences may not be actualised. The accessibility component explores how access to, or lack of, economic and socio-cultural resources and human and material assets – including weaponry, transportation infrastructure, telecommunication services, and voodoo – shapes decision-making in adversity. Increased adaptability and enhanced community resilience stem from investing in 'community capitals,' which are resources used to boost productivity and generate new assets in the community (Magis, 2010, p. 406; Kais and Islam, 2016, p. 10). These capitals encompass resources aimed at improving the well-being of all community members (Kais and Islam, 2016, p. 10). Consequently, focusing on *resilience* and resource *accessibility* becomes essential in exploring community adaptability, especially in adversity. The *accessibility* to these resources directly impacts community resilience and adaptability.

Giddens' (1984) 'duality of structure' concept further enriches the resilience-accessibility framework. Giddens's 'duality of structure' provided key insights into the concept of 'agency' and 'structure' within the resilience-accessibility framework, illustrating the interdependent relationship between structure and agency. Human agency and social structure are mutually constitutive at the core of social life, existing in a 'duality of structure' (Giddens, 1984). This 'duality of structure' elucidates the intrinsic interdependence of agency and structures, demonstrating how they simultaneously influence and reconstruct each other, acting as the medium and outcome of various practices (Busco, 2009, p. 250). It highlights how social structures enable and constrain agency while emphasising how actions contribute to the reproduction and transformation of these structures. Incorporating the 'duality of structure' concept from Giddens (1984) enriches the resilience-accessibility framework, highlighting how social structures both enable and constrain agency and how actions contribute to the reproduction and transformation of these structures.

The core assumptions of the resilience-accessibility framework maintain that people's staying behaviour, in times of adversity, is influenced by (1) their *agency/actions*, (2) *accessibility* to specific resources, and *resilience capacities*, as well as by (3) the *structures* and *adversities* in their surroundings; furthermore, (4) people's decisions/actions impact those *structures* and their *perception*. According to the Resilience-Accessibility framework, understanding the factors that influence and sustain immobility among community members in adversity requires examining human agency and structure, as current migration theories do, and in addition, their resilience and access to specific resources. Thus, we must consider four broad factors: human influences, resource accessibility, environmental conditions, and the duality of structure.

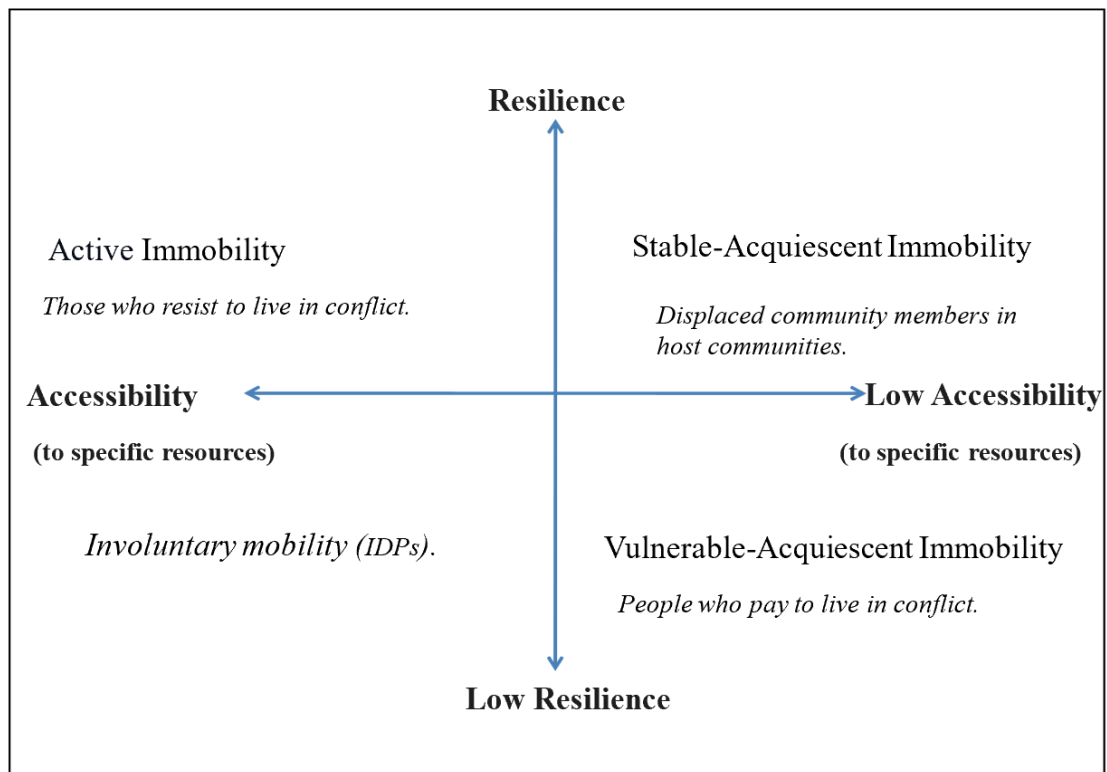


Figure 1. (im)mobility categories according to the Resilience–Accessibility framework

Notes: This is adapted from de Haas (2021) and Schewel (2020), with inputs from Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000) and Luthar and Cicchetti (2000).

Central to the Resilience–Accessibility Framework is an understanding that immobility in adversity is shaped by a complex interplay of human agency, resilience, and ‘accessibility’ to resources within the context of structural conditions such as adversity. This framework emphasises the cyclical nature of human–environment interactions, where human actions and structural influences mutually shape each other. Thus, the framework recognises that people’s actions in adversity are both responses to environmental challenges and are factors that shape broader perceptions and reactions within the structure. For instance, examining a community that actively confronts environmental disasters or violent conflicts through self-help to remain in its indigenous locations necessitates understanding the types of human agency, resilience, and accessibility it possesses against the structural conditions it faces to identify the factors influencing and sustaining its desired immobility. Such a study, informed by the Resilience–Accessibility Framework, will explore and explain their migratory

experiences, the adversities they face, and the perceptions and responses (or lack thereof) from the state.

In Figure 1, *Stable-Acquiescent immobility* describes individuals with resilience but limited access to resources, who, despite their aspirations to stay, live in host communities due to fleeing their own. *Vulnerable-Acquiescent immobility* pertains to those with low resilience and accessibility who choose to negotiate or pay to stay in conflict. *Involuntary mobility* describes people residing in IDP camps who have accessibility to resources but lack resilience and tend to flee far from adversity. Individuals in the *Active Immobility* category possess resilience and accessibility, coupled with a lack of desire to migrate, actively using their agency to maintain immobility in conflict. I elaborated on these categories in subsequent sections.

This framework clarifies how the synergistic interaction of various factors elucidates the immobility preferences and experiences of individuals or community members in adversity, using the agential and structural levels for analysis. Thus, essential categories for explaining staying behaviour in conflict-affected communities exposed to adversity should include ‘retain’ factors, ‘repel’ factors, ‘vulnerability’ factors, ‘protective’ factors, ‘internal constraints’ (Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000; Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker, 2000; Schewel, 2020), and what I term ‘internal boosts’. According to Schewel (2020, p. 339), understanding why people choose to stay put involves recognising the appealing conditions in their current location (‘retain factors’), the deterrents of relocating elsewhere (‘repel factors’), and personal factors that inhibit migration like gendered norms (‘internal constraints’). ‘Protective’ factors are the critical resources that mitigate the impacts of adversity, whereas ‘vulnerability’ factors exacerbate adverse conditions (Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000, pp. 858–859). Vulnerability factors include but are not limited to, structural conditions such as displacement, destruction, adverse climatic and environmental conditions, economic status, legal systems, and health. Protective factors comprise social networks, intellectual resources, cultural and religious practices, and economic resources.

‘Internal boosts’ are defined as factors promoting immobility, encompassing psychosocial variables like lifescape, place identity, collective memory, and cultural norms, as well as psychological factors, including cognition, emotion, and behaviour, reinforcing the decision and resolve to stay put. Although ‘internal constraints’ and ‘internal boosts’ may appear similar, they are distinct. While ‘internal constraints’ refer to factors that limit aspirations, like gendered norms (Schewel, 2020, p.

343), 'internal boosts' relate to elements such as place identity, emotion, and behaviour that strengthen the desire to stay put.

Unpacking Immobility Amidst Adversity

During fieldwork, core and follow-up questions were posed to understand why respondents chose to remain in conflict zones and how they maintained this decision without government support. In the discussion about staying in their village despite lethal violence threats against community members from the community O, one respondent's comment, reflecting the sentiments of others, was as follows:

#9-OIU-M: This land is where I was born, and this is my father's land. Wherever I run to, I will become a stranger and may become destitute. Until then, I have been a sustainable person. Why should I become a beggar with my family? I will rather stay if it means to die; let me die. If I die in my house for what belongs to me, let me die. This is why I did not flee. If they want to kill me, let them kill me.

According to the respondent's comments, he views the land in his community as an ancestral inheritance with which he identifies, and that provides a means of subsistence. Additionally, this excerpt highlights fundamental components that the Aspiration-Capability framework alone cannot capture but can be explained by including additional factors:

- a. genuine *agency* to stay put.
- b. a deep emotional attachment to the land that emanates from collective and materialised memories ('retain' factors' and 'internal boosts').
- c. the foreseen and unforeseen impact of displacement ('repel' factors).
- d. a firm determination to stay put or die while protecting the land ('internal boosts' and 'protective factors').
- e. the *structures* or 'vulnerability factors' which they are exposed to.

Firstly, the quotation interpretations show that the concept of land for them transcends mere habitation, embodying an emotional attachment – a 'sense of place' – and a sense of self. This 'sense of place' signifies an emotional bond with a specific place and its importance to them (Kudryavtsev, Stedman and Krasny, 2012, p. 231). In this instance, the bond is akin to a familial relationship and *affinity*, extending from the respondents to their father then to their 'father's land', driving the desire

to maintain these ties. Secondly, displacement from this ‘father’s land’ is perceived as not only a loss of identity and ancestral rights but also the risk of assuming undesirable identities like ‘stranger’ or ‘beggar’, compelling a willingness to risk life to prevent forced fleeing. In Nigeria, the displacement of community members from their community can drastically disrupt their social existence and pose a severe threat of permanent loss, mainly when land claims depend on actual land habitation (Nwankwo and Ayadiuno, 2022, p. 186). This situation exemplifies community members’ emotional connection with their ancestral land, shaping their self-conception in line with the idea that identity is linked to place (Mckinnon *et al.*, 2016, p. 1121). Thus, it fuels their quest for immobility, even at the cost of significant sacrifices.

Questions about measures to sustain immobility despite attacks aimed at dislodging them elicited this noteworthy response, echoed by other respondents:

#1-OIU-M: We used two methods to counter them: charms prepared by native doctors that prevented bullets from penetrating our bodies and our own ammunition, primarily pump-action shotguns; in the process, we would overpower them and collect their rifles. That was mainly how we were able to fight them and secure the sort of weapons they were using against us, the AK47 rifles.

This excerpt highlights three key components:

- a. The use of firearms as a ‘protective’ factor to adapt to vulnerabilities.
- b. Voodoo as a ‘protective factor’ enhances perseverance and adaptability.
- c. The crucial role of an organised social network as a ‘protective’ factor.

The excerpt provides insights into the strategies used by community members in Community O to sustain their staying behaviour. It shows their determination and the extensive measures they are willing to take to sustain their desired immobility in the face of conflict. These community members are active agents and proactive in their efforts to remain in their community, actively maintaining their lifescape and pursuing their desire to stay. The Aspiration-Capability Framework, while foundational in explaining determinants of immobility, does not fully capture the migratory experiences and contextual realities of respondents in the study locations, particularly their decisions to stay put in conflict-affected areas. To better understand these migratory processes, an inductive approach was used. This method concentrated on examining specific instances involving community members in these locations, aiming to identify and analyse patterns related to their decisions and

actions concerning their desired immobility in the face of adversity. As previously discussed, this process led to the development of the Aspiration-Capability Framework. The following section explains the inclusive (im)mobility categories according to the Resilience-Accessibility Framework, which includes some of the migratory experiences that extant (im)mobility categories do not cover – see Figure 1.

The (Im)mobility Categories within the Framework

In migration studies, (im)mobility categories like voluntary and involuntary immobility, mobility, and acquiescent immobility (Schewel, 2020; de Haas, 2021) span various migratory processes but show limitations in covering specific demographics identified in my fieldwork and other regional locations. The limitations in extant (im)mobility categories have led to the development of new categories that more accurately represent the varied migratory experiences observed in the study locations. For instance, existing categories do not adequately include displaced persons who avoid residing in IDP camps and instead prefer temporary habitation in communities near those they fled from and seek to maintain connections with their community networks. Likewise, existing categories may not fully capture communities that choose to remain in adversity, such as those in conflict zones, where they often adopt protective measures.

Based on contextual situations and research findings, I developed the (im)mobility categories, illustrated in Figure 1. These categories include *stable-acquiescent immobility*, *involuntary mobility*, *vulnerable acquiescent immobility*, and *active immobility*. These categories of (im)mobility are viewed similarly to how Schewel (2020, p. 336) perceived the extant (im)mobility categories – as ideal types rather than rigid, fixed categories. The distinguishing features of these categories are the levels of *resilience* and *accessibility*, which could determine individuals' capacity to navigate adversities and structural factors within their communities.

Stable-acquiescent Immobility

The term, Stable-acquiescent Immobility, builds upon acquiescent immobility (Schewel, 2020), underscoring the added vulnerability of people due to their limited access to essential resources and reduced resilience. 'To illustrate, "vulnerable-stable" could describe findings where the general disadvantages of individuals or groups with the attribute remained stable despite changing levels of stress' (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker, 2000, p. 548 italics in original). Despite lacking specific

attributes or competencies that make them vulnerable, people in this category adapt amid rising stress levels. They maintain stability in adverse places, possibly due to their resolve not to move and some form of resilience (see Figure 1).

Vulnerable-*stable* or simply *stable-acquiescent immobility* describes a migratory phenomenon where community members choose to stay put, exhibiting resilience capacities to withstand challenges; however, limited access to vital resources hinders the achievement of their preferred immobility and results in displacement. The *stable-acquiescent immobility* category pertains to individuals or community members who intentionally seek to stay within their community but cannot accomplish this independently. Typically, they reside in close proximity to the communities they have fled rather than in IDP camps. This category also encompasses those who may periodically return to and subsequently flee their villages, seeking refuge in host communities. Their limited access to specific resources renders their resilience capacities inadequate to maintain their preferred immobility. Despite these resource constraints and exposure to vulnerabilities, they attempt to adapt to heightened adversity, remaining resolved to return to their community.

My fieldwork observations and the 2022 International Organization for Migration report reveal that most individuals displaced by violence in the Middle Belt region prefer residing in nearby host communities over IDP camps, despite harsh conditions and the availability of governmental and NGO support in the camps (Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) of the International Organization for Migration, 2022). The report indicates that about 788,284 (81%) of those displaced in the Middle Belt live among host communities, while 181,473 (19%) reside in IDP camps or camp-like settings. Consequently, more people fall into this category than any other in Nigeria.

Despite the ongoing violent conflicts faced by most host communities in the study locations, there is a noticeable trend of an increasing number of persons choosing to stay in these conflict-affected communities.

Involuntary Mobility

The ‘... term *forced* (or involuntary) *mobility* is used as an umbrella for characterizing human flows in which there is an element of coercion, including the threat to life, health, and freedom as a result of political persecution and conflicts or natural or anthropogenic disasters (Tsapenko, 2021, p. 526, italics in original). In the context of the Middle Belt, the involuntary mobility category comprises community members ‘forced’ to move due to vulnerabilities, seeking sanctuary far from where they

fled (see Figure 1). Involuntary mobility among community members stems from exposure to violent conflicts; they have low resilience to withstand the violence in their communities yet have access to resources that enable them to flee despite a desire to stay put. Within the framework, involuntary mobility describes a migratory process in which people, due to limited *resilience capacities*, are forced to leave their community and use their *access* to specific resources to relocate to safer environments.

Adversities can compel people to move against their wishes to stay put, driving them to seek safety and opportunities far from their communities. Within the study locations, instances of mobility are often prompted by violent conflicts, causing coercive factors to drive community members to flee their communities. Hence, their movement is referred to be *involuntary*. Their lack of resilience increases their vulnerability. *Typically, vulnerability is inevitable, but their vulnerable situation must be viewed from the context that:*

- a. they lack resilience capacities (protective factors and internal boosts) to adapt.
- b. they have accessibility to move.
- c. they are exposed to violence (vulnerability factors) out of their control, compelling ('forced') them to flee.
- d. relocation was still possible despite uncertainties beyond their communities (repel factors).

As a result, we can infer that their departure was involuntary, motivated by susceptibility to danger, embodying the term involuntary mobility. Contextualising these issues clarifies their vulnerability and the reasons behind their decision to move.

Vulnerable-acquiescent Immobility

Acquiescent immobility categorises people who neither wish to migrate nor can do so (Schewel, 2020, p. 335). *Vulnerable-acquiescent immobility*, however, characterises those who desire not to migrate and have low resilience and access to resources while living in areas exposed to adversity, increasing their vulnerability to harm. This phenomenon can occur in regions with ongoing armed conflicts. Vulnerable-acquiescent immobility considers contextual factors affecting migration decisions, where hardship and a lack of support complicate people's circumstances.

The low resilience and resource accessibility among affected community members result in an inability to resist belligerent armed groups. Their reluctance to relocate worsens their situation, forcing them to endure violence under the captors' authority. Those experiencing vulnerable-

acquiescent immobility are vulnerable to adversities such as natural disasters or violence from non-state actors and often get caught in crossfires between these groups and state actors over disputed territories. This category enhances our understanding of the contextual factors contributing to their vulnerability and immobility.

In a study in Nigeria, it was revealed that communities in territories controlled by the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP), or Wilāyat Garb Ifrīqiyā, pay two types of taxes to continue living in their communities: 'Daraya' and 'na marayu' (Higazi, 2022, p. 166). Numerous communities continue to pay taxes to bandits and militants to maintain their immobility amidst conflicts instead of fleeing. During the Maoist revolution in Nepal, some development workers and teachers in certain villages had to pay a specific levy to the Maoist group while living in the conflict-affected villages (Adhikari, 2003, p. 377).

In essence, the community members' lack of resource accessibility and resilience to resist armed aggressors, combined with their desire to stay put, not only leads to acquiescence but also increases their vulnerability. Consequently, they often pay armed aggressors, typically non-state actors, to remain in their community based on terms agreed upon with or imposed by these actors.

Active Immobility

The study focused on a community with unique attributes, posing challenges to classification under existing (im)mobility categories. While their experiences partially align with voluntary immobility, this term fails to encompass their context and migratory experiences fully. Consequently, a thorough analysis led to the adoption of 'active immobility' (Robins, 2022a) as the most appropriate term, a decision backed by relevant research findings. Active immobility is defined as immobility arising from a sense of 'loyalty' or 'duty'; and to '(...) describe those who may have the capability to migrate (and may even have the desire to), but actively refrain from doing so due to a sense of duty or loyalty' (Robins, 2022a, p. 28).

In the context of active immobility (Robins, 2022b, 2022a), it is essential to recognise that necessity, often associated with a sense of duty or loyalty, does not automatically exclude *choice* and *agency* for the involved actors. However, loyalty and duty could sometimes limit conscious choice and agency. Insights from community members suggest that for active immobility to avoid becoming a coerced form of immobility, it should encompass genuine agency (Crawford, 2015, p. 28), a free-willed decision to stay put despite challenges, beyond mere 'duty' or 'loyalty'.

Incorporating ‘freedom of choice’ and ‘voluntariness’ is key to better conceptualising ‘active’ immobility. While ‘voluntariness’ alone might make it seem coerced, combining it with ‘freedom of choice’ ensures ‘active’ immobility results from ‘free will’ and is ‘active’. Conscious decision-making is essential in removing coercion from the term active immobility. Overlooking this distinction can lead to incorrect analyses of the phenomenon. In the O community, the active immobility category encompasses those who engage in actions like armed resistance to maintain their decision to stay. This category aptly describes the migratory patterns of these community members, who deliberately chose to remain despite exposure to violence and a lack of state support; they relied on self-help strategies, including the use of firearms, to enforce their decision to stay.

Drawing from Robins’ (2022a, 2022b) concept of active immobility and insights from the study in the Middle Belt, *active immobility* is defined as a category encapsulating the conscious immobility preferences of individuals or community members who, despite having the ability to migrate, ample access to resources, and resilience capacities, consciously choose to stay put of their own free will as they strive to sustain their immobility while facing adversity in their communities.

The O community exemplifies active immobility; despite having the ‘accessibility’ to resources and resilience to migrate away from conflict, its members stay put without state support. Motivated by a strong desire to remain, they sustain their immobility through various measures, including the use of firearms by their ‘Youths’ to fend off armed aggressors. This community is a typical example of groups that stay put actively in the face of adversity.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the resilience-accessibility framework, which emerged from a study conducted in the conflict-prone Nigerian Middle Belt. It addresses a gap identified by scholars regarding the absence of a theoretical framework or model for analysing people’s staying behaviours (Mallick et al., 2023; Carling & Collins, 2018; Stockdale & Haartsen, 2018), especially in conflict-affected communities. Thus, it provides analytical tools for exploring immobility in adversity. Additionally, it responds to the call for including non-Western perspectives in immobility research (Salazar, 2021) and could facilitate further inclusion of such perspectives.

The resilience-accessibility framework complements existing frameworks by suggesting that people’s decisions to stay put during times of adversity are influenced by a combination of personal agency, structural factors, resilience, resource accessibility, and the interplay of various structures and

adversities. The analytical tools of this framework facilitate the exploration of the determinants of immobility in adversity, especially among indigenous people who wish to remain on their land. Presented to stimulate further studies on immobility, the Resilience–Accessibility Framework aims to advance knowledge. It is primarily designed to examine the staying behaviour of indigenous people, particularly those who choose to stay put even in adversity.

Statements and Declarations

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are not openly available due to privacy concerns but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Royal Holloway, University of London, with the approval number ID 2667.

Footnotes

¹ The locations have been anonymised due to ethical considerations.

² Eco-violence is a type of conflict that stems from disputes over land and water, causing widespread violence and environmental damage, and is aggravated by government inefficiencies in managing resources and addressing environmental injustices (Olumba *et al.*, 2022, p. 2082).

³ At this point, they looked at each other, paused, and then went ahead with the discussion.

⁴ In the context of the Resilience-Accessibility framework, resilience capacities encompass characteristics such as ‘internal boosts’ and ‘protective factors’ that motivate and support individuals in adapting to challenges and adversities in their environment.

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