

DISPLACED:
AID, PERFORMANCE, AND THE SURVIVAL OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED
PERSONS

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At various times in history, performance has served as a crucial laboratory for promoting positive change in society. By spotlighting existential issues, interrogating superstructures, and subverting stereotypes, it has shaped and guided the way we live in the world and how we react to the multifaceted questions that our interactions with each other generate. Performance has also reaffirmed the notion that human persons experience the world in different ways; hence, our understanding of the world ought not to be consigned to mere statistics and words, but should encompass the sundry modes through which we experience and know the world, including sounds, images, feelings, gestures, tastes, smell and touch. By employing performance ethnography as both a lens and a method, this dissertation articulates these various (visceral) modes of understanding the world, within the context of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria and their vexed relationship with humanitarian actors.

Humanitarian actors' failure to involve IDPs in decision-making processes that concern the latter have exacerbated the plight of IDPs. Through performance ethnography, which recognizes the agency and the unique voice, memory, and context

of minoritarian populations, IDPs can now reclaim their narratives and position themselves in such a way that will make humanitarian actors respond to their real needs.

The underlying conviction of this dissertation is that, until displaced populations become the narrators of their own experiences, no matter how bleak or beautiful these might be, the dominant narratives that project their reality to the outside world will not only be partial and exclusionary, but will also privilege the norms, perspectives, and prejudices of the external storyteller, no matter how well-intentioned that person might be. And, until the unique views, needs and context of displaced persons get mainstreamed into humanitarian interventions, the goal of ensuring the wellbeing and security of displaced persons as well as their eventual return home will remain elusive.

By adding performance perspectives and unique case studies from IDP camps in Nigeria to the existing body of knowledge on internal displacement, this study will illumine in the humanities the long-overlooked nexus between performance and internal displacement. It will equally build on literature portraying IDPs as valuable members of society who possess prized repositories of knowledge from whom scholars, policymakers, artists, and humanitarian actors can learn a lot if only they engage them as people and change agents rather than as mere objects of research and helpless mendicants in perpetual need of aid.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Elaigwu Peter Ameh is an artist and a scholar who employs storytelling, teaching, and research to promote societal reorientation and the pursuit of the common good. He earned an MA in Performing and Media Arts from Cornell University in 2018 and an MA in Development Communication from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 2015. He is a recipient of the Arrupe College Book Prize for graduating with a First Class in the BA (Hons.) Philosophy program at the University of Zimbabwe, Harare in 2005. His teaching and research interests include performance ethnography, forced migration, performance theory, critical race theory, devised theatre, human rights, and postcolonial Africana performances. His publications include plays, poems, short stories, social commentaries, and academic essays.

For my wife, Ekoche, and my sons, Elaigwu and Ekowoicho

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PROLOGUE

PERFORMATIVE ACTS OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT¹

The recognition that our lives are structured according to repeated and socially sanctioned modes of behavior raises the possibility that all human activity could potentially be considered as “performance,” or at least all activity carried out with a consciousness of itself.

—Marvin Carlson²

In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality, and of what I wished and wanted for my life, however short it might be, priorities and omissions became strongly etched in a merciless light, and what I most regretted were my silences. Of what had I ever been afraid? To question or to speak as I believed could have meant pain, or death. But we all hurt in so many different ways, all the time, and pain will either change or end. Death, on the other hand, is the final silence. And that might be coming quickly, now, without regard for whether I had ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned someday to speak, or waited for someone else’s words. And I began to recognize a source of power within myself that comes from the knowledge that while it is most desirable not to be afraid, learning to put fear into a perspective gave me great strength.

—Audre Lorde³

If life beats you until you have a swollen face, smile and pretend to be fat.

—Nigerian proverb

After a narrow escape from the Boko-Haram assault that plundered his hometown in northeast Nigeria, massacred his loved ones, and reduced his house to ruins, Murtala, a middle-aged displaced man, took refuge in performance as a last-gasp attempt to safeguard his life and that of his child. Aware that the terrorists had

¹ By “Performative Acts of Internal Displacement,” I buttress that internal displacement is not a constitution of one’s being, but an identity category assumed and constituted in time; hence, it is, as Judith Butler said of gender, a social role which a person performs. Also, by my use of the term “performative” in reference to the internally displaced persons’ improvised acts of survival, I am consciously disengaging the improvised acts from, as Henry Bial pinpoints, “connotations of artificiality or superficiality that accompany the word ‘theatrical’” (145).

² Marvin Carlson, “What is Performance?” *The Performance Studies Reader*, p. 70.

³ Audre Lorde, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action.” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, p.41.

overrun his hometown, he felt trapped. But, since stories of previous attacks in other places maintained that the terrorist group habitually spared middle-aged women, choosing instead to kill men and abduct young women, Murtala improvised a gender performance that, he figured, would help him escape the rampaging terrorists. After cleanly shaving off his long beard, applying red lipstick to his lips, putting on female clothing, including a scarf and a hijab, Murtala strapped his child to his back with a wrapper and, now passing as a middle-aged woman, escaped the attack in his hometown, and embarked on a long trek from terror, still afraid he might run into other clusters of the terrorist group on his way; yet, hoping that, if he unfortunately encountered them, they would mistake him for a middle-aged woman and show mercy on his child and him.

Murtala's improvisation of gender epitomizes the sundry performative acts of internal displacement displayed by internally displaced persons (IDPs) as they negotiate survival in the interstices of displacement scenarios. To survive in their flight from terrorism and in their stay in the camps, IDPs improvise social scripts, adopting different identity categories to fit the circumstances in which they find themselves. Murtala's example constitutes a performance in the sense that it was an "activity carried out with a consciousness of itself" (Marvin Carlson 70). He disguised himself as a woman and played the gender script to achieve a premeditated outcome: that is, an escape from terror and the preservation of his life and that of his child.

However, for IDPs, not all social scripts which they enact result from their own volition or calculation. Some powers-that-be routinely foist social roles onto IDPs and, afraid to incur the wrath of these authority figures, many IDPs play those imposed

roles. In her report for *The Guardian* on May 5, 2017, Ruth Maclean captured some disconcerting roles imposed on displaced persons in their negotiation for survival. Entitled “Dressed for Death: The Women Boko Haram Sent to Blow Themselves Up,” Maclean told the story of Nadia, a 17-year-old displaced girl from northeast Nigeria, who had listened, from her hideout, as Boko Haram shot her father dead following an attack on their village. It did not take long before Boko Haram found and abducted her. While she was in the enclave of the militants, the commander took an interest in her, informing her that he was going to make her his second wife. Nadia recounted that she vehemently refused the marriage and was subjected to series of rape attempts and death threats. After three months of death threats, the commander decided to dispose of her. One morning she woke up to see explosives strapped to her body. That was when she realized that she had been drugged the previous night. In response to the dictates of their commander, some Boko Haram militants put her on a motorbike together with two other young women and dropped them off near Gamboro, Borno State.

As playwright, director and producer combined, the commander had already given the young women his stage directions for the devised performance he had imposed on them. It was up to them now to apply the directions. Stage directions, as Paul M. Levitt underscores in *A Structural Approach to the Analysis of Drama*, play a pivotal role in the actualization of a performance. Levitt discusses two kinds of stage directions: the written and the spoken, stressing that we encounter them as “printed commands in the dramatic text and as ‘announcements’ in the dialogue of a play” (36). These directions serve as “instructions concerning time and place of the events,

actions, movements, entrances and exits, sound effects, stage properties, costumes, or setting” (36). In Boko-Haram directed improvised performances, stage directions are often spoken and are doled out as commands with stiff penalties if unheeded. Adherence to these directions enhances the success rate of the performance and heightens the spectacle often intended from them.

In the case of Nadia and the two other young women, their stage directions included an instruction from the commander for them to blow themselves up in any large crowd they could spot. Among themselves, the three young women decided not to play the role the commander had imposed on them: the role of a suicide bomber. It took immense courage for them to decide to reject this role because of the seeming omnipresence of Boko Haram and the group’s penchant for re-kidnapping and torturing runaway abductees. The young women contemplated their next move, aware that none of them was equipped to either defuse the explosives or unstrap them. Approaching a checkpoint, the women braced for the worst. Raising their hands in surrender, they shouted agonizingly that explosives had been strapped to their bodies.

Fortunately, the paramilitary group at the post did not shoot them, choosing instead to place a call to the military who eventually arrived at the scene and removed the bombs from their bodies. They were lucky. They survived. Another female IDP, Fatima, whom several different men had raped every night for eight months while in Boko Haram custody before she was sent on a suicide bombing mission also survived after handing herself over to military personnel rather than blowing herself up in a crowded place according to the script Boko Haram had given to her, as recounted by Maclean in the same article. But the stories of female suicide bombers do not always

end that way. Most times, in fact, they end tragically. Either afraid of the grave repercussions for not playing their assigned role or cuckolded into playing the role because of indoctrination or the belief in the promise of paradise, many young women have blown themselves up in suicide attacks, taking many lives with them as well as their own.

Through coerced or self-improvised role plays, many displaced persons, tellingly, have engaged in performance as a way to give meaning to their lives or, in some cases, bring closure to their seemingly unending misery, even if closure for them means a conscious acceptance of death. Buoyed by a soaring recognition of their twin mortality and disposability amidst the palpable imminence of death stemming from repeated terrorist assaults on their hometowns, IDPs often put their fear into perspective and, as Audre Lorde suggests in the opening quote of this prologue, draw enormous strength from it. Having overcome their fear of death through a cold acceptance of its inevitability, most of these Boko-Haram displaced persons embark on a flight from terror, unaware of what might befall them, but always believing that it could not be worse than death. Despite their unsettling acceptance of the immediacy of death en route to safety, many IDPs, during flight, still nurse the hope of eluding death and, therefore, resort to improvised performances to improve their chances of survival. The resort to performance continues even when they settle in an IDP camp. As they negotiate survival in their interface with security agents, camp officials, and aid administrators, many IDPs draw upon a slew of cultural codes and societal expectations, and devise and stage performances on the move. To survive, they know they must perform.

IDPs, notably, are not the only displaced persons taking refuge in performance. Refugees do too. For example, stuck on the border between Greece and Macedonia, Iranian migrants in November 2015 sewed their lips together and inscribed messages such as “just freedom” on their chests and foreheads, in protest against border blockade following tightening border controls in Europe. IDPs and refugees alike have engaged in different forms of performance to give vent to their grievances.

What, then, is performance? Or better still, how could we understand performance? Victor Turner, in his 1982 book *From Ritual to Theatre* begins with the French etymological basis of the word, *parfournir*, which means “to furnish forth,” “to complete,” or “carry out thoroughly,” and then introduces his concept of “social drama” to underline the “in-betweenness” of performance, which, as Marvin Carlson explains, presents performance as a “transition between two states of more settled or more conventional cultural activity,” thereby depicting performance “as a border, a margin, a site of negotiation” (Turner 13; Carlson *Performance: A Critical Introduction* 14). In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman also offers his thoughts, defining performance as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants;” thus, he distinguishes performance from a mere theatrical display which includes a thorough scripting of routines in advance (15). Meanwhile, in his 1977 book, *Verbal Art as Performance*, Richard Bauman argues for an understanding of performance as “a mode of speaking,” thereby extending the understanding of performance beyond a focus on the written text and its enactment (3-4). As Joseph Roach acknowledges in *Cities of the Dead*, a plethora of competing definitions complicate our understanding

of “performance.” Nevertheless, he pinpoints that performance “stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace” (Roach 3).

In *Between Theater and Anthropology*, Richard Schechner proposes a definition of performance as “restored behavior” or “twice-behaved behavior,” meaning performance is that behavior that is constantly subject to revision because it cannot occur precisely the same way more than once (35-6). For Schechner, since “the behavior is separate from those who are behaving, the behavior can be stored, transmitted, manipulated, transformed” and it is “‘out there,’ distant from ‘me.’ It is separate and therefore can be ‘worked on,’ changed, even though it has ‘already happened’” (36). However, Peggy Phelan contends in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* that “[p]erformance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance” (146). Here Phelan pins performance’s ontology to the inability to reproduce itself; therefore, to associate the term reproduction with performance constitutes a misnomer or a betrayal of the being of performance itself. Hence, she concludes that performance “becomes itself through disappearance” (146). The implication of this line of thought for performance is that, although it may be done repeatedly over time, it is different each time. But this different repetition does not in any way diminish the value of the performance nor does it render it inauthentic. Rather, each repetition represents an authenticity since repetition rehearses “the disappearance of the subject who longs always to be remembered” (Phelan 147).

Even within the African context, performance remains a highly queried subject, especially as it permeates the lives and cultures of various individuals and communities in the society. Besides, as Osita Okagbue affirms, most African cultures and languages appear not to have precise words for performance; rather, they possess “terms that broadly encompass a host of performance activities, ranging from ritual to play, from sporting activities such as wrestling, boxing and hunting to masking, dancing, singing and acrobatic displays” and the “descriptive verbs for these activities generally tend to be the same in a lot of African cultures” (1). To illustrate this point, Okagbue writes:

For them [the Igbo], the word *egwu* is used to refer to ‘play’, ‘dance’, ‘song’ and ‘music’. The Hausa use the term *wasa* as both a noun meaning ‘play’ and a verb ‘to play’...The Krobo of Ghana...use the term *fie* to mean ‘play’ as in children’s play and theatre; *fie do* means to drum and *do* also stands for song. The same can be said of other West African languages in which the various activities, which in English are generally classed as performance or theatre or drama, are very often designated by a single term. However, verbs are then used to specify which type of activity is being referred to. So for the Igbo, ‘to play’ is *igwu egwu*, ‘to sing’ is *igu egwu*, ‘to dance’ is *igba egwu*, ‘to play music’ is *iti egwu*, *iti igba* is ‘to drum’. *Iti mmo* is ‘to mask’ or ‘to play mask’, *iti okpo* is ‘to box’ and *igba ngba* is ‘to wrestle’. (1)

Highlighting the highly contested nature of performance, Dwight Conquergood remarks that “[a]ny attempt to define and stabilize performance will be bound up in disagreement, and this disagreement is itself part of its meaning” (‘Of Caravans’ 137-

8). Against the backdrop of the contested nature of performance, Diana Taylor categorizes performance into (1) an object of analysis and (2) an epistemological lens or a way of knowing (*The Archive*, xvi; *Scenes of Cognition*, 356). Arguing that performance, seen from a methodological lens, constitutes a way of knowing, Taylor maintains that “we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices” (xvi). This epistemological lens gives room to an interpretation of attitudes and behaviors as performances. Thus, it is not out of place to recognize, as Erving Goffman did in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, that certain human attitudes and behaviors such as ethnicity and gender can be understood as performances.

I share Taylor’s view that “[p]erformances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called ‘twice-behaved behavior’” (*The Archive* 2-3). Taylor makes her case by distinguishing archives from repertoire. This way, she makes a pivotal distinction between knowledge as fixed and knowledge as fluid. While the former kind of knowledge is disembodied and privileges the written over the unwritten, the latter is embodied and expresses itself in manifold forms. These forms include spoken word, rituals, movement, songs, dance, gestures, memories, oral histories and other “vital acts of transfer” that recognize the historical processes of intercontinental interaction. These vital acts of transfer situate performance in the lives of people as an embodied action that is about the survival of species. This understanding of performance, thus, grants visibility to a gamut of attitudes, values and practices hitherto occluded from the canons of theatre and performance studies, or

as Roach aptly puts it, the “genealogies of performance” (25). The fact that this form of knowledge transfer (i.e. the repertoire) is nonarchival becomes enlightening if we take into consideration Taylor’s point that “if performance did not transmit knowledge, only the literate and powerful could claim social memory and identity” (xvii).

Nevertheless, I contend that Taylor’s distinction between archive and repertoire appears to create a dichotomy between embodied and disembodied knowledge as well as between fixed and fluid knowledge, which jointly constitute the gamut of human experience in and of the world. Such a dichotomy, while illuminating existing binaries in society, also indirectly threatens to reify them. Taylor’s analysis seems to privilege episteme over praxis, a way of knowing over an object of analysis, and embodied action over scripted documentation. This approach, though commendable as a brave shift from the longstanding bias towards archives and the written word, still occludes other vital acts performed at the nuanced interstices of human encounters—for example, our ways of feeling in the world. Her approach is also suspect since, as Phelan underscores, “the sterilizing binaries of self/other, possession/dispossession, men/women...are increasingly inadequate formulas for representation. These binaries and their institutional upholders fail to account for that which cannot appear between these tight ‘equations’ but which nonetheless inform them” (165). Therefore, pushing the boundary of Taylor’s idea of repertoire, I suggest that we view performance not as praxis or an episteme but as *vita activa*.⁴

⁴ Hannah Arendt explains, in *The Human Condition*, the term *vita activa* as our being in the world. She categorizes the essential activities of our being in the world into three human activities: work, labor and action. Work is synonymous with making: it is an activity of the craftsman and refers to the

I agree with Taylor that the term performance “suggests both a praxis and an episteme. It proves generative in that it allows scholars to view events...as layered and interconnected (i.e., as object of analysis, as repertoire, as spectacle, as worldview, and as analytical lens)” (364-5). However, I would add that performance goes beyond a mere object of analysis or a way of knowing to include a way of being-in-the-world. As a result, performance collapses the praxis and episteme binary into the fluid vitality of living in the world. This idea of performance is predicated on the notion that human beings are not atoms and that performance cannot be done in isolation from the historical, socio-political, and affective contexts in which people live. As Judith Butler fittingly puts it, “the body is a historical situation...and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation” (2). Thus, what this idea of performance as *vita activa* does is to relocate epistemological issues in performance to the existential realm of community and individuals, and allow for a potent recognition of the dialectical tension between reality and representation and its generative and negating capacities.

Similarly, positing performance as a way of being-in-the-world seeks an understanding of human persons in the world both in their uniqueness and in their web of interconnectedness with others inhabiting the world. Consequently, this model of

activity carried out in the construction of the inanimate, artificial world of objects by making objects conform to models. Labor, to Arendt, refers to the life of humans and their deeds as biological beings. And action, she notes, has to do with the shared plurality of human beings, which essentially comes with the capacity to initiate new beginnings and bring novelty into the world, as well as the ability to do the unexpected. Placing her emphasis on action, Arendt argues that a fundamental flaw in someone is the person’s failure in action—that is, the person’s act of thoughtlessness, which refers to their feeling as if they live in the world all alone. Thoughtless people, for her, are people who are unable to see things from the standpoint of others who are also co-existing with them in the world. Such people have a shrunken idea of the world in which they live: they could not see beyond themselves.

performance that does not feed off, accentuate, or perpetuate any form of binaries in society, but places our shared plurality and the historicity of humanity on a pedestal counts as a plausible alternative. This alternative, which is performance as *vita activa*, presents performance not just as an object of analysis and a way of knowing, but also as a way of perceiving, feeling, and behaving in the world.

In “What is Performance?” Carlson reflects on the popularity of the term “performance” in the arts, literature, and the social sciences, noting how this popularity has occasioned “a complex body of writing about performance, attempting to analyze and understand just what sort of human activity it is,” and how “such a complex web of specialized critical vocabulary has been developed in the course of this analysis, that a newcomer seeking a way into the discussion may feel confused and overwhelmed” (68). In order not to *confuse* and *overwhelm* readers of my dissertation, I emphasize that my overarching understanding of performance is in terms of *vita activa*. However, in this dissertation, I am chiefly interested in only a segment of this overarching understanding—a segment which Carlson meticulously articulates. After exploring the wide-ranging literature on performance, Carlson crystallizes three major understandings of the term: one involves “the display of skills;” the other also involves “display, but less of particular skills than of a recognized and culturally coded pattern of behavior,” and the third places emphasis “not so much on display of skill (although that may be involved) or on the carrying out of a particular pattern of behavior, but rather on the general success of the activity in light of some standard of achievement” (Carlson 70).

Many humanitarian organizations working with IDPs evaluate their work using Carlson's third sense of performance, which basically concerns metricized indicators of success and how well an organization has done in checking off those metrics. While not discounting the evaluation mechanism of these organizations or this way of understating performance, my use of the term "performance" in this dissertation excludes this understanding. Likewise, even though I acknowledge that IDPs possess theatrical skills and indeed demonstrated it during the fieldwork for this dissertation and in other contexts, I do not pursue this aesthetic sense of performance either. Its exclusion now leaves us with the second understanding of performance which Carlson discusses—that is, performance as a display of "a recognized and culturally coded pattern of behavior," otherwise known as role play or patterned behavior (70). My dissertation focuses on this understanding of performance and demonstrates how this understanding enhances our study of performance as a method, an episteme, and an object of analysis.

Conceiving internal displacement as performance offers a unique perspective for understanding and addressing the sundry problems IDPs face. Rather than trivialize the horrifying experiences of IDPs, this conception draws attention to the interwoven issues of internal displacement and the behind-the-scenes puppeteers pulling the strings that induce displacement. It also fosters an understanding of the intricate nexuses of historical, political, and socio-economic relationships that drive internal displacement and perpetuate the displacement of IDPs. In addition to helping us understand internal displacement beyond mere data points, framing internal displacement as a performance equally brings into focus the questions of justice and

accountability in aid administration and IDP treatment, especially as it spotlights individuals, their motives, and their behaviors.

My use of performance, rather than theatre, in describing internal displacement is deliberate. Performance, broadly speaking, goes beyond theater and synthesizes different modalities for expressing and resisting human behavior, including poetry, theatre, music, dance, cinema, rituals, ceremonies, demonstrations, art installations, oral tradition, political events, and everyday life. I also employ the term to depict how performance retools and repurposes our bodies as sites for unique knowledge, embodied activism, and positive change. More than ever before, we need to focus on behavior as an object of study, and performance lends itself for such an action. Performance also does not occur in a vacuum as it is always done for an audience, even if the audience is either imagined or oneself.

I have structured this dissertation into five parts: Prologue, Act I, Act II, Act III, and Epilogue. This prologue, entitled “Performative Acts of Internal Displacement,” serves as an introduction to the dissertation. It situates the understanding of internal displacement within the analytical lens of performance as patterned behavior, thereby providing a visceral perspective on the existential situation of IDPs from the moment of their flight from the terror of Boko Haram to their fraught interactions with humanitarian actors in the camp. Such a lens also illuminates the improvised behaviors of IDPs and other key players in the theatre of internal displacement. In recognition that internal displacement represents a human reality and not one restricted to Nigeria, this section also interweaves within its fabric some classic experiences and performative traits of internal displacement in other parts of

the world. In the final section of this prologue, I will provide a summary of the other parts of this dissertation. As shown in the diagram below, Act I focuses on performance as a method, Act II presents performance as an object of analysis, and Act III emphasizes performance as an episteme—a way of knowing. The epilogue reflects on this study and provides an insight into my future work with and about IDPs.

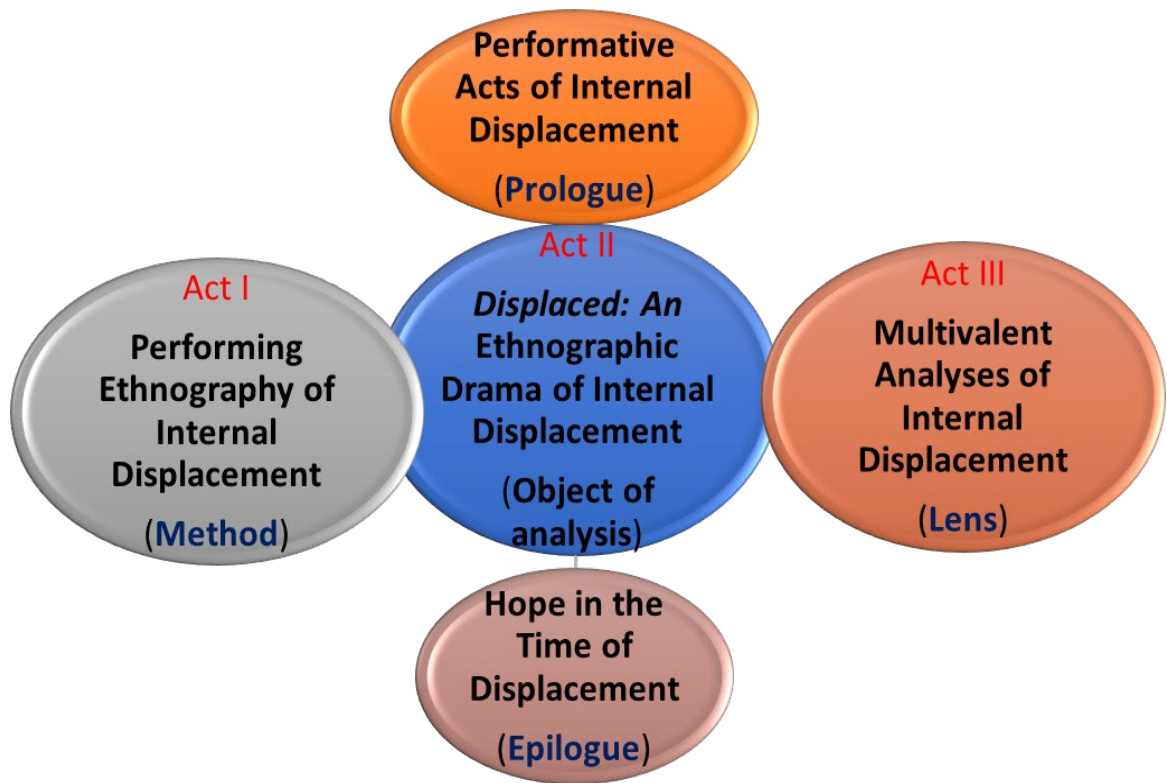


Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of the dissertation

Internal Displacement and Performance as Role Play

Role-playing involves a modification of one’s behavior to assume a role. This modification could be done unconsciously to fulfil social expectations or done as a self-conscious engagement in the acting out of an adopted role. In either case, role play must not be understood with regard to pretension, but in terms of (a) the

specificity of intention, (b) an awareness of the other, (c) an expectation to be seen by the other or the public, and (d) an embodiment of socio-cultural functions and expectations. As Osita Okagbue notes, a “performance happens wherever the spectator encounters and engages with the performer, and the two automatically define, and continuously redefine, the enveloping space of their meeting throughout the duration of the performance” and “their roles, as performer or spectator, go through a similar process of renegotiations and re-definitions as the performance progresses” (2). For role play to occur, actors do not need a proscenium or a written script. They only need an awareness of, and a readiness to play, their roles.

During role play, actors determine their task based on their characterization. The extent to which they interpret and embody their characters determines their success as actors within the regulatory framework of the role assigned to them. Through the series of choices actors make, they can structure both the direction and the outcome of a performance.



Illustration 1: IDPs in Bakassi Camp, Maiduguri queuing up for humanitarian aid

The lives of IDPs comprise self-conscious role-play. Their lives are a process of perpetual rehearsals. During their stay in the camp, they engage in a procedure of constant revision that involves cutting, changing, varying, modifying, substituting, subtracting, and improving their behaviors and attitudes. This revision process, which assigns meanings to the lives of IDPs on the go, lends credence to the liveness and repetitiveness of performance. It also reinforces Taylor's idea that "meaning is not a thing but a practice that requires the tireless and repetitive process of doing, making, unmaking, revising, retheorizing, and reconfiguring the many, many parts" (*Scenes* 372). This meaning-making process of performance for us, as human beings inhabiting the world, occurs in and through the sum of our existence and the embodied space where stories and histories get enacted and re-enacted.

For IDPs, the social scripts of survival that they perform range from tragedy to comedy. Habitually, they find themselves burdened with a glut of roles, and some of these roles periodically turn them into superstars, scoundrels, or 'scums,' based on their levels of success at role-playing, or their willingness to accept those roles. With literally no previous training in acting, many IDPs huddle into the unfamiliar roles which their new reality of displacement has thrust upon them, learning, unlearning, and relearning the expectations, stage directions, and best practices for the characters they now must embody. Some IDPs excel in their new roles; some trudge through; some simply fail; while others, despite their ability to excel in those roles, resist the role assignment and, as a result, fail woefully but willfully. Since the roles constantly change depending on who's involved, what's at stake, or where IDPs find themselves, improvisation becomes the unwritten rule in the camp, and IDPs relentlessly need to

reinvent themselves to have a shot at success in any role they need to play to survive. As such, the life of an IDP is about improvisation as much as it is about survival. To survive, for IDPs, is to improvise.

One of the roles new IDPs quickly learn when they get into the camp concerns submissiveness to camp officials and security agents. Serving as mini gods, these state humanitarian actors regulate the daily happenings in the camp, delineating who gets what, when, and how much, and who leaves the camp, when, for how long, or for good. Undermining the authority of these actors upsets the power structure in the camp, and has severe repercussions for transgressors; hence, docility becomes a prescribed costume for IDPs to wear in their interactions with these humanitarian actors. To step out of the camp for personal reasons, for instance, IDPs need to secure a gate pass from camp officials. Afraid of not being let back into the camp without the pass, IDPs guard this pass jealously as if their lives depend on it. Misplacing the pass incites anxiety within IDPs and exposes them to easy exploitation from camp officials who readily latch onto the anxiety to prey upon them.

Predation is an activity many female IDPs have rationalized, accepting it as one of the preconditions of camp living and one over which they have virtually no control. Yet, they would rarely talk about it. When they do, however, they would mostly discuss it as hearsay as opposed to it being an experience they have had or an experience they are sure someone else in the camp has had. Gossip spreads like wildfire in the camp, so many IDPs are careful about accusing an official of sexual predation. Calculated silence about varying acts of oppression in the camp, especially

sexual assault, reinforces the dramatic nature of the relationship between camp officials and IDPs. As Jeffrey C. Alexander affirms in *The Drama of Social Life*,

Identifying an event as dramatic heightens tension and creates anticipation. It turns everyday events into performances, readers into audiences, and ordinary actors into characters, protagonists and antagonists whose struggles drive a churning plot through scene after scene. Everybody knows what drama is. It's what goes on in theatres, movies, and TV. But in order to create critical moments, this aesthetic manner of framing and heightening experience is moved from the world of artifice to social reality. Doing so creates the drama of social life. (1)

In their encamped drama of social life, IDPs have come to a general knowledge of the expectations of humanitarian actors for them, including camp officials, NGOs, and security agents. IDPs skillfully embody and exploit these expectations for their survival. One of the expectations of humanitarian actors for IDPs is for the latter to play the role of the grateful receiver, while the former, especially donors, play the role of the benevolent giver. This unwritten role-assignment reinforces the belief that the

...donor is a good-doer and every society values his position. At the same time, every society looks down upon the reverse position of the one who receives. This asymmetry in the humanitarian relationship is a psychological and sociological insight that points to the limitations and the shortcomings of humanitarian action. (Brauman, Jamil, and Ophir 13)

A former member of Médecins Sans Frontières' board, Didier Fassin, also decries this asymmetric relationship between humanitarian actors and vulnerable

populations, pinpointing how expectations for humanitarian workers and victims of conflict have changed over time, with humanitarian organizations focusing less on ending conflicts and placing more emphasis on the resilience of, and care for, vulnerable populations. Fassin declares:

Whereas, not so long ago, that is until the 1960s, volunteers went off to fight alongside people in their liberation struggles, it is now humanitarian workers who go to take care of victims of conflict. Where previously the language evoked in defending oppressed peoples was that of revolution, current usage favors the vocabulary of psychology to sensitize the world to their misfortune...Not so long ago we glorified the resistance of populations; we henceforth scrutinize the resilience of individuals. (532)

An emphasis on the victimhood of vulnerable populations such as IDPs without a corresponding acknowledgement and enhancement of their capacity to help themselves perpetuates the victim stereotype and condemns these populations to a position of perpetual dependency. In such a position, these populations live at the mercy of humanitarian actors. In my interaction with IDPs, for instance, I have come to recognize that one of the appalling expectations of humanitarian actors for them is a clear understanding of their “position” as IDPs. Knowing one’s position in the interaction with humanitarian actors and remaining *in the position* play a key part in one’s access to aid. IDPs who *know* their position understand when to talk and when to remain silent, when to complain and when to laud, who to hobnob and who to avoid.

Despite any misgivings an IDP might have, if such a person chooses to challenge, for instance, a camp official or security agent in public, that IDP faces serious consequences, including reduction of food supplies, denial of aid, physical punishment, or even the risk of expulsion from the camp. Hence, even in situations that require rage against systems of oppression in the camp, many IDPs choose to remain docile in order not to incur the wrath of the powers-that-be. Some IDPs who choose to criticize the government or camp officials, do it in a subtle way: (1) they mention the problems besetting IDPs in the camp; (2) they express gratitude for the good the government has so far done; and (3) they end either by emphasizing that more could still be done to better their lives or by dexterously couching as a prayer to God their request for better living conditions. Sometimes, these three elements appear in different orders in their criticism of the status quo.



Illustration 2: A young IDP hurrying to queue up for water. Water shortage is a recurrent concern for IDPs.

Amidst the palpable fear of punishment, IDPs have devised clever ways of relaying their grievances about camp life and the humanitarian aid administration therein. For instance, an interviewee in Bakassi camp complained bitterly to me about the ill-treatment of IDPs in the camp, and then finished by couching his complaint like this:

What's happening in this camp, well, we thank God and we thank the president. We thank camp officials. We're many here and the responsibility is huge. What we want, our prayer is for there to be an end to this Boko Haram problem, so we can all go back home, start our lives all over again and live in peace. At home, everybody can hide their secrets and maintain their dignity. You'll decide for yourself what to do to make ends meet. You decide whether you want to farm or do business. That's my prayer.

In the above quote, the IDP artfully registers his displeasure with camp life, revealing it as a life of indignity without expressly calling it so. Also, by insinuating that in the camp IDPs remain vulnerable to the prying eyes of everybody, with each person's secrets laid bare for all to see, he subtly exposes the folly in the prevailing idea that IDPs have accepted the camp as home and are comfortable inside. The interviewee also introduces an understanding of home that involves self-determination. Camp life denies IDPs their self-determination, in the sense that they cannot decide for themselves what to do to better their lives. Chased away from their land, many of these IDPs who hitherto relied on their land for survival, now face not just an occupational crisis but an existential one as well, as they must retool to survive, yet do

not have the incentives, opportunities, or even an enabling environment to help them retool.

Notwithstanding the risks associated with deserting one's role or 'position,' some IDPs have in fact embarked on public protests against camp officials and the government for deteriorating living conditions in the camp. Abdulkareem Haruna reported in a *Premium Times* article on February 6, 2019 how hundreds of IDPs from Baga occupied streets in Maiduguri, Borno State in a show of public dissent as a result of the hunger in their camp and the highhandedness of camp officials. A few months later, thousands of IDPs in the Banki Camp in Borno staged their own protest, citing non-availability and delay of foodstuff (Musa Njadvara, *The Guardian*). In August 2016, according to Ndahi Marama's article in the *Vanguard*, IDPs in Bakassi camp had also protested, barricading the Maiduguri-Biu road in the Borno State capital and expressing their grievances about poor food in the camp and mistreatment by the government and other humanitarian agencies.

As in their interaction with camp officials and security agents, IDPs also adopt social roles in their rapport with non-state humanitarian actors. A telling occasion of this kind of role-play presents itself in IDPs' begging of alms from camp visitors, especially those unaccompanied by camp officials. In a conscious attempt to curry favors from visitors, IDPs recount tales of misery, painting in the worst possible way their reality of suffering, even to the point of shedding tears, in a choreographed appeal to the fellow-felling of visitors. Sometimes, when such a performance of their suffering does not elicit the desired result, they straightforwardly beg for alms, with some of them adding in Hausa or the pidgin variant: "*at all at all na him bad pass,*"

which loosely means “getting something, no matter how small, is better than getting nothing at all.”

IDPs also understand full well that some individuals come to the camp for ulterior motives, which include posing for pictures with IDPs and displaying the pictures on social media for feel-good reasons or as a mechanism for generating funds for the individuals’ NGOs. When IDPs come across visitors that come to the camp adorned in NGO-branded outfits, armed with digital cameras, and are posing for pictures with IDPs from one location to another within the camp, IDPs know how to leverage their reality of displacement to extract from such visitors a performance of benevolence towards them. IDPs have no problem with individuals and organizations taking photos of them, or even brandishing their faces on social media or other media outlets. What they despise is exploiting their condition for personal or corporate benefits without giving them something concrete in return, even if the gift is not commensurate with the rewards such individuals or organizations stand to garner from the photos. In a conversation with an IDP, he expressed to me his shock when he once travelled to Lagos and saw a picture of himself and fellow IDPs on the poster of an organization soliciting funds on behalf of IDPs. He wondered if the funds being generated would ever trickle down to IDPs.

Performative acts in the context of internal displacement in Nigeria also include the role-playing that the Boko Haram insurgency has foisted on individuals who may not be IDPs, but live and/or work in states where terrorism-induced displacement is rife. While researching for this dissertation, I was one of such individuals. On my return to Abuja by road from Maiduguri, the military at

checkpoints unwittingly assigned to me a role: the role of a potential terrorist. I did not have this experience when, together with a research assistant, I flew down to Maiduguri from Abuja. But, on our return, this time by road, we went through several military checkpoints. At each checkpoint, the soldiers asked everyone but the driver of the bus to disembark. Upon disembarking, we queued up before gun-wielding military personnel, while some of their colleagues, with guns dangling from their shoulders, interrogated and frisked us, and then checked our IDs. After this vetting process, they made us walk, under the scorching sun, for a few miles on the side of the road to reunite with our driver and continue our journey. Between where the driver stopped the bus for us to disembark and where the soldiers were standing was a few meters.

But one would not blame the soldiers for their action, as they had become accustomed to Boko Haram terrorists opening fire at them at checkpoints. They had to erect barricades a few meters away where everyone, but the driver, would exit the vehicle and trek towards them. In that way, they would already be prepared to fire back in the event of anybody exiting their vehicle with firearms ready to attack them. These repeated checkpoints punctuated at intervals the 525-mile journey from Maiduguri to Abuja, thereby disturbingly prolonging the journey. Nevertheless, if you had been accustomed to the guerrilla tactics of Boko Haram militants and their devastating use of suicide bombers against both civilians and the military, a few more hours on the road because of military checkpoints would be considered worthwhile. The problem with such improvised checkpoints, however, was that bandits, kidnappers, and even Boko Haram militants routinely set up similar checkpoints to

rob, abduct, and even kill, and it was often difficult to tell ahead of time who the people managing the checkpoint ahead would be until one arrived at the barrier.

Encountering Boko Haram on the highway elicits a different kind of performance. I was lucky not to encounter them on that journey, or on any of my journeys to and from Maiduguri. But other people have not been so lucky. On January 17, 2020, *The Cable* reported the abduction of at least eight University of Maiduguri students on their return to school around the Jakana section of the Damaturu-Maiduguri road. One of the abductees, a second-year biological science student, secured his release from Boko Haram after putting up a social performance of religion. Although he was a student of Biological Sciences, he told the insurgents that he was a student of Arabic at the university, and that he was studying the course so he could better understand and preach the word of God. The student left home that morning a student of Biological Sciences and, without any input from his university regarding course change, suddenly became a student of Arabic. In one fell swoop, he engineered his own survival by acting his way out of the grip of Boko Haram. As Michael Kirby notes, “[a]cting means to feign, to simulate, to represent, to impersonate” (3). The student feigned his course, simulated the identity of a student of Arabic, represented himself as such, and then impersonated the role of a budding Islamic preacher. This act of role-playing saved him.

In a blatant exploitation of gendered stereotypes, Boko Haram too have resorted to role-play as demonstrated in their employment of women as suicide bombers in their ongoing offensive against the state and the Nigerian society. Wired as human weapons, these suicide bombers pose an enormous strategy challenge for the

military, as the bombers upon their discovery by the military could easily change their target location and detonate the bomb immediately, wreaking havoc on anyone or anything in the immediate surroundings. Nigeria's first female suicide bomber did exactly just that when, in June of 2014, she rode a motorcycle to a military barracks in Gombe and detonated her explosives upon being searched at a checkpoint, killing a soldier in the process. In a conservative society like northeast Nigeria, the introduction of female suicide bombers complicates the security challenges in the region, as it also meant the deployment of female military personnel—who are already in short supply—to checkpoints to search women.

After undergoing thorough indoctrination, these female suicide bombers, many of them teenagers, ditch gendered expectations of teen girls, and assume gendered roles of masculinity in brazen transgression of the socio-cultural norms of northern Nigeria. By February 28, 2018, a record number of 469 Boko Haram-deployed female suicide bombers either had launched their attacks or had been arrested in 240 incidents in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, resulting in the killing of over 1,200 persons across these countries, with approximately 3,000 others injured (Elizabeth Pearson 33).

The narrative of female suicide bombers as willing martyrs exists in literature on terrorism. Elizabeth Pearson reveals that in “Chechnya, for example, the so-called ‘Black Widows’ shared experiences of brutality and rape by Russian security forces to elicit public sympathy prior to their bombings” (42). But in the case of Boko Haram, there is hardly any direct linkage between martyrdom and female suicide bombing, especially as “Boko Haram has not ‘capitalized’ on female suicide deaths with

martyrdom videos, or ‘wasiyeh,’ which have in other terrorist groups elevated women as ‘poster-girls’” (Pearson 42). On the contrary, there have been reports of coercion of young women to embody the role of human bombs in furtherance of Boko Haram’s terrorism mission. In fact,

Some stories reveal parents ‘donating’ girls to Boko Haram. Zaharau Babangida, a 13-year-old girl who aborted an attack in Kano, described how her parents ordered her to join Boko Haram, which they supported. Another account of coercion comes from an adult, ‘Hauwa.’ She willingly married an insurgent but after his death rejected the advances of another militant and was ordered to blow herself up. She refused. There are other complex accounts like theirs that ‘defy neat categories’ and demonstrate a spectrum of agency.

(Pearson 43)

The deployment of women as suicide bombers may be appealing to Boko Haram for many reasons, including the fact that, at checkpoints, women get searched in a slacker manner than men and their clothing allows them to conceal weapons. Also, the fact that most of the military personnel at checkpoints are men, coupled with the religio-cultural expectations for men to be discreet in public engagements with women that involve bodily contact, complicates the search of women, further increasing their appeal to terrorist groups for use in suicide bombing. As if to substantiate the efficacy of deploying women as suicide bombers, some Boko Haram men have gone to the extent of disguising themselves as women to execute suicide-bombing attacks. Some of these attacks have been successful, while a few have not, with the Joint Task Force apprehending some cross-dressing insurgents.

The enactment of gendered norms evident in the performance of internal displacement also appears in the larger social drama of forced displacement and migration. Noelle Brigden's ethnographic research in Central America gives credence to the occurrence of this kind of enactment among migrants in that part of the world. In "Gender Mobility: Survival Plays and Performing Central American Migration in Passage," Brigden recounts how migrants improvise performances of gender to help them navigate the vicissitudes of the migrant journey and attain their goals. She reveals how a large cast of migrants, smugglers, gangs, activists, soldiers, policemen, migration officials, journalists, food vendors, and humanitarian workers stage performances of survival along the lengthy, meandering migration route (Brigden 112). She, too, takes part in these self-styled performances when, at different points in her research, she assumes the roles of a volunteer, a researcher, and a staff member in a Catholic shelter (113).

Portraying migrants' employment of performance to negotiate their otherness along the migration route, Brigden emphasizes that migrants devise "loose reenactments" of their self-styled stories to strengthen or subvert gender binaries, thereby creating social ambiguity (112). For instance, in a bid to escape violence from gangs and immigration officials, many migrant men ditch the dominant narrative of masculinity as strong, assertive, and aggressive and perform the script of vulnerability and docility often associated with the dominant narrative of femininity. Some women, on their part, flip these problematic gender stereotypes and display enormous physical and mental strength, which allows them to surmount the travails of the migrant journey, in clear subversion of the stereotype of women as soft and brittle. Brigden

also reveals that some migrant women cover themselves up from head to toe and, with prayers or religious songs streaming from their lips throughout the journey, perform the role of the virtuous woman. This performance helps some of them to escape sexual assault from gangs, smugglers, immigration officials, and fellow migrants. The “makeshift nature of these performances,” Brigden underlines, “unmoors social expectations” and “reorders possibilities and constraints for both men and women” (112). I add that this makeshift nature substantiates Judith Butler’s assertion that “gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity, instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (519). Through the lens of performance, we get to understand not just the dynamism of gender but also the production, institution, and policing of gender norms.

Another telling performance that Brigden uncovers in her ethnographic research concerns migrants’ packaging and retelling of their experience of violence or rape as if it had happened to someone other than themselves. Brigden had already learned from other sources that some of these migrants who had narrated to her their stories of abuse as mere close calls or as the experience of someone else were the victims of the described abuse. Brigden explains:

Indeed, some victims of rape may have transformed their personal experience into third-person accounts of violence suffered by ‘a friend’ to avoid directly talking about their own experiences. Others may have shared their first-person narratives as close calls, ending with a miraculous rescue. The plot turn of the

close call recurs in the interviews; several women escaped at the last moment through an incredible turn of events (113).

What these veiled re-enactments of the abuse show is how trauma and stigma associated with sexual victimization wreaks havoc on the psyche and lives of victims. It also reveals how through what Brigden calls “selective silences” and “optimistic adaptations” of their narratives of abuse, marginalized people use performance as a means for “surviving violence, protecting reputation and redefining identity in its wake” (Brigden 113). Just like the migrants Brigden interviewed, IDPs in my research too desisted from the specificities of sexual assault cases, choosing instead to speak about rape and sexual assault generically as a major problem in the camp without giving away personal identifications or going into details about the nature of the assault.

Production Team of the Performance of Internal Displacement

As in every devised performance, there exists a production team in the performance of internal displacement. In the case of conflict-induced internal displacement in Nigeria, the production team comprises complex and overlapping drivers such as Boko Haram insurgency, conflicts between pastoralists and farmers, ethno-religious skirmishes, political violence, armed banditry, and rampant corruption in government. As data from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) show, Nigeria recorded nearly 142,000 new displacements in the first half of 2019 alone, with 140,000 resulting from conflict and 2,000 stemming from disasters.⁵ The

⁵ See “Nigeria,” an IDMC report on Nigeria’s internal displacement figures. <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/nigeria>. Accessed February 15, 2020.

Boko Haram group is responsible for the majority of these new conflict-induced displacements.

Founded as an Islamic sect in 2002 in Maiduguri by Mohammed Yusuf, the group eventually withdrew into remote parts of northeast Nigeria where it sought to create an Islamic State in Nigeria and began recruiting jihadis. Analysts have blamed the Nigerian government for its role in the emergence of Boko Haram, citing the government's repeated acts of ignoring warnings about the steady metamorphosis of the sect into a militarized group. In 2008, a police investigation of the group led to the July 26th arrest, by security agents, of nine of the group's members and the seizure of their firearms and bomb-making apparatus. After a reprisal attack on the police—either because of the arrest of its members or the confrontation with police during a funeral procession—a joint military task force launched an offensive against the group, leading to the death of over 700 persons (mostly members of the group) by July 30th. The founder, Yusuf, was arrested, and he died in the custody of security forces.



Illustration 3: A scene from the performance of *Displaced* at A.B.U, Zaria, dramatizing the trauma IDPs face following their encounter with Boko Haram.

At his inauguration as President of Nigeria on May 29, 2015, Muhammadu Buhari underscored how lapses in government and the security apparatus in the country contributed to the rise of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. He explained:

Boko Haram is the typical example of small fires causing large fires. An eccentric and unorthodox preacher with a tiny following was given posthumous fame and following by his extra-judicial murder at the hands of the Police. Since then through official bungling, negligence, complacency or collusion, Boko Haram became a terrifying force, taking tens of thousands of lives and capturing several towns and villages covering large swathes of Nigerian sovereign territory.⁶

While the government thought it was uhuru following the death of Yusuf, little did they know the bloodbath that was about to ensue with the ascension of his deputy, Abubakar Shekau, who would engineer the breakout of 105 members from the Bauchi prison along with at least 600 other prisoners. Shekau would also spearhead lethal attacks on the Nigerian public, including spates of bombings and guerrilla-style attacks in crowded areas.

Corruption in government constitutes another key player in the production team of internal displacement in Nigeria, especially as it continues to fuel the operations of Boko Haram, both directly and indirectly. Boko Haram-induced internal displacement has become a cash cow for corrupt officials at the expense of national security and the lives of soldiers sent to the battlefield to combat terrorism. Apart from being underpaid, many of these soldiers have protested over the years, decrying the

⁶ President Buhari quoted in Ona Ekhomu's *Boko Haram: Security Considerations and the Rise of an Insurgency*, p. 19.

late or partial payment of their salaries and other remunerations. They have also voiced their displeasure over the poor quality of weapons at their disposal, claiming that the terrorists they are sent to fight have superior firepower.

On May 14, 2014 news media across the country widely reported that disgruntled soldiers shot at the car of their commander, Major General Ahmed Mohammed at the Maimalari Barracks. Although he escaped unhurt, that incident spotlighted the hushed but growing discontent within the army about how the military top brass enriched themselves from the defense budget to the detriment of the lives of ordinary soldiers. In the Maimalari incident, soldiers accused the general of complicities that led to the ambush and killing of their colleagues by Boko Haram, including the supply to the soldiers of inferior firearms. In a news report, Abena Agyeman-Fisher quoted one of the soldiers lamenting that “[s]oldiers are dying like fowl.” “The Nigerian Army is not ready to fight Boko Haram,” the soldier also noted, adding, “Boko Haram are inside the bush, everywhere. They [senior commanders] are sacrificing soldiers.” Transparency International has also reported cases of inflated military contracts and the payment of “ghost soldiers” as instances of corruption within the military that undermine Nigeria’s efforts to fight the insurgents. While real soldiers remain demotivated through delay of payment or underpayments, some military chiefs enrich themselves by paying salaries to soldiers who exist only on payrolls. In addition to endangering the lives of the soldiers, the pervasive corruption in the Nigerian military continues to perpetuate the displacement of over 2 million IDPs who await an end to the Boko Haram insurgency for them to return home.

The complicity of the military and political leaders in engendering and perpetuating internal displacement across the world cannot be overemphasized. The crisis of human displacement in Liberia, for instance, stems from multiple factors, but Samuel Doe's coup of 1980 certainly exacerbated it. Although there are no consensus data on the human costs of the crisis, Colin Scott recounted that a minimum of 750,000 people became refugees and an extra million became IDPs, while 100,000-150,000 either died or got killed (113). In Burundi, similarly, an ethnopolitical conflict led to the death of over 15,000 Burundians in 1996 and the displacement of an estimated 700,000 persons, with almost 300,000 fleeing to neighboring countries as refugees and nearly 400,000 remaining in the country as IDPs (US Committee Report 19).

But we must not understand the 1996 forced displacement in isolation from the political history of Burundi, particularly from 1962 to 1992. Repeated struggles for power between the Hutu majority and the Tutsi minority had generated several conflicts and displaced large numbers of the population since 1965. These conflicts included the 1965 assassination of Burundi's Hutu-born prime minister; a coup by Hutu army officers resulting in the deaths of about 500 Tutsi barely four months later; the retaliatory massacring of over 2,500 Hutus by Tutsis; the deposition in 1966 of Burundi's monarchy which until then had acted as a political stabilizer; and then the 1972 massacre of an estimated 150,000 persons, mainly Hutus, following the killing in southern Burundi of about 2,000 Tutsis by Hutu militants (23-25). Following their forced displacement, most Tutsi IDPs lived in large congregations under the protection of the military, while, on the contrary, most Hutu IDPs lived in small units in rural

areas and without armed protection from the military. As the US Committee for Refugees documents,

The military assumes that Hutu civilians give assistance to Hutu rebels in the current conflict. This makes all Hutu civilians potential targets in the military's thinking. Many Hutu, meanwhile, regard the heavily guarded camps for displaced Tutsi as bases for Tutsi civilian militia, or as safe zones intended to keep Tutsi out of the line of fire while soldiers slaughter the rural Hutu population (37).

The grouping of IDP camps based on ethnicity further polarized the country and complicated humanitarian efforts to provide relief to IDPs (41-3). On the one hand, some international organizations accused the Tutsi-backed military of inflating the food-need figures of IDPs under its protection, while simultaneously reducing food aid to the IDPs as a form of political control. The military, on the other hand, accused international organizations of favoring the Hutu IDPs in the distribution of aid and, by the same stroke, marginalizing the Tutsi.

The large cost of human displacement in Yugoslavia too can be traced to the decisions and, in some cases, indecisions of military and political actors, but especially of the latter. Thomas G. Weiss and Amir Pasic affirm this point when they argue that the “three most common characteristics of sovereignty—territory, authority, and identity—have been in continuous flux and contested at every turn” in the Yugoslav wars that led to the displacement of many people (178). As if to buttress the political nature of the social drama of displacement resulting from the wars, Weiss and Pasic further note:

The political roots of violence in the Yugoslav case indicate that the lessons are overwhelmingly related to actions that should be, and should have been, taken in the political arena. Humanitarian measures cannot address fundamentally political problems. As in other complex emergencies, misplaced humanitarianism and political ineffectiveness often combined in the former Yugoslavia to make a bad situation worse. (177)

Although the Yugoslavia wars were a combination of insurgencies, ethnic conflicts, socio-economic downturns, and battles for independence, the role of political actors cannot be overemphasized. No doubt, Yugoslav leaders politicized ethnicity for their political agendas, fueling hatred along ethno-demographic lines, and setting the stage for a grand military offensive that culminated in the Croatian War, the Bosnian Wars, and the war against the Croatian and Bosnian Serbs, thereby engendering the displacement of over 4 million persons in the former Yugoslavia (Weiss and Pasic 183-4).

However, political leaders and the military are not alone in their perpetuation of internal displacement. They occasionally collaborate with (other) humanitarian actors to exploit displaced persons. In the performance of internal displacement, people whose task it is to protect and provide for IDPs also exploit IDPs. Sometimes, these people stray away from their assigned roles, choosing instead to become rogue actors by deserting the stage directions in their employment script and assigning to themselves improvised roles that run contrary to their organization's ideals. In the situation of Yugoslavia's IDPs, Weiss and Pasic observe that "aid deliverers and so-called protectors often contributed to exacerbating the problems of victims," with

peacekeepers in Sarajevo engaging in “smuggling, recruiting women for prostitution, and selling aid shipments illegally” (191).

The Nigerian IDP situation is no different, as there have been reported cases of aid administrators misappropriating funds meant for IDPs. Some aid materials meant for IDPs have also been repackaged and resold at cheap rates on the black market and, sometimes in the open market, to assuage the greed of corrupt government officials and their accomplices. *Premium Times* on March 19, 2018 reported the arrest by the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corp (NSCDC) of some people in a Borno State motor park as they were diverting relief materials, including food, books, and other educational materials meant for IDPs to a location outside the state. Those materials had been donated by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Program (WFP). Other instances of the diversion of relief materials abound in the country, with culprits often repackaging the typically branded materials before selling them.



Illustration 4: Internally displaced schoolgirls and their UNICEF backpacks.

In a scathing criticism of state humanitarian actors, Blaise Aboh declared in an online news bulletin, *Medium*:

These monsters are insane with greed and have no souls. They are untouchable and have their tentacles in every cake in the government's bakery. They are overtly corrupt individuals with super political power who do not care for development in Nigeria and in recent time are stealing and diverting humanitarian funds and resources, depriving Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS) from the North East of relief materials and food items, causing them unnecessary frustration, hopelessness and poverty, as they die in numbers of preventable diseases after losing their families, homes and lives to Boko Haram insurgency, a crisis that should never have happened.

Senator Shehu Sani, who chaired a senate committee that probed the pervasive corruption in the administration of IDP-related humanitarian aid in the country, also lamented the rot in IDP aid administration in the country. In his explanation to Reuters, the senator underlined that, conservatively, "over 10 billion naira (\$33 million) of monies that were supposed to go to the IDPs (internally displaced persons) were misappropriated or unaccounted for, or misused from different segments of the Nigerian government" (Akwagyiram September 14, 2017).

One of the high-ranking government officials implicated in the diversion of funds meant for the insurgency-ravaged northeast region was Babachir Lawal. He was accused of fraud to the tune of N500 million. *Premium Times* on September 18, 2019 captured one of the charges by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) against him:

That you Engineer Babachir David Lawal, while being the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) and a director of Rholavision Engineering Ltd on or about the 22nd of August 2016 at Abuja in the Abuja judicial division of the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory, did knowingly hold indirectly private interest in the contract awarded to Josmon Technological Limited but executed by Rholavision Engineering Limited for the removal of invasive plant species and simplified irrigation to the tune of N258,132,735.99 (Two Hundred and Fifty Eight Million, One hundred and Thirty Two Thousand, Seven Hundred and Thirty Five Naira, Ninety Nine Kobo) only, by the office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (OSGF) through the Presidential Initiative for North East (PINE) and thereby committed an offence punishable under Section 12 of the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, 2000.

Babachir's misappropriation of funds meant for the displaced victims of the Boko Haram insurgency elicited widespread condemnation across the country, leading to his removal from office as Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) on October 31, 2017. Many Nigerians could not understand why anybody, especially someone occupying his eminent position, would seek to enrich himself or herself from the purse of vulnerable populations such as IDPs.

There have been other cases of corruption like that, and they have sparked publicly organized protests in the country, especially in Abuja and the northeast. These protests, in themselves, serve as improvised performances geared towards achieving a political result, including the apprehension and prosecution of government

officials involved in exploiting IDPs for their personal gains. As Jeffrey C. Alexander reckons:

If theatre contrives to dramatize compulsive emotional conflict, so do publicly organized political movements strive to dramatize urgent social conflicts, to publicly demand political and economic reform. Theatre and political movements both project meaning toward distant audiences via more and less artfully constructed symbolic performance. (6)

Richard Schechner also accentuates how politics-themed public events such as street protests serve to dramatize social conflicts. Such events buttress drama as a cross-cultural phenomenon and one that is not restricted to the stage (in the traditional sense of the word) but includes the province of everyday life, thereby making performing on stage, at socio-political events, and in everyday life a continuum (Schechner, *Performance Studies* 143).

The Spectacle of Internal Displacement

Another performative act of internal displacement is the creation of spectacle. Spectacles represent eye-catching exhibitions notable for the visual impact and emotive appeal they generate from their unusualness or unexpectedness. In Africa, spectacle plays a pivotal role in the understanding and creation of performance. This is partly because, as Okagbue admits, “[i]n Africa, the idea of performance is very much about ‘showing’ and ‘seeing’. It is about spectacle, a feast for the eyes. It can sometimes be an auditory feast for the ears, as Igbo *Ayaka* performances show” (2). Boko Haram terrorists seem to understand the importance of spectacle to performances in Africa and make it a key part of their campaign of terror.

We witness spectacle, for instance, in the style and scale of Boko Haram operations. Although not receiving as wide a media coverage as Al Qaeda or the Islamic State, this group has been responsible for largescale fatalities, making them, according to the *Global Terrorism Index 2015*, the deadliest terror group in the world in 2014. That year witnessed over 300 percent increment in fatalities from terrorist attacks in Nigeria, with the total figure put at 7,512, of which Boko Haram was responsible for 6,644 deaths (*Global Terrorism Index 4,12*). To put this figure into context, the same terrorism index estimated that Daesh or the Islamic State killed 6,073 people in the same year. Boko Haram's tactics involve indoctrination, looting, kidnapping, killing, suicide bombing, attacks on security posts, and raids on towns and villages. Marius Pricopi captures this spectacle in his description of the terrorist operation of the group:

...first, large numbers of terrorists assaulted the communities, initially targeting police or military institutions and facilities; after government forces were neutralized or determined to abandon their posts, the terrorists captured the arms and ammunition left behind; then they targeted civilians, either gunning them down as they tried to escape or executing them in their own homes; simultaneously, [the] terrorists looted shops, collected private valuables, set houses on fire and abducted residents. (43).

The kidnapping of 276 Chibok schoolgirls from a secondary school on the night of 14-15 April 2014 took the spectacle for which Boko Haram had been known to an alarming scale, with the news of the abducted girls becoming an international sensation almost immediately. The Nigerian military rescued 57 of the girls a few

months later. On May 12, 2014, the insurgents heightened the sensationalism of the Chibok-girls abduction by releasing a video of roughly 130 kidnapped girls clad in hijab. Outrage spread in some parts of the country after seeing the video, with some Christian groups expressing indignation over the alleged conversion of the Christian girls to Islam. On May 30, a civilian armed group in Baale reported that they had found two of the kidnapped girls, barely alive and tied to a tree, with four others killed and buried by the terrorist group for allegedly disobeying their orders. On May 6, 2017, the terrorist group released 82 of the schoolgirls following intense negotiation between the group and the Nigerian government, with intervention from the Red Cross and the Swiss government. The deal involved the exchange of five Boko Haram leaders.

In addition to the Chibok girls, Boko Haram has since abducted many other girls at different times and locations. The Nigerian military and the Civilian Joint Task Force have found some of these girls during their operations in and around Sambisa Forest, with some of the teen girls found to be carrying babies born to Boko Haram insurgents. Although more Chibok girls have been released since May 6, 2017, with some of them already continuing their studies in the United States, the whereabouts of 112 of the Chibok girls remained unknown five years later. Since the Chibok abduction, the terrorist group has gone ahead to kidnap many more people, including 110 girls from Government Girls' Science and Technical College in Dapchi, Yobe State in northeast Nigeria. The February 19, 2018 abduction of the Dapchi schoolgirls demonstrated that the group's appetite for spectacle had not waned. After initially remaining silent on the abduction, the Nigerian government announced on March 21,

2018 that the group had returned 106 of the girls. Leah Sharibu, a fourteen-year-old, was not among the girls released, with reports in the media alleging that the terrorist group had insisted on not releasing her until she converted to Islam.

Like terrorism-induced internal displacement in Nigeria, the IDP crisis that stemmed from the Rwandan genocide was nothing short of a spectacle too, making Larry Minear and Randolph C. Kent to describe the IDP situation in Rwanda as a “conundrum within a conundrum” (57). In the aftermath of the killing of the president of Rwanda, the mutual suspicion between Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups grew worse, providing a fertile ground for series of propagandist messages which engineered one of the worst genocides the world has ever witnessed. No doubt, the international community failed in its initial response to the crime against humanity unfolding in Rwanda, preferring instead to frame it as a clash between rival ethnic groups. It was after the literal slaughter of 500,000 to 800,000 people, the flight of about 2 million Rwandese as refugees to neighboring countries, and a further displacement within the country of approximately 2 million of Rwanda’s estimated population of 8 million people that the international community acknowledged the traumatizing gravity of the genocide happening in the country (Minear and Kent 62-3).

In *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda*, Scott Straus describes the horrifying spectacle:

On April 6, 1994, Rwanda’s fate changed. At 8.20 that evening, the plane carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana and his entourage was shot down over Kigali. Quickly after the assassination, Hutu hardliners took control of the Rwandan state. In short order, they physically eliminated their main

rivals in the political opposition, drew the RPF into combat, attacked international peacekeepers, and sidelined dissenters in the army. From there, the hardliners unleashed an all-out war against the “Tutsi enemy,” and Rwanda hurdled horribly and swiftly toward genocide. One hundred days later, Rwandans had murdered at least half a million other Rwandans, including an estimated 75 percent of the resident Tutsi population. It was the twentieth century’s fastest genocide (41).

The genocide took many forms, including looting, maiming, killing, and sexual assault. It also comprised large-scale rape, with some statistics putting the figure of the rape cases at 250,000. However, some researchers such as Straus have disputed this figure, especially as the 1991 census in Rwanda estimated the number of Tutsi women in the country to be 163,738 (Straus 52). The number of rape cases, Straus contends, might have been derived from the number of “rape babies” recorded during the genocide. Notwithstanding the actual number of rape cases, one can never fathom the depth of the trauma that rape engendered within the women. Such a crass display of inhumanity towards fellow human beings, not even mentioning the fact that the rapist and the raped all belonged to the same country, heightened the spectacle of the genocide, just as it also indicted the international community for sleepwalking when ordinary Rwandese expected a proactive response to quell the holocaust.

Many years have passed since the Rwandan genocide took place, but the spectacle of the occurrence persists in the hearts and minds of many people in the country and around the world. This spectacle is also sheltered in the Kigali Memorial

Centre. Concerning the sheltering of the spectacle, Laura Edmondson in *Performing Trauma in Central Africa: Shadows of Empire* observes:

The curators use a range of representational strategies in a determined effort to capture the horror of those three months. From the facticity of videotaped testimonies and photographs to the abstractness of sculpture and stained-glass windows, the museum seeks to capture the immensity of genocide through a variety of techniques. Visitors who move past the mass graves encounter a memorial garden complex, in which a waterfall signifies the country's descent into genocide, and roses invoke the individuality of the victims. Those looking for a more gut-wrenching experience can visit the Children's Room in the museum, which contains a display of enlarged backlit photographs of fourteen children who were killed in the genocide. (35)

Though admirable for multiple reasons, this museum promotes the pornography of trauma since it repackages the Rwandan genocide as a commodified spectacle for consumption on the global stage of exhibitionist voyeurism and revisionist history. As Edmondson rightly notes, "[t]hroughout the museum, the concept of the genocide as the defining moment of Rwandan identity is repeatedly and insistently driven home" (37). As a result of a centering of the spectacle, all other aspects of Rwanda, including its rich culture and multifaceted resourcefulness, get relegated to the backseat of irrelevance.

Despite the foregoing, I must note that spectacle permeates not just the reality of IDPs, but also that of all forcibly displaced persons across the globe. In *Managing the Undesirables: Refugee Camps and Humanitarian Government*, Michel Agier

chronicles some of these spectacles, including the reality of Afghan asylum seekers in humanitarian camps at Woomera, Australia who “killed themselves by hurling themselves against the barbed-wire fences;” the “borders of many kinds, dotted with sophisticated control systems” in Europe; “the dead who pile up at the borders;” and the detention camps built for immigrants “on the other side of the Mediterranean, in Algeria or Libya, where some African ‘illegals’ are sent back and abandoned in the desert with no means of survival, eventually to die” (3,12). This appalling reduction of displaced persons to mere spectacles under the devouring gaze of the public objectifies this vulnerable population. It also calls for rethinking (1) what it means to be human and (2) what constitutes our shared obligations to one another as members of the human community.

Costume, Make-up, and the Aesthetics of Internal Displacement

Costume and make-up enhance the aesthetics of any performance, including the performance of internal displacement. Costumed in varying styles of camouflaged outfits, with heads wrapped in turbans revealing only their eyes, Boko Haram insurgents periodically storm villages and towns, unleashing terror as villains in the performance of internal displacement. IDPs, as another set of key actors in the performance of internal displacement, also have their own costumes. They wear various forms of civilian apparel, depending on the roles they would be playing on a given day. To showcase their suffering, some IDPs choose to wear dirty and tattered clothes in calculated evocation of sympathy and empathy from humanitarian actors or camp visitors. If, for some reason, some visitors fail to notice the tattered clothes,

some IDPs would not hesitate to draw their attention to the clothes in the hope of getting not necessarily new clothes but financial assistance.

There are also IDPs who fundamentally resent their reality of displacement and, as a passive protest, have chosen to always dress neatly, as if to announce that they do not belong in the camp. Such IDPs resent their subjection to alms as a way of life and cannot wait for the insurgency to end for them to return home and rebuild their lives. There are likewise IDPs who make it a duty to dress elegantly on Fridays when most of them go to the mosque for prayers. On such days, they remove any costume that reminds them of their suffering, and enrobe themselves in their best attire, as they join other Muslims in prayer.

Humanitarian agents and camp officials as well have their costuming aesthetics, with many of them wearing branded t-shirts and caps, or reflective vests (mostly orange, yellow, or blue). This costume serves as an identification mechanism for humanitarian actors in their interactions with IDPs, just as it also reinforces their authority and purpose in the lives of IDPs. The mere sight of the costume institutes in IDPs a certain set of expectations, including how they should behave, what they might say, or whether to even flee.

Instructively, IDPs have recounted stories about some young women who have received beauty treatments from Boko Haram insurgents before being sent on suicide mission as human bombs. Vladimir Hernandez and Stephanie Hegarty confirm these stories in their well-illustrated BBC report, “Made-up to Look Beautiful. Sent Out to Die.” “Falmata is getting a full beauty treatment—a thick paste of henna, with its delicate pointed swirls, adorns her feet,” they narrate. “While it dries, a woman is

battling with her hair. Comb in hand she's stretching and straightening Falmata's tight curls." The spectacle associated with dressing this young woman for death mirrors a scene in Euripides' *The Bacchae* in which Dionysius costumes Pentheus as a woman in preparation for the latter's ill-fated journey. Dionysius reveals:

Now
I shall go and costume Pentheus in the clothes
which he must wear to Hades when he dies, butchered
by the hands of his mother. He shall come to know
Dionysius, son of Zeus, consummate god,
most terrible, and yet most gentle, to mankind. (291-92)

Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* also includes a scene in which an individual is costumed for death. Aware that the king has died, Elesin, who is the king's horseman, must, according to Yoruba tradition, also die and journey to the afterlife with the king. In preparation for his fate, the women of the marketplace help dress Elesin in elegant clothing, after his complaint to them about his undeserving outfit. Like Elesin, Pentheus too complains about his outfit. But, unlike Elesin, his complaint concerns the costume he is about to wear, not the one he is already wearing. Pentheus eventually succumbs and gets dressed as a woman, after Dionysius convinces and mesmerizes him. In the case of Falmata, the insurgents permit her to choose the style for her hair and henna, and she is also allowed ample henna for her hands, legs, and even neck. Some escapees have also reported being clad in beautiful clothes before being sent on suicide-bombing missions.

Both Pentheus and Elesin know beforehand the nature of the journey before them. Elesin makes this known in his announcement:

My rein is loosened.
I am master of my Fate. When the hour comes
Watch me dance along the narrowing path

Glazed by the soles of my great precursors.
My soul is eager. I shall not turn aside. (1154)

When some women ask him if nothing will deter him from accepting his fate, Elesin responds:

Nothing. What! Has no one told you yet?
I go to keep my friend and master company. (1154)

In Falmata's case, however, at the time of the make-up she only knows she is being made to look beautiful for a mission. What she does not know is the kind of mission for which she is being prepared—a mission to blow herself up in a large crowd. At the end of the make-up session, when a suicide bomb gets attached to her waist, the mission soon becomes clear to her.

Narration and the Performance of Internal Displacement

Narration represents another crucial performative act in internal displacement. This act often involves the transmission of stories to an audience from a given point of view, with the intent to raise awareness about an issue and, in some cases, elicit a calculated response from the audience. In the performance of internal displacement, there exist multiple narrators, with some living within the country housing the IDPs while others live faraway in other countries. The contested narratives surrounding internal displacement the world over reveal a multiplicity of points of view from which individuals and groups have sought to understand internal displacement. As Clayton Hamilton observes about narratives in *Studies in Stagecraft*:

Any story, to attract and to enthrall attention, must exhibit the crisis, or climax, of a series of events, but the individual artist is left at liberty to determine how far before the crisis he shall set the initiation of his narrative and how far

beyond it he shall set the end. If he is interested mainly in causes, he will choose to depict in detail the events that lead up to his climax; and if he is interested mainly in effects, he will prefer to devote the major share of his attention to those subsequent events that are occasioned by crisis. Thus we discover in practice two types of narratives,—in one of which the main events look forward and are interesting chiefly as causes, and in the other of which the main events look backward and are interesting chiefly as results. (176-77)

I share Hamilton's opinion that plural points of view exist in the assessment or portrayal of a story and that a point of view establishes how a story or performance may be witnessed. In the performance of internal displacement, there exist many players, each having vested interests in the way the performance should be perceived by the public as audience; hence, a plurality of narratives. These narratives pinpoint unique shades of the reality of IDPs, just as they also underline the multiple allegiances and agendas of the individuals or groups acting as narrators.

When family members learned about my desire to travel to Maiduguri to conduct part of this dissertation research, they outrightly discouraged me from traveling to the city, citing news reports of insecurity in Maiduguri and the ever-imminent danger of terrorist attacks in Borno, a state in northeast Nigeria for which Maiduguri is the capital. I told them somebody needed to do the kind of research I was planning on conducting, and that the research would not be done if everybody was afraid of encountering death in the process. Next, I convinced them I would be fine, and embarked on the trip, even though their warnings kept reverberating within me as I travelled to Maiduguri. The fear my family expressed about the travel to Maiduguri

is common among Nigerians, and it stems, largely, from the media narrative surrounding Maiduguri. Both local and international media present the city as the theatre of Boko Haram where the militant group with reckless abandon stage bomb-blast, mayhem, decapitation, and abduction, as a show of force against the government and deploy young girls as gladiators in a spectacle of suicide bombing where the allure of gore reigns supreme. Yet, Maiduguri remains a bustling, densely populated city in Borno State, where commerce thrives.

It did not take long for me to realize after arriving in Maiduguri that the hospitality subsector in the city flourished alongside IDP-related humanitarian work. With new hotels and residences sprouting in choice locations around the city, I found it difficult to decipher the designation of Maiduguri as a war zone in the psyche of practically everyone else that is not in Maiduguri. Contrary to widespread belief, Maiduguri is as safe as virtually every other part of the country, and the rampage of the terrorist group happens chiefly in the local government areas outside the city—places where most people’s means of livelihood are intricately tied to farming. This understanding gives the displacement of IDPs—that is, their forced physical removal from their land, a new meaning, making it imperative for us to look beyond the temporary shelters that have been provided to IDPs and question both the assignment and the description of the camp as home for IDPs, especially as the camp does not guarantee the sustenance of IDPs’ livelihoods the way the land from which they have been displaced would.



Illustration 5: Chased away from their ancestral land, IDPs resort to gardening within the camp to boost survival.

Another troubling narrative in the performance of internal displacement that directly concerns IDPs is the stigmatization of Boko Haram escapees. Some young women abducted by Boko Haram have managed to escape from the insurgents' camp. While in Boko Haram captivity, these women saw many members of the group go for operations and never return. Some of these women were already married to the insurgents. In the event of the demise of married insurgents, their widows faced the option of getting married to other insurgents or going for a suicide mission, with a promise of eternal bliss in paradise. Facing constant threats of death from the persistent offensive of the military, coupled with the horrors they faced in the hands of the insurgents, many of these abducted women yearned for any opportunity to escape. Suicide bombing missions, despite the obvious danger, often presented an opportunity

for them to escape from their captors, especially after being widowed. Far away from their captors with bombs strapped to their waist, some of these women have chosen not to accomplish their mission, deciding instead to turn themselves in to the military. After persistent interrogation and prolonged rehabilitation in a deradicalization center, these women get reunited with their families, or sent to IDP camps.

The ease with which information (or rumor) flows in an IDP camp presents yet another challenge for these women on their journey to recovery. Viewed as diseased, terrorist wives, or bona fide terrorists, many of these women have a hard time adjusting to life after their escape from Boko Haram. Long after their escape from the terrorists, the narrative of terrorism continues to plague them. It hangs around their necks like a medal. Camp officials and some fellow IDPs view these escapees with suspicion or open disdain. The sight of the escapees reminds some IDPs of the trauma to which Boko Haram has subjected them, and they somehow transfer their aggression onto these 'unlucky' women. These IDPs choose to focus on the act of terrorism with which the escapees have been associated rather than concentrating on (1) the humanity in the women, (2) their ill-fated victimhood, and (3) the collective victimhood these escapees share with them through a common experience of terrorist-inflicted trauma. Dealing with the stigma associated with their stay in the camp of Boko Haram is a distressing battle that these female escapees face. While they cannot eliminate the narrative of terror and contamination that trails them, many of them, at least, lean on family members or new acquaintances for support, while they chart a new course for their lives under intense scrutiny from camp officials and fellow IDPs.

Similarly, IDPs understand the importance of narrating their own stories. Through periodic protests, they seek to influence the narratives about aid administration and living conditions in the camp. Government officials, too, understand the potency of narratives, and often perform a counter-narrative in response to IDP protests. For example, when in August 2016 IDPs from Bakassi camp protested the poor living conditions in their camp, coupled with the ill-treatment they suffered from government officials and other humanitarian agencies, Mohammed Bashir Tarbari as Senior Special Assistant to the Governor on Information Communication Technology and Social Media improvised a counter-narrative. In his improvisation, he gave the protest a different meaning, describing it as a political ploy against Governor Kashim Shettima, aimed at causing disaffection among the populace.

As captured in Ndahi Marama's *Vanguard* report, Tarbari declared: "disgruntled and desperate politicians for self-centeredness use some vulnerable people at various internally displaced persons camps to cause conflict between the authorities and the respective communities by instigating them to protest." After describing the grievances of the IDPs over poor food as "unfounded allegations," he granted that in a situation where the government would have to cater for thousands of IDPs, "there might be minor mistakes which do not erode the good intentions of the authorities to give the best possible to the affected." Before concluding his remark, he urged IDPs to "be wary of some unscrupulous politicians or individuals" who might "wish to use them for their personal agenda or to settle political scores," adding that the "era of impunity" had ended and it was the responsibility of "law enforcement

agencies to bring sanity to the entire system by bringing to book the trouble makers and masterminds of violence.” The last part of the remark sounded like a threat, as if to remind IDPs of (1) their ‘position’ in society; (2) the authorities to which they should be subjected, and (3) the consequences facing them should they step out of line.



Illustration 6: Pit latrines in Bakassi IDP camp

The plurality of narratives stemming from the Bakassi IDP protest reinforces the fact that narratives are never value neutral. Hence, the ability to control the dominant narrative is key for players in the performance of internal displacement. There often does not exist a single story but a multiplicity of narratives, each competing for attention as the objective truth of the reality under consideration. In the propagation of narratives, not only is the content of the narrative important, the

medium through which it is communicated or disseminated is equally significant. Equally crucial are influential figures aligning, or perceived to be aligning, themselves with the narratives or, at least, the key actors in the narratives. With different groups clinging tenuously to their position and making truth claims, narratives yet again present themselves as never value neutral; hence, the need for a deep scrutiny of claims, a re-evaluation of issues from the perspective of others, and an honest appraisal of individual beliefs, prejudices, backgrounds, and value systems.

In the end, a focus on the performative acts of internal displacement affords us a unique opportunity to illuminate, scrutinize, and understand the existential situation of IDPs, the panoply of forces keeping them displaced, the harmful consequences of humanitarianism, and the cartographies of power at play in the administration of IDP camps, with a view to creating enabling conditions that would better the lives of these vulnerable but valuable members of humanity.

In “Act I: Performing Ethnography of Internal Displacement in Nigeria,” I take the reader on a journey through my process of conducting a performance ethnography on internal displacement in Nigeria, with IDPs as co-researchers. This chapter leverages performance ethnography as a research method to generate intimate and multi-layered understandings of IDPs. It builds on the unique knowledge of displaced persons through a collaborative process that recognizes the need to engage them as co-researching and co-participating subjects. By using the unfiltered words of IDPs to present their personal stories, I let their stories breathe in this chapter, and provide a first-hand access to their lives, especially those silences agitating for airplay in the public sphere.

The next chapter, “Act II: *Displaced*: An Ethnographic Drama of Internal Displacement” presents a full-length play, *Displaced*, resulting from the fieldwork. Caught between resignation and resistance, IDPs must choose how to negotiate survival in their interaction with humanitarian actors. Jointly set in an IDP camp in Nigeria and at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, *Displaced* provides a snapshot of this negotiation for survival.

In the third act, “A Multivalent Analysis of *Displaced*,” I subject *Displaced* to a critical examination, x-raying the unique, embodied kind of knowing underpinning it as an ethnographic play which centers the personal stories, perspectives, and priorities of IDPs as an underprivileged and underserved population that, nonetheless, constitutes a rich repository of knowledge. In the exploration of the principal characters in the play, their metatheatrical relations to the lived conditions of IDPs, and their complex interactions among themselves, the chapter offers a multi-layered understanding of internal displacement and the panoply of drivers that continue to keep IDPs displaced and exploited in reckless abandon.

I conclude the dissertation with “Epilogue: Hope in the Time of Displacement.” This final section contains my reflection on the entire project and my plans for its future. It also contextualizes our understanding of IDPs’ response to displacement as one of hope. Beaten down in their quest to negotiate survival after their displacement, IDPs remain hopeful for a better day and, hence, continue to exhibit amazing resilience in the wake of protracted lack, exploitation, and subjugation. In their hope I witness their unassailable will to live and experience a

renewal in my own purpose as a human person in this unpredictable world—a purpose that is intertwined with the service of others, especially those at the margins.

ACT I

PERFORMING ETHNOGRAPHY OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN NIGERIA

But that face facing me, in its expression—in its mortality—summons me, demands me, requires me: as if the invisible death faced by the face of the other—pure alterity, separate, somehow, from any whole—were ‘my business.’...The death of the other man puts me on the spot, calls me into question, as if I, by my possible indifference, became the accomplice of that death, invisible to the other who is exposed to it; and as if, even before being condemned to it myself, I had to answer for that death of the other, and not leave the other alone to his deathly solitude. It is precisely in that recalling of me to my responsibility by the face that summons me, that demands me, that requires me—it is in that calling into question—that the other is my neighbour—Emmanuel Levinas⁷

Dialogical performance is a way of having intimate conversation with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them. The sensuous immediacy and empathic leap demanded by performance is an occasion for orchestrating two voices, for bringing together two sensibilities. At the same time, the conspicuous artifice of performance is a vivid reminder that each voice has its own integrity—Dwight Conquergood⁸

Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter—Chinua Achebe⁹

Understanding Performance Ethnography

Performance ethnography presents a dynamic opportunity for generating unique knowledge from, for, about and with underexplored, underappreciated, and underrepresented populations. Through its blend of the trio of ethnographic methods, performance theory, and performance practice, performance ethnography has recommended itself to researchers seeking, viscerally, to understand human persons, our world, and our interactions with each other and the universe. As a research

⁷ Levinas, Emmanuel, *Alterity and Transcendence*, (translated by Michael B. Smith), p. 24-25.

⁸ Dwight Conquergood, *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis*, p.77.

⁹ Chinua Achebe in an interview by Jerome Brooks entitled “Chinua Achebe, The Art of Fiction,” *The Paris Review*, issue 133, winter 1994.

method, performance ethnography accommodates a myriad of ways through which we, as humans, experience the world—ways that transcend sight, words, and statistics to include touch, smell, feeling, sound, imagination, movement, and stillness.

Apart from shining a spotlight on “social dramas or dramatic moments in everyday life, such as moments of conflict,” performance ethnography also “inquires into everyday interactions, which include culturally conditioned behavior of the performance of social roles—roles [such] as father, daughter, employee...as well as roles associated with gender...or roles [associated] with race, status, age, and so on” (Conrad 608). Performance ethnography emerged from “the so-called crisis of representation,” after “[c]ritiques of meta-narratives, truth claims, and the production of knowledge legitimized other ways of knowing, alternative approaches to doing research, and new forms of representing research” following their disavowal of “the fallacy of objectivity, the oppressive dominance of the written word, and the colonizing effect this had for the ‘other’ as the object of investigation” (Conrad 608).

Since its emergence from the aforesaid crisis of representation, performance ethnography has fostered a metaphysics of presence which emphasizes that persons, as umpires of their own presence in the world, must participate in decision-making processes about their lives. This metaphysical worldview rejects the hegemonically vertical model of knowledge dissemination where an omniscient researcher doles out knowledge to a community of uninformed receptacles. Performance ethnography not only acknowledges the rich repository of knowledge within the researched community, but also privileges the community’s participation in the research through a dialogical process of knowledge-seeking, knowledge-sharing, and knowledge-

utilization in such a way that dispels misperceptions and fosters mutual respect and understanding.



Illustration 7: Learning from IDPs in recognition of their embodied knowledge

Over the years, the effectiveness of performance ethnography as a research method has drawn to it researchers from diverse fields, prompting an intensified shift from the traditional methods of qualitative research to performance ethnography. Dwight Conquergood affirms this shift when he observes that “researchers have begun restoring and unpacking the ancient *theatrum mundi topos* for fresh ways of thinking and talking about social life” (15). Victor Turner equally acknowledges this shift, noting that “[a]nthropology itself is shifting from a stress on concepts such as structure, equilibrium, system, and regularity to process, indeterminacy, reflexivity,

resilience...There is also a renewed interest in ‘performance,’ partly stemming from sociolinguists,” modern folklorists, and the seminal work of Erving Goffman and Gregory Bateson (Turner 337).

Like many arts-based approaches, performance ethnography eschews binarism, electing rather to combine theory with practice in its quest for understanding lived experiences through “an ongoing inquiry committed to continuously asking questions, enacting interventions, gathering information, and analyzing that information before asking further questions and enacting more living inquiry” (Irwin 27). It investigates the folds of meanings generated and transacted during interactions between the researcher and the researched, and between the multiple identities, communities and relationalities on display; thus, providing a keen understanding of intersubjective layers of existence and experience that may at once be evocative and provocative, illuminating and asymmetrical. This allows percipients not only to see the same reality in various ways but also to come to an understanding of subjective realities hitherto estranged in the traditional “binocular” vision of epistemological objectivism (Barone 29-30).

However, the dominant lens of positivism eschews this kind of understanding, therefore disregarding legitimate ways through which individuals in society experience and process life. As J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole note, “[l]ife is lived and knowledge is made through kitchen table conversations and yarning at the wharf or transit station or coffee shop or tavern...or by an encounter with an evocative photograph, or in an embodied response to a musical composition or an interpretive

dance” (33). Yet, as Knowles and Cole rightly acknowledge, these meaning-making moments often get discounted as knowledge. This is largely because

Knowledge, as society has learned to define it, dwells beyond the realm of the everyday. It is discovered by intellectuals—researchers and theorists—and held by them until its implications are determined and passed on for consumption. Knowledge is propositional and generalizable, and research is the process by which it is generated. According to this paradigmatic view, knowledge remains the purview of the academy, where it can be carefully defined and controlled. (Knowles and Cole 33-34)

In recognition of this colonial attitude even within academia, Kathryn Herr and Gary L. Anderson advise in their seminal work, *The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide to Students and Faculty*, that we continually “recognize that we carry out our work at odds with the academic environment in which we conduct our research....With this recognition comes a goal to continue to create our research approaches in keeping with our values while working to recreate our work spaces in ways that can accommodate a diverse community of scholars” (149). This accommodation of a diverse community of academics requires an inculcation of an ethnographic sensibility that, as Dwight Conquergood explains, displaces “positivist claims for objectivity by which knowledge of the other is abstracted from its historical and dialogical conditions,” especially as such claims possess “the moral consequences of fixing people in subject-object categories in an alignment of power relations where the fieldworker observes from a privileged distance the Other who becomes the field studied” (21). Such otherizing not only fosters binarism between the researcher and the researched, but

also runs the risk of turning the researched into an object to be mined for data and discarded soon afterwards. It also promotes a master-servant relationship between the duo, whereby the researcher is the omniscient imperial lord, and the researched is the uninformed subservient servant.

Such a parochial worldview does not allow for the acknowledgement of the generative interdependence that constitutes the interaction between the researcher and the researched, therefore making it difficult for the researcher to conceive of the researched as a co-researcher, or as a co-actor in the performance of ethnography. A positivist approach to research aims at securing the “objective truth,” and emphasizes certainty, validity, reliability, and replicability of data, whereas arts-based methods such as performance ethnography aspire not so much to make knowledge claims about a given phenomenon but to explore multiple ways of understanding it. As a result, performance ethnography’s rationale comprises “the generation of doubts about, the potential for disrupting or transgressing against, and the enhancement of uncertainty regarding presuppositions about the social world that have come to be taken for granted as contributing to a final reality” (Barone 29-30). As such, this method engages not so much in a quest for certainty as it does in the quest for the interrogation of the status quo, gradually unveiling different subjective realities and, in the process, demanding a rethinking and a reconfiguration of attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and entire value systems.

This difficulty of regarding the researched as a co-researcher or a co-actor would scarcely arise within a reciprocal framework of dialogic performance that

recognizes embodied knowledge and understands culture, history, and experience as texts inhabited by the researched. As Conquergood underlines:

Dialogical performance is a way of having intimate conversation with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them. The sensuous immediacy and empathic leap demanded by performance is an occasion for orchestrating two voices, for bringing together two sensibilities. At the same time, the conspicuous artifice of performance is a vivid reminder that each voice has its own integrity. (*Cultural Struggles* 77)

In its emphasis on dialogical performance, performance ethnography recognizes and respects the humanity in researched populations, opting to work with rather than work on these populations in a process that not only engages the researcher in an empathic relationship with the researched, but also acknowledges and centers the integrity of the perspectives of researched populations.

For researchers to sustain a dialogic disposition in their work with researched populations, their positionality vis-à-vis the researched community may need reordering. This is especially true within the context of performance ethnography whose method of creative inquiry demands an openness of the human imagination to the layers of meanings unfolding in the researcher's engagement with the phenomena under study. This openness alerts researchers to their biases and sensibilities, just as it also paves the way for them to enter the milieu of the subjects of the research and be reflexively responsive to the subjects and evolving events.

The deployment of performance ethnography in this research builds on my appreciation of the assorted ways applied theatre, throughout history, has placed itself

in the service of social change in response to the manifold yearnings of human society. As Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston note, applied theatre represents “a broad set of theatrical practices and creative processes that take participants and audiences beyond the scope of conventional, mainstream theatre into the realm of a theatre that is responsive to ordinary people and their stories, local settings and priorities” (9). More specifically, the kind of applied theatre I nurture in my research is rooted in the performance ethnography lens. Such a lens does not just focus on theatre in informal spaces, but also privileges the lived realities, agency, voices, and cultures of ordinary people who often get relegated to the margins of discourses and decision-making processes that concern their lives and livelihoods. And since my research primarily takes place in the socio-cultural informal settings of internally displaced persons (IDPs), who are themselves not only ordinary people, but also socio-politically excluded from scripting their own narratives and piloting their own affairs, performance ethnography naturally lends itself as an appropriate method for my research.

Performance ethnography does not just reflect the intersectional reality of human life, it also co-creatively engages with this intersectionality to draw attention to attitudes, practices, and norms that require social change. During this exercise in co-creation, the power dynamics between researchers and participants shift back and forth and sideways as both parties recognize each other’s value and agency and, consequently, foster an atmosphere of mutual learning and respect. Similarly, this co-creative exercise enables participants to cross-examine the ethos that shape their behaviors concerning an issue under investigation and then arrive at a non-linear,

collaborative understanding of the issue in ways that engender openness towards ambiguities and assortments of thinking.

Performance ethnography also suits this IDP-centered project since the method “rests on the idea that bodies harbor knowledge about culture” and that performance allows for “the exchange of that knowledge across bodies” and paves the way for “forging new visceral understandings of culture” (Jones, 337, 344). And according to Norman K. Denzin, performance ethnography allows for a unique, embodied kind of knowing since it creates situations in which performed experiences serve as “the sites where felt emotion, memory, desire, and understanding come together” (13). Thus, performance ethnography, as Joni L Jones aptly pinpoints, may entertain, but its aims are to “explore bodily knowing, to stretch the ways in which ethnography might share knowledge of a culture, and to puzzle through the ethical and political dilemmas of fieldwork and of representation” (7).

Far beyond entertainment or data collection, performance ethnography studies individuals and communities as performers, scrutinizes bodies as embodied archives, and provides an enabling environment for critical consciousness and radical intervention. It recognizes that persons do not exist in a vacuum but within society, within a matrix of cultures. Therefore, in addition to “reconfiguring longstanding subject-object relations as copperformative,” performance ethnography, as Della Pollock argues, has relocated “the *writing* in the ‘writing of culture’ into a performance frame such that (a) performance ethnography manifests given power relations in the poesis of their undoing, and (b) it not only allows for but requires variously sensuous retellings and ongoing re-creations, in word and body” (325).

Culture under this epistemological framework no longer represents a static, prehistoric artefact to be mined for its exotic minerals but a living, dynamic reservoir consisting of vital force, ever changing, ever alive and ever revealing itself to us in manifold ways, including the revelation of culture as embodied knowledge.

Through performance ethnography, researchers can generate unique knowledge about persons, communities, and the world. Contrary to the belief in some quarters that knowledge gets produced from an artistic work only when the work gets subjected to analysis, Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuck rightly note that “[k]nowledge is produced as creative work, and not simply through their analysis and interpretation” and, in this respect, “such creative work can be understood as a strong form of intervention, contributing to knowledge in a profoundly different way from the academic norm” (21). Hence, they argue that arts-based research, or what they call “research creation” possesses the capacity to serve as a “form of intervention precisely due to its often experimental, processual nature,” which includes the generation of “situated forms of knowledge, combined with new ways of developing and disseminating that knowledge” which help to “reveal different contexts and methods for cultural analysis” (Chapman and Sawchuck 11-12). Nevertheless, Chapman and Sawchuck warn:

Suggesting that research-creation can pass through credibility tests stemming from sanctioned metrics for qualitative research programs reads as a form of apologetics. It may be necessary, for strategic reasons, to work with previously existing frameworks of assessment, but defining research-creation as a

subcategory of qualitative or ethnographic research risks misrepresenting the field and its potential to generate new forms of knowledge. (13)

In other words,

Research-creation operates in contrast to the dominant academic paradigm. But paradigms are mutable and have the potential to grow, shift, or even be overturned when alternative technologies, practices and anomalous discoveries accumulate to the point where new epistemological and ontological foundations present themselves in flashes of light. (Chapman and Sawchuck 24)

By shining a spotlight on existential issues, interrogating superstructures, and subverting stereotypes, performance ethnography has been able to shape and guide the way we live in the world and how we react to the multifaceted questions that our interactions with each other generate.

Therefore, my choice of performance ethnography equally stems from the comparative advantage it has in generating intimate and multi-layered understandings of human behavior. This approach emphasizes participant observation, oral histories, multiple perspectives, and cultural context. This kind of emphasis is important in a research like this, which not only builds on the unique knowledge of displaced persons, but also recognizes the need to engage them as co-researching and co-participating subjects (Freire 1970). Certainly, performance ethnography is not bereft of epistemological ancestry, as it feeds on the Freirean emphasis on inter-subjectivity between researchers and the host community. As Freire notes, “[o]ne cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect

the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding.” (95). Like Freire, this research method shares the conceptual view that any situation which allows for the exclusion of a certain group of people from participating in a process of inquiry that has implications for their lives is guilty of inflicting violence on them (85). By adopting performance ethnography, I make a premeditated decision to avert this violence.



Illustration 8: Cross-fertilizing ideas with IDPs as competent decisionmakers in affairs that concern their lives and livelihoods

No doubt, performance ethnography represents a family tree of significations, including a field of study, a research method, an interpretive process, a communication tool, and an intervention mechanism. In this chapter, I am concerned primarily with its relevance as a research method. As a method, performance ethnography has made it

possible for researchers to explore how human persons experience the world in different ways; hence, underscoring that our understanding of the world ought not to be consigned to mere statistics and words, but should encompass all other modes through which we experience and know the world, including sounds, images, feelings, gestures, tastes, smell, and touch. This kind of understanding, as Conquergood affirms, does “privilege the body as a site of knowing” (180). Rather than just being a mass of flesh and bone, the body serves as an archive of knowledge, at once inviting investigation, elucidation, interpretation, and representation.

Words play a crucial role in articulating and transmitting this embodied knowledge, particularly because, as Tami Spry notes, “[w]ords represent bodies, how bodies move, react, interact; words represent how bodies perform in their everyday lives” (*Body, Paper, Stage* 100). Therefore, one of the missions of the performance ethnographer is “to make writing perform, to make writing represent the complexity of the body’s critical expression of interacting with others in the frames of social norms and expectations, and then write the body’s transformation of those norms” (100). In the performance of the body, its stories, and its histories, we unlearn and learn a lot about persons and our place in the world. We learn about our differences, just as we learn about the thread of humanity that binds us all together.

This process of unlearning and learning involves transmuted oral histories, personal narratives, and cultural values into public performances. These performances constitute a valid form of witnessing to and in the world. In public performances, as Madison reckons, “we are witness to how the other sees us, and we are, in turn, now invited to witness ourselves in and through the eyes of others” (*Performed*

Ethnography 120). In such situations, not only are we subjected to the gaze of the other, we too can return that gaze as co-witnesses. In this work that explores IDPs' public performance of survival at the interstices of their lives with humanitarian actors, I have taken up the challenge of witnessing. In my research and in the writing of this dissertation, I serve as a witness not only to the multifaceted misery of IDPs in Nigeria, but also to their underappreciated agency, their indescribable resilience in the face of unyielding subjugation, and their unshakeable hope for a better future, if not for themselves, at least, for their children.

Snapshot of Internal Displacement in Nigeria

Undoubtedly, forced displacement is one of the defining challenges of our time. It is the reality of tens of millions of people across the globe. At the end of 2019, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported 79.5 million people as forcibly displaced globally, of whom 45.7 million were IDPs, 26 million were refugees, and 4.2 million were asylum seekers (*Global Trends 2019*). At the end of the previous year, the same organization had reported 70.8 million people as forcibly displaced globally, of whom 41.3 million were IDPs, 25.9 million were refugees, and 3.5 million were asylum seekers (*Global Trends 2018*). At 70.8 million in 2018, the global population of displaced persons exceeded the entire population of the United Kingdom (put at 66.47 million within the same period). This number of displaced persons also amounted to 21.6% of the estimated population of the United States in 2018. The population of IDPs in Nigeria by the end of 2018, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), stood at 2,216,000, with 541,000

being people newly displaced by conflict and violence in 2018 alone. By the end of 2018,

Syrians still made up the largest forcibly displaced population, with 13.0 million people living in displacement, including 6.7 million refugees, 6.2 million internally displaced people (IDPs) and 140,000 asylum-seekers. Colombians were the second largest group, with 8.0 million forcibly displaced, most of them (98 per cent) inside their country at the end of 2018. A total of 5.4 million Congolese from DRC were also forcibly displaced, of whom 4,517,000 were IDPs and 854,000 were refugees or asylum-seekers. Other large displaced populations of IDPs, refugees or asylum-seekers at the end of 2018 were from Afghanistan (5.1 million), South Sudan (4.2 million), Somalia (3.7 million), Ethiopia (2.8 million), Sudan (2.7 million), Nigeria (2.5 million), Iraq (2.4 million) and Yemen (2.2 million). (UNHCR *Global Trends 2018*)

| Year | Refugees | IDPs | Asylum seekers | Global Forced Displacement |
|-------------|----------|------|----------------|----------------------------|
| 2015 | 21.3 | 40.8 | 3.2 | 65.3 |
| 2016 | 22.5 | 40.3 | 2.8 | 65.6 |
| 2017 | 25.4 | 40.0 | 3.1 | 68.5 |
| 2018 | 25.9 | 41.3 | 3.5 | 70.8 |
| 2019 | 26.0 | 45.7 | 4.2 | 79.5 |

Figure 2: Forced displacement figures 2015-2019

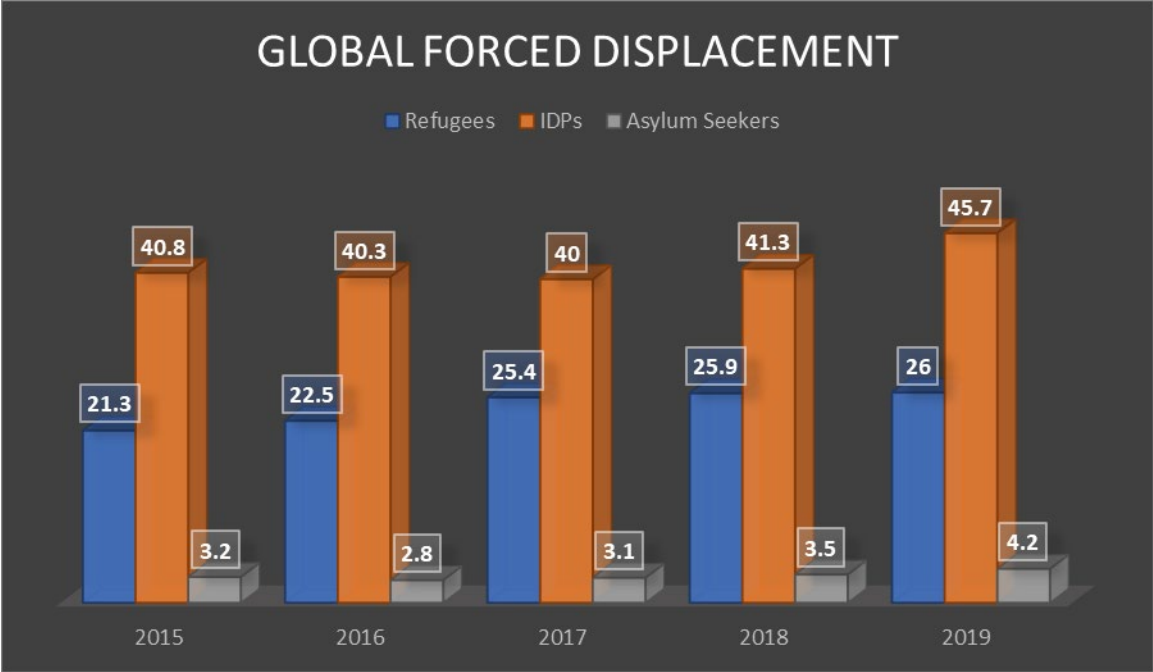


Figure 3: Histogram depicting refugee, IDPs, and asylum seekers' figures

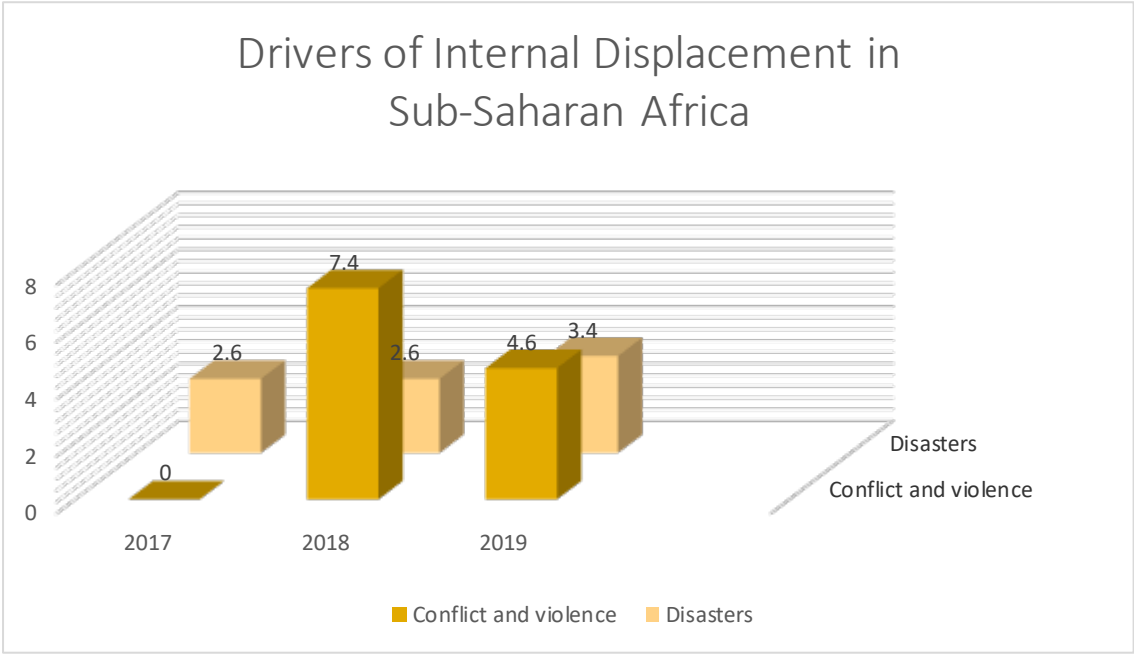


Figure 4: Key drivers of internal displacement in Sub-Saharan Africa

Over the years, the global forced displacement population has increased significantly, “rising from 37.3 million in 1996 to 65.3 million in 2015 – a 75 per cent increase,” and then expanding to 79.5 million at the end of 2019, with the ‘Arab Spring’ and the Syrian conflict contributing substantially to this tally (*Global Trends 2015*, 6; *Global Trends 2019*). This appalling tally depicts the enormity of the forced displacement conundrum globally. In recognition of this enormity, scholars from varying disciplines have, for a long time, centered their work on tackling forced displacement.

However, it was not until the 1990s that they began raising awareness on internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a group that is distinct from refugees and one that requires specific attention and intervention (Deng 1993; Cohen and Deng 1998 a and b; and Korn 1999). Specifically, a refugee is 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 to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country or his former habitual residence as a result of such events (*1951 Refugee Convention Article 1A (2)*).

Whereas IDPs are:

persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged 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 (*UNCHR Guiding Principles 53*)

Although both categories of persons are fleeing persecution or disaster, refugees have crossed the international borders of their countries, while IDPs are on the run within the borders of their own country and remain under the protective control of their home government, even if the government is overtly or covertly the cause of their displacement.

Since this established distinction between refugees and IDPs, many scholars and international organizations such as the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) have all become actively involved in addressing issues peculiar to internal displacement. Phuong (2004), for instance, has elucidated the conceptual dissimilarity between refugees and IDPs and has called for legal protection and institutional protective frameworks for IDPs. In the same vein, Muggah (2000), Oliver-Smith (2009) and Correa (2011) have isolated conflict, development initiatives, and natural disasters as key causes of forced displacement, arguing that they have far-reaching implications for IDPs and society. Like Muggah (2000), I will focus on conflict-induced internal displacement, particularly that stemming from the terrorism of the Islamic militant group, Boko Haram in Nigeria. Since 2014, the group has engendered huge numbers of displacements in northeast Nigeria.

Most IDPs in Nigeria have been displaced because of repeated assaults by Boko-Haram militants on their communities. Since 2009, not only has the Boko-

Haram-triggered conflict in northeast Nigeria led to the loss of over 20,000 lives and numerous properties, it has also forced over two million Nigerians to live as exiles in their own homeland, while many others live in neighboring countries of Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. Other causes of internal displacement in Nigeria are natural disasters and communal clashes. However, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) displacement tracking matrix of March 2019 revealed that Boko Haram conflicts alone displaced 93.3 percent of IDPs between 2016 and 2018, with communal clashes causing 6.1 percent and natural disasters accounting for the remaining percent.¹⁰ The 2019 figures represented an increase from the 2015 data which presented Boko Haram militancy as responsible for 85 percent of the displaced populations, while communal clashes caused 12.6 percent and natural disasters accounted for the remaining 2.4 percent.

Founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf as a group committed to propagating the Prophet's teachings and jihad, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, widely known as Boko Haram, has since metamorphosed into a lethal terrorist organization based in northeast Nigeria with operating bases in the neighboring countries of Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. The term "Boko Haram" has been translated to mean "Western education is forbidden." Although "boko" in Hausa means "fake," the term gets used to refer to western education as fake. The word "Haram" comes from an Arabic term which means "forbidden." Linked to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Boko Haram have explicitly expressed their intent to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria. After Nigerian security agents' execution of its leader in July 2009

¹⁰ See page 19, *Within and Beyond Borders: Tracking Displacement in the Lake Chad Basin* by International Organization for Migration (IOM), March 2019.

following the group's increased Islamist radicalization activities, Boko Haram insurgent attacks set in. Headquartered in Sambisa Forest under their new leader Abubakar Shekau, the group quickly engineered a spate of suicide bombings of strategic targets such as churches, mosques, motor parks, police stations, and even the United Nations headquarters in Abuja. The car bomb attack on the UN building on August 26, 2011 killed 23 people and injured over 75 others.

Through suicide bombing, guerrilla warfare, and conventional armed incursions, the group has been responsible for tens of thousands of deaths. In addition to looting, maiming, and killing, the group has also abducted people, including rural dwellers, security agents, aid workers, and schoolchildren. The April 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok represents their most well-known rampage because of the attention it garnered from the international media and global leaders, yet there have been additional horrific abductions since then, including the abduction and brutal killing in December 2019 of four aid workers after holding them hostage for about five months (Ekhomu 71).

But one could understand the media attention on the Chibok abduction, especially after the cold video statement on May 5, 2014 from someone claiming to be Shekau, saying, "I abducted your girls. I will sell them in the market, by Allah...there is a market for selling humans. Allah says I should sell. He commands me to sell. I will sell women. I sell women."¹¹ Security agencies in Nigeria have also suffered huge casualties in the fight against terror, with the January 3, 2015 Baga attack causing tremendous embarrassment to the Nigerian Army. The terrorist group not only

¹¹ See CNN report, "Boko Haram Fast Facts." <https://www.cnn.com/2014/06/09/world/boko-haram-fast-facts/index.html>

overran the Baga joint-task-force military base but also massacred many soldiers, leaving many of them fleeing the base for a neighboring country, Chad. Although international media put the death toll at over 2000, the defense ministry in Nigeria gave an estimate of 150 deaths. It was not until February 21 that army reinforcements succeeded in expelling the terrorist group from Baga.



Figure 5: Map of Nigeria showing Abuja, Borno, and neighboring countries¹²

Addressing Boko Haram-driven displacement requires a multifaceted, multi-country approach as the activities of this militant group continue to fuel the thorny

¹² Map credit goes to *The Economist*. “The Black Flag in Africa.” January 22, 2015. <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2015/01/22/the-black-flag-in-africa>

humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad Basin, especially Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The World Bank has underscored the enormity of the crisis' economic impact in the sub-region, as shown in the following IOM report:

In September 2017, infrastructure damages were reaching nearly 9 billion USD in Nigeria alone. The total need for recovery and peacebuilding across all areas of interventions is estimated to be 6.7 billion USD while infrastructure and social services interventions are estimated a total of 6 billion USD. As a comparison, the 2017 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Nigeria was worth 375.77 billion USD, \$34.80 billion for Cameroon, \$9.98 billion for Chad, and \$8.12 billion for Niger. (*Within and Beyond Borders* 13)

In these four countries, the total number of IDPs as of 2018 was 2,497,549 (5). According to IOM's displacement tracking matrix, these individuals were displaced from a cumulative area of 702,356 km², which matches the geographical area of Austria, Belgium, France, and Switzerland put together (*Within and Beyond Borders* 5). Out of these 2,497,549 IDPs, 2,026,602 of them were said to be Nigerians.

Moving beyond these disquieting figures about IDPs and emplacing oneself in their existential milieu accentuates the fundamental but often overlooked truth that forced displacement is not just about statistics but also about human lives and vulnerable people's struggle for survival in an unpredictably unsettling world. While in recent times, the refugee challenge has inundated the global news media, IDPs, despite almost doubling the refugee population, continue to attract peripheral attention globally. While not fostering any binary opposition between these two groups of vulnerable but valuable members of the human community, there is need to highlight

this disproportionate attention for significant and sustainable gains to be made in providing meaningful solutions to IDPs worldwide and in Nigeria in particular.

The Research Process

Over the years, performance-based researchers have used different research methods such as forum theatre, documentary theatre, theatre historiography, performance ethnography, and playback theatre to examine people's experiences and explore varying issues in society. Jo Salas, for instance, employed playback theatre to help schoolchildren deal with bullying in schools. By interpreting on stage the personal stories of bullied and bullying students in a "creative, non-judgmental and non-confrontational" way, many students were able to "understand their own experience in a new way" (78). Likewise, Alison Jeffers (2012) used theatre historiography to explore refugee arts and theatrical approaches since the 1990s, enunciating the disquieting nature of refugees' stories, especially in the twin context of globalization and migration.

Within the African context, scholars (both African and non-African) have also employed performance to illuminate—and 'intervene' in—an array of problems besetting the continent. They have also leveraged performance to showcase the beauty, resilience, and productivity of African people both on the continent and in the diaspora. Through a focus on dance, music, poetry, folklore, festivals, rituals, devised performances, applied theatre, and theatre for development, among others, these 'Africanist' scholars have addressed issues such as race, gender, war, trauma, self-determination, self-love, migration, apartheid, reconciliation, social justice, and

political struggle.¹³ In *Refugee Performance: Practical Encounters*, Michael Balfour specifically documents how scholars and performance practitioners alike have used performance to illumine and interrogate issues of forced displacement in Africa and other parts of the world, including Uganda, Iraq, Thailand, Palestine, Burma, Croatia, Serbia, and Australia. Therefore, against the backdrop of the diverse deployment of performance-based methods to understand the peculiar realities and needs of underserved populations, I embarked on a performance ethnography research in Nigeria.

The overall aim of the research was to understand and share the lived experiences of displaced persons in Nigeria, with a view to providing an effective space for uncovering silences and forging alliances geared towards bettering the lives of this vulnerable but valuable population. Positing that humanitarian actors' failure to involve IDPs in decision-making processes that concern the latter have exacerbated the plight of IDPs, I contend that, through performance ethnography, which recognizes

¹³ See Ndlovu, Morgan. *Performing Indigeneity: Spectacles of Culture and Identity in Coloniality*. Pluto Press, 2019; Na'Allah, Abdul-Rasheed. *Globalization, Oral Performance, and African Traditional Poetry*. Springer International Publishing, 2018; Okagbue, Osita. *African Theatres and Performances*, Routledge, 2012; Odhiambo, Christopher. *Theatre for Development in Kenya: in Search of an Effective Procedure and Methodology*. Pia Thielmann and Eckhard Breitingner, 2008; Hagher, Iyorwuese. *The Kwagh-hir Theater: A Weapon for Social Action*, UPA, 2013; Fischer-Lichte, Erika, et al., editors. *Theatrical Speech Acts: Performing Language: Politics, Translations, Embodiments*. Routledge, 2020; Rizk, Mohamed El-Mohammady. *Women in Taarab: the Performing Art in East Africa*. Lang, 2007; Samba, Emelda Ngufor. *Women in Theatre for Development in Cameroon: Participation, Contributions and Limitations*. Bayreuth African Studies, 2005; Edmondson, Laura. *Performing Trauma in Central Africa: Shadows of Empire*, Indiana UP, 2018; Ebron, Paulla A. *Performing Africa*, Princeton UP, 2014; Colvin, Christopher. *Traumatic Storytelling and Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Performing Signs of Injury*. Routledge, 2019; Shaw McMahan, Rashida Z. *The Black Circuit: Race, Performance, and Spectatorship in Black Popular Theatre*. Routledge, 2020; Kleist, Nauja, and Dorte Thorsen, editors. *Hope and Uncertainty in Contemporary African Migration*. Routledge, 2017; Homann, Greg, and Marc Maufort. *New Territories: Theatre, Drama, and Performance in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2015; and Salhi, Kamal. *African Theatre for Development: Art for Self-Determination*. Intellect Books, 1997.

the agency and the unique voice, memory, and context of minoritarian populations, IDPs can now reclaim their narratives and position themselves in such a way that will make humanitarian actors respond to their real needs.

My overarching conviction is that, until displaced populations become the narrators of their own experiences, no matter how bleak or beautiful these might be, the dominant narratives that project their reality to the outside world will not only be partial and exclusionary, but will also privilege the norms, perspectives, and prejudices of the external storyteller, no matter how well-intentioned that person might be. And, until the unique views, needs and context of displaced persons get mainstreamed into humanitarian interventions, the goal of ensuring the wellbeing and security of displaced persons as well as their eventual return home will remain elusive.

Adopting Joseph Alex Maxwell's tripartite distinction of research goals, I classified my goals for this research into three categories: personal, intellectual, and practical goals (23-9). Personal goals represent one's motivation to embark on a study, and it may not necessarily interest other people but oneself. Such goals may include deep-rooted personal desires and may result from a person's private beliefs, values, experiences, or circumstances. Intellectual goals, on their own, seek to *understand* something, while practical goals seek to *accomplish* something (28). Yet, as Maxwell admits, these three goals may overlap in the conduct of one's research, and this overlap does not necessarily compromise the objectivity, reliability, or reproducibility of the research.

My personal goal for embarking on this research was to improve the administration of aid for IDPs (in Nigeria). I had come to Cornell thinking I would do

my dissertation research on black identity and its (dis)contents. But the suffering of IDPs, especially as I saw it being bandied around on social media and on TV, demanded that I rethink my dissertation research project. Although I had been aware of IDPs and their plight and, as an aide in the Nigerian parliament, had been involved in IDP matters, I had not personally visited an IDP camp to see first-hand what was happening there or to speak with IDPs about their lived experiences. Thanks to a travel grant from the Department of Performing and Media Arts, I was able to travel to Nigeria to spend time with IDPs. That experience convinced me of the need to focus on internal displacement as a research area for my dissertation.



Illustration 9: Inside the tent of an IDP

During that first visit, I understood in an undiluted and visceral way what it meant to be a living dead person—that is, to be alive and yet not be living by any

stretch of the imagination. I knew I had to do something about my observation and the affects the observation generated within me. Due to how affectively charged the experience was, I knew I did not want to do a dissertation that would be statistics-driven, so I ruled out quantitative analysis. I also wanted a research project that would privilege the oral histories, personal narratives, and storied bodies of IDPs; hence, my inclination towards performance ethnography. During my initial visit, I saw how IDPs, despite their overwhelming suffering, still strove to make something out of their lives by asserting their agency and re-tooling themselves. IDPs were knitting hats, planting vegetables, selling groceries, serving as gatemen, and running food kiosks. Some were also engaging in trade by barter, exchanging essential commodities among fellow IDPs to survive. I was impressed.

What I was seeing countered the narrative of idleness and laziness that dominated IDP stories—stories which often portrayed IDPs as adult babies who would not want to do anything to help themselves but wait perennially on alms to live. On the contrary, I saw a people willing to work, to help themselves, even with the little at their disposal—a people that abhorred their reality of aid dependency and yearned for an enabling environment and extra material support to thrive. I also witnessed IDPs' incredible stories of resilience and creativity, and I could not wait to share it with the world; hence again, my need to employ performance ethnography since it would help me tell the rich stories and analyzed narratives of IDPs in a viscerally embodied manner.

My practical goal was to develop an ethnographic performance that could be used to raise awareness on both the lived experiences of IDPs and the

maladministration of IDP-targeted aid, with a view to bettering the lives and livelihoods of IDPs. This goal feeds on my relentless pursuit of enduring social change and my existential attraction to processes that are participatory rather than top-down, people-oriented rather than interventionist-oriented. Through an unapologetic focus on lives at the margins of society, ethnographic performances, I believe, provide marginalized people such as IDPs with an effective space and tool to examine their realities, express their feelings, reframe their perceptions, and articulate their issues with a view to emancipating themselves and transforming their environment.

My intellectual (or scholarly) goal for this research relates directly to my future career in academia. The results of my research, including this dissertation, ethnographic performances, and academic essays, will increase humanistic knowledge through an expansion of the body of literature on internal displacement. For instance, since past studies on internal displacement in Africa have overlooked the connection between population growth and the use of family planning among IDPs—even against the backdrop of a spike in the birth rates and the number of displaced persons on the continent and a concomitant swell in the unmet humanitarian needs of IDPs—the significance and timeliness of this research for expanding humanistic knowledge cannot be overstated. This expansion equally involves the exploration of internally displaced persons as vulnerable but valuable members of society who possess prized repositories of knowledge from whom scholars, policymakers, and humanitarian actors can learn a lot if only they engage them as knowing subjects and change agents rather than as passive objects of research and helpless mendicants in perpetual need of aid.

To this end, this dissertation research for me as an artist and a scholar rests on the conviction that I am, before anything else, a servant of the people and, in service to them, I find meaning and gain fulfilment. My tripartite goal for this research reflects my aspiration to a career in research, teaching, and theatre practice—a career that is not just an occupation but a vocation—a calling to be a better person, serve humanity better, and create a better world for all, irrespective of our invasive pluralities.

This project builds on two sessions (winter and summer) of pre-dissertation fieldwork in displaced persons' camps in Nigeria and on four years of professional experience working in Nigeria's parliament, first as a Senior Legislative Aide and then as Special Assistant to the Senate President of Nigeria. Both my fieldwork and parliamentary experience have helped to broaden my understanding of the multiple challenges of IDPs in Nigeria. My experience employing theatre in the service of social change in marginalized communities in Nigeria has also been invaluable to me in this dissertation research.

The bulk of this research took place in Bakassi IDP camp in Maiduguri, Borno State and in Durunmi IDP camp in Abuja, the Federal Capital of Nigeria, between June 2017 and May 2019. The IDPs were all from northeast Nigeria and had been displaced because of incessant attacks by the Islamic terrorist group, Boko Haram. During the conduct of my research, the Bakassi IDP camp housed over thirty-five thousand IDPs, while the Durunmi camp had a population of a little over two thousand IDPs.

| BAKASSI CAMP POPULATION As AT | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|
| 14 TH APRIL 2018. | | | | | | |
| S/N | L.G.A. | MEN | WOMEN | BOYS | GIRLS | TOTALS |
| 1 | Nganzai | 142 | 226 | 145 | 152 | 665 |
| 2 | Guzamala | 504 | 667 | 212 | 834 | 2,717 |
| 3 | Monguno | 1,700 | 2,453 | 2069 | 2252 | 8,474 |
| 4 | Gwoza | 2,602 | 3,259 | 2669 | 2957 | 11,487 |
| 5 | Marte | 2,714 | 3,869 | 2628 | 3145 | 12,356 |
| | | 7,662 | 10,474 | 8,223 | 9,340 | 35,699 |

Number of House Hold = 6,781
 Infants for the week; Male = 7 Female = 10 > 17
 Lactating Mothers = 2,614
 Pregnant Women = 2,834
 New arrivals; Male adult = 3, Female adult = 4
 Male children = 10, Female children = 9
 House Hold = 5, Total Individuals = 26
 DEATH ÷ NULL.

Illustration 10: IDP demographic chart at the reception area in Bakassi camp

Brief History of the Camp
 The camp was established on 25th January, 2015 with population of 4,763, from Monguno L.G.A. Influx of IDPs are recorded as a result of Military activities in the liberated areas and consolidation of IDPs who are taking refuge at various collective centers has raised the population to 35,645 with 6,768 households.

Bakassi IDP camp update as at 20TH FEBRUARY 2018

| | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Gwoza L.G.A. | 4. Monguno L.G.A. |
| Men 2,599 | Men 1,700 |
| Women 3,258 | Women 2,453 |
| Boys 2,656 | Boys 2,053 |
| Girls 2,943 | Girls 2,239 |
| Total 11,456 | Total 8,445 |

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2. Guzamala L.G.A. | 5. Nganzai L.G.A. |
| Men 504 | Men 143 |
| Women 667 | Women 229 |
| Boys 708 | Boys 149 |
| Girls 829 | Girls 154 |
| Total 2,708 | Total 678 |

| | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 3. Marte L.G.A. | Total in camp |
| Men 2,714 | Men 7,581 |
| Women 3,869 | Women 10,461 |
| Boys 2,616 | Boys 8,179 |
| Girls 3,128 | Girls 9,180 |
| Total 12,327 | Total 35,641 |

DELIVERIES 15/20 PER WEEK

Pregnant Women 2,927
 Lactating Mothers 2,528
 Separated Children 145
 Orphans 361
 Unaccompanied 86

DEATH

Physically Challenged
 Blind 45
 Deaf 20
 LEPERS 68
 Mentally disorder 17

Health Condition

H.I.V./Aids 201
 Diabetic 97
 High blood pressure 2113
 Asthmatic 5
 TUBERCULOSIS 6

QUARANTINE & DISCHARGED

Sectors Activities

WASH

No. of Boreholes 21
 No. of non-functioning Boreholes
 No. of Solar Boreholes
 No. of Hand-pump
 No. of Latrines
 No. of non-functioning
 No. of Bathrooms
 No. of non-functioning

DAILY WATER
 General sanitation

Shelter
 Total number of Shelter
 UNHCR
 IOM/NEMA
 PCNI
 NRC
 IRC
 Housing Estate

| BAKASSI CAMP POPULATION As AT | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|
| 14 TH APRIL 2018. | | | | | | |
| S/N | L.G.A. | MEN | WOMEN | BOYS | GIRLS | TOTALS |
| 1 | Nganzai | 142 | 226 | 145 | 152 | 665 |
| 2 | Guzamala | 504 | 667 | 212 | 834 | 2,717 |
| 3 | Monguno | 1,700 | 2,453 | 2069 | 2252 | 8,474 |
| 4 | Gwoza | 2,602 | 3,259 | 2669 | 2957 | 11,487 |
| 5 | Marte | 2,714 | 3,869 | 2628 | 3145 | 12,356 |
| | | 7,662 | 10,474 | 8,223 | 9,340 | 35,699 |

Illustration 11: Information chart pasted on the wall at the reception area in Bakassi

The major components of this on-site performance ethnography include participant observation, interviews (semi-structured and in-depth forms), story circles, theatre improvisation workshops, and self-reflexive drama projects. All these components complemented each other, with a view to generating fresh insights. In a research such as this where the research population is not only fleeing persecution but is also encamped and where there is a paucity of data on the unique needs of IDPs, on-site research is crucial for generating primary data and for drawing multi-layered inferences. Being on-site allowed me to have a visceral understanding of the realities of IDPs during participant observation, story circles, and theatre improvisations. It also helped to build trust between researcher and participants; therefore, increasing opportunities for mutual learning and more flexibility in the conduct of research.

In the recruitment of research participants, I employed face-to-face public invitations. It is a direct method for recruiting participants from a large population of IDPs in the two camps where I conducted the research. Upon approval from the government agency in charge of the camps (NEMA), I took a walk through the camps, moving from tent to tent, soliciting participation in the research project. This recruitment method is significant for its high-response rate and for soliciting extensive, interactive in-depth interviews. The straight-forward method increased openness in the participants and built trust between them and the researcher, since it did not have the extra baggage of a recruitment exercise initiated and directed through camp officials and government agencies. IDPs are often suspicious of interviewers that government agencies have introduced to them. They fear that such interviewers might relay sensitive information to government officials, who may then use the

information against them, especially in situations where the information criticizes or exposes the government. I combined the face-to-face public invitation with the snowballing technique in research. I complemented this effort with a sampling for range which allowed for identifying and interviewing sub-categories of IDPs relevant to the study, namely young men and women, elderly men and women, single men and women, and married men and women—all of them between the ages of 18 and 65.

I had originally gone to the field to conduct research on the role of men in family planning decision-making among IDPs. Hence, my earlier research design did not include women as participants. Interestingly, when the research was being conducted, many women, young and old, kept on asking to be part of it. Since family planning was an issue that concerned them a great deal, I decided to review my research methodology and include women aged between 18 and 65 among the interview and story circle sessions. I was amazed at how much the IDPs, both men and women, responded to the prompts and questions posed to them and how open-minded and generous they were with their responses.

The IDPs also wanted us to focus on something else, something more pressing and integral to their survival as persons living in an encamped space. After several requests from IDPs and in fidelity to the ethos of performance ethnography, I agreed and expanded my research topic to a focus on the lived experiences and unique needs of IDPs. They upheld the worth of my former research topic by affirming that high birth rates among IDPs was a problem, but they also felt that a bigger problem for them was the failure for government and the humanitarian agencies to learn and integrate the needs of IDPs into their humanitarian architecture. They believed my

performance-mediated research presented a unique opportunity to convey their message to the government and humanitarian agencies, and I obliged them, with the support of my dissertation Chair. My integration of their request into the framework of the research stems from my recognition of the repository of knowledge in the IDPs and the distinct perspectives they would bring to the research as co-researchers. In assenting to their request, I saw on their faces a call to action which was both a supplication and an obligation. In *Alterity and Transcendence*, Emmanuel Levinas aptly captures the gravity of this call:

... But that face facing me, in its expression—in its mortality—summons me, demands me, requires me: as if the invisible death faced by the face of the other—pure alterity, separate, somehow, from any whole—were ‘my business.’...The death of the other man puts me on the spot, calls me into question, as if I, by my possible indifference, became the accomplice of that death, invisible to the other who is exposed to it; and as if, even before being condemned to it myself, I had to answer for that death of the other, and not leave the other alone to his deathly solitude. It is precisely in that recalling of me to my responsibility by the face that summons me, that demands me, that requires me—it is in that calling into question—that the other is my neighbour.

(24-5)

Without abandoning the family planning question, I was able to redesign the research in such a way that positioned the lived realities and unique needs of IDPs at the forefront of the discourse on internal displacement. Such a redesign also privileged IDPs as their own storytellers and historians, thereby affirming Chinua Achebe’s

seminal dictum: “[u]ntil the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.”

This research project was designed in three phases. These phases, though, were not done in a linear manner but in a circular, processual way as the evolving realities in the camps and in the country demanded. The circularity, which took the form of moving forward, backward, and sideways in our data-gathering exercise and creative co-creation, allowed for in-depth interrogation and understanding of the issues unfolding in our interactions with IDPs and the socio-political realities in Nigeria.

The first phase comprised participant observation, interviews, and story circles. During this period, I spent my time in IDP camps in Borno and Abuja, observing and recording the lived experiences of IDPs in these camps, their relations among themselves and their interactions with humanitarian actors. In the camps, I also observed and recorded how, where, and when IDPs accessed family planning services, as well as observed the attitudes and behaviors of IDPs towards family planning services and their providers. Next, I interviewed IDPs and non-state humanitarian actors to learn about the access to and use of family planning within the specific context of internal displacement.

My knowledge of English language and two indigenous languages (i.e. Hausa and Pidgin) were an added asset in my interaction with IDPs. However, I realized that some IDPs spoke other indigenous languages, especially Fulani and Kanuri, about which I had no clue. My recruitment of research assistants from the University of Maiduguri helped me negotiate this language barrier and gain access to more IDPs than I could have done all by myself. In total, I worked with thirteen research

assistants. Remarkably, some IDPs who could speak and understand Hausa chose not to interact with me in Hausa, insisting on speaking in their native language of Kanuri, perhaps as a way of asserting their ethnicity—or their freedom of choice.

Rather than calculating the total number of people to interview, I used a sequential interviewing approach that “calls for logical rather than statistical inference, for case rather than sample-based logic, for saturation rather than representation” (Small 28). This approach fits in with the epistemological framework of performance ethnography, which is not concerned with digits but with the sensibleness of cases. With the help of my research assistants, I conducted six hundred and seventy-three (673) interviews. Some of these interviewees joined the story circle sessions we organized.



Illustration 12: PI with research assistants

Before we began conducting the interviews, I had a briefing with my research assistants, detailing the dos and don'ts of a great interview and establishing firm guidelines. They were all already familiar with the conduct of interviews, but I thought it necessary to refresh our memories on etiquette and some key strategies for a great interview. At the end of some interview days, we would come together and share our experiences for the day before departing the camp. During these sharing sessions, I would reiterate Joseph Hermanowicz's advice in "The Great Interview: 25 Strategies for Studying People in Bed" that an interview needs to take the form of a conversation—that is, rather than being an inflexible list of predesigned questions, it ought to be a system that allows for flexibility in the asking and answering of questions (482-3). This approach to interviews not only removes the mechanical nature of interaction with the interviewee but also increases familiarity between the two and inspires confidence and comfortability in the interviewee. It also allows the interviewee to lead the interviewer to deeper layers of the former's existential reality.

Inasmuch as my research assistants and I had a list of questions to cover and a timeframe to work with, we ensured that these concerns did not overshadow the voice of the interviewee. We also did not weld ourselves to the list, allowing for the spirit of the conversations to lead us on. For a great interview to occur, Hermanowicz rightly notes, the interviewer needs to do more listening than talking (483). The act of listening privileges the voice of the interviewee over that of the interviewer and also allows the interviewee to generate more information, while simultaneously paving the way for the interviewer to map out the interconnections and the unsaid in the information being generated. By listening attentively to IDPs, we were able to uncover

different shades of meaning both in what was said and what was left unsaid during the interviews. Through sequential questioning, we were able to move beyond the already written questions to questions that took cues from the responses of the interviewees, with a view to illuminating the interviewees' responses and gaining clarity about the larger issues under consideration.

The first phase of the research culminated in story circles. A story circle is a group of people who tell stories about their own personal experiences following a prompt by a facilitator. In this case, the facilitator was also the primary researcher. I conducted twelve story circles with IDPs, with six sessions being entirely for men and the other six entirely for women. Apart from lending themselves to the drawing of logical inferences, the technique of story circles also assisted me in cross-fertilizing and consolidating data already gleaned from participant observation and interviews. We conducted the story circles in locations within the camp that were convenient for IDPs and free from external interference. We conducted some of the sessions in two different classrooms inside the camp school, while others were done under shade trees and improvised shelters, which often served as relaxation spots for IDPs.



Illustration 13: IDPs display their priority needs in the aftermath of a story circle

The second phase of my field research was collective theatrical creation. I tapped into my expertise as an artistic director and a playwright to facilitate theatre improvisation workshops. The workshops included (a) drama games, (b) role play and improvisation, (c) voice and movement, and (d) story-building. In this phase of the research, I leveraged indigenous performance practices such as dance, folklore, proverbs, and music not just to increase interest among IDPs in the project, but also to accentuate their agency and voice as co-participants in the collective theatrical creation.

Serving as a scribe, I was able to write down the priorities of IDPs on flow charts. Prioritizing the needs of IDPs was an incredibly revealing exercise: there was a consensus on what constituted the needs of IDPs, but the consensus did not extend to what matters most to all IDPs. While, for some IDPs, food security topped their list of needs, for many others, housing, resettlement, or a return to their homes was their top priority. A few were most concerned about the educational future of their children and were highly vocal about the need for quality education for their children. All of them, however, affirmed the need to end the conflict that caused their displacement, even though some of them openly expressed skepticism about the imminence of any end to the crisis since, according to them, the crisis had evolved into another cash cow for the political class, security agencies, and non-state humanitarian actors in the country. Nevertheless, after protracted back and forth discussions, we came up with a list of key issues requiring an inclusion in our ethnographic performance, *Displaced*. In writing the script for *Displaced*, I made sure that certain harrowing experiences that some IDPs insisted should be part of the play got included. Recurring themes in my interaction with IDPs also gained prominence in the play.

The third phase of the fieldwork took place in June 2019 at the Drama Village of Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria and focused on a performance of the research data, which had been turned into an ethnographic drama, *Displaced*. This drama is a product of the key themes which IDPs crystallized from the preceding phases of the research. The Head of Department of Theatre Arts at Bayero University, Kano, Dr. Ola Ifatimehin, directed the play, and Professor Debra Castillo of Cornell University,

moderated the talkbacks after the show. The audience comprised students, faculty, media personnel, humanitarian workers, and the public.



Illustration 14: Prof. Debra Castillo leading the talkback at the world premiere of *Displaced* at A.B.U., Zaria

The premiere was initially planned for the International Conference Centre, Abuja, but political instability resulting from the 2019 presidential, legislative, and gubernatorial electioneering in the country, as well as the resultant delay in the post-election constitution of the ministerial cabinet, truncated the realization of the Abuja performance. IDPs, policymakers, diplomats, non-state humanitarian actors (local and international), traditional rulers, business leaders, local government actors, security personnel, media personnel, and academics were supposed to constitute the audience for that performance. Since this is a living project, it will continue beyond this dissertation, thereby paving the way for this strategic Abuja performance to be realized as it holds much promise for the betterment of the lives of IDPs.

A resurgence in terrorist attacks in Borno, especially the kidnapping and eventual murder of aid workers by the Boko Haram terrorist group, led to the indefinite postponement of the planned performance of *Displaced* in Bakassi IDP camp in Borno. However, we were able to perform a portion of it in the Durunmi IDP camp in Abuja, which houses over 2,000 IDPs. As part of the 2019 Refugee Day celebration, students of Loyola Jesuit College, Abuja performed a portion of *Displaced* in their college, after which there was a talkback with the researcher and Prof. Castillo on subjects underpinning the question of internal displacement and migration generally. A staged reading of *Displaced* was scheduled to take place on March 21, 2020 at the Schwartz Centre, Cornell University, but it got cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The plan to take the play to as many communities in Nigeria as possible remains. It stems from the need to emphasize, among other points, that the question of IDPs in Nigeria is a national problem and not a problem for one part of the country alone. Many people in Nigeria tend to portray the IDP problem as a problem of northeast Nigeria and, thus, do not demonstrate enough concern towards combating the problem. I also intend to publish the play to make it accessible to as many people as possible in other parts of the world, since displacement is equally a human reality requiring multifaceted global solutions. I documented the performance ethnography project using (a) audio recording, (b) video recording, (c) still photography, and (d) written documents such as interview questions and consent forms.

Displaced testifies to the emergence of performance ethnography as an effective way of drawing attention to the veiled stories, priorities, and perspectives of

vulnerable populations. Using the device of a play within a play, it transports its audience into the world of IDPs, revealing the existential situation of IDPs, while also making audience members more aware of their responsibility to IDPs as fellow human persons. As Shimon Levy affirms, during a play within a play, the “actual audience is constantly goaded to examine its ‘spectating’ motivations; the morality of peeping, the audience’s vicarious enjoyment of agony, of the suffering of others, whether real or acted-out” (164). This technique of the play within the play also depicts the fluid nature of the roles of actors and spectators, with each assuming the role of the other at some point during the performance. This fluidity, in the case of *Displaced*, also echoes the existential truth of IDPs as persons who continuously live in a flux, not sure of what the next day might bring, how long their displacement would last, and whether they would ever return home.

During the performance of *Displaced* in Durunmi IDP camp, IDPs offstage identified with the IDP actors on stage who were play-acting stories that were all too familiar to them as carceral subjects in IDP camps. They watched as actors replayed their lives back to them, providing commentary on the negative consequences of humanitarian actors on their lives, while also underscoring their agency and capacity for resistance even as IDPs. As Manfred Jurgensen maintains, the act of spectating for those whose stories are being relived in a metatheatrical drama “amounts to an act of recognition. What they are watching on stage is a process of variation including and defining their own selves. From the beginning the audience is confronted with the reflective spectacle of their own collective biographies. Once they become aware of

this fact, they cease to be mere onlookers” (103). Shimon Levy lends his voice to this idea when he notes:

...(self-)conscious theatricality must be regarded as a tool for enhancing deeper engagement of audiences with the stage, its theatrical events and their addresses. It necessarily involves thinking, feeling and (sometimes) acting—in theatre as well as in life. Metatheatricality also involves an ethical approach to histrionics, rather than the more habitual non-committal, sentimental, mostly commercial theatre most Westerners see. It invites free and egalitarian participation by an audience and, sometimes, it may even suggest that the playwright does not want solely to amuse us. (165)

Certainly, *Displaced* does not solely aim to entertain the audience. It also seeks to illuminate the existential situation of IDPs, their problematic interaction with humanitarian actors, and their capacity to make meaningful contributions towards the betterment of their lives—if only the government and other humanitarian actors would integrate them into decision-making processes that concern their lives and stories.

IDPs are breathing stories. Just as IDPs tell stories, stories also tell them. IDPs make stories and stories make them. IDPs live, as do all human beings, in a web of stories. The singular act of their existence is a family tree of stories. Their existence requires no permission from them before their lives become storied. It just happens—not by chance though, but by their continual interaction and transaction with others through their shared plurality in the community of humanity. Every day, IDPs leave a trail of stories wherever they go. Some of them are stories IDPs construct about themselves; others are stories other people construct about IDPs. If IDPs do not make

deliberate efforts to tell their own stories, someone else will make the stories and tell them for IDPs. Some of these stories can be liberating, while others can be inhibiting.

What matters in the end are not so much the stories but what IDPs do with them and what the stories do to IDPs. And what better way to understand the effects of stories on their lives and what IDPs might do with their collective stories than through theatre? After all, as John Clammer affirms, “[O]f all the branches of the arts most engaged with development, it is the performing arts, and amongst them theatre, that leads the way” (63). Theatre, as a universal art form, has a long history of serving as a laboratory for promoting social change in different cultures and across an extensive array of audiences. Just like other human beings, the bodies of IDPs serve as a canvas upon which individuals and society paint multifaceted stories that, over time, coalesce into narratives about such bodies. Through theatre, IDPs have the opportunity not only to deconstruct the dominant narratives about them, but also present a plethora of counter-narratives about themselves to the world.



Illustration 15: IDPs performing their stories in Durunmi IDP camp

The Flight from Terror

The flight from terror is one of the many stories IDPs tell. This story presents a window into the horrors IDPs experienced in their escape from Boko Haram terrorism. It also demonstrates IDPs' amazing tenacity and will to live. For IDPs, the flight from terror continues long after they have left the immediacy of the conflict zone and have been emplaced in a camp. Many years after their flight from Boko Haram, the threat of the group still lives within them, appearing periodically as nightmares when they sleep or as traumas when they are awake and trying to make sense of their new reality of displacement. After enduring horrors and hardships in their escape from terrorism, many IDPs were hoping for a better life in the camp. Years after arrival in the camp, many IDPs still have not found the solace for which they yearned. Reflecting on his near-death experience with Boko Haram, Ishaku revealed:

I have been displaced for three years but have only been in this camp for two years. When Boko Haram attacked us and took over our hometown, we ran to a mountain to hide. We spent two weeks on the mountain, sitting and idling away. We believed that Boko Haram would quickly vacate our hometown and then we would return home. Unfortunately, while we were still hiding, they didn't leave. Eventually, all ten of us came down from the mountain because we had left our families behind. We were wondering if our families were still around. By this time, calm seemed to have returned to our hometown, and we assumed that the boys [Boko Haram] were no longer there. Unknown to us, they were still there. When I left home, I left behind my father and mother. Upon my return, I realized Boko Haram had killed them. When I got back

outside, they arrested me, and I spent a month in their custody. They asked me if I wanted to join them. They gave me the option of joining them and remaining alive, or refusing to join them, and then they would kill me. They said if I joined them, they would allow me to live with them and join them in carrying out the work of Allah. At that time, I made them to understand that there was no problem. They gave me time to reflect on the decision and get back to them. They then took me to a group of arrested people and assigned three Boko Haram members to guard us, while we reflected on their offer to join them. After a while, I asked them to allow me to step aside to urinate. Four other guys joined me. Shortly after that, I struck two of the Boko Haram guards and we ran away.

The encounter with Boko Haram remains fresh in the mind of Mahmud, another IDP that contributed to this research. He detailed this encounter:

About 5:00 pm on a Tuesday, we heard there was shooting happening somewhere in Gwoza Local Government Area. Initially, we thought the security agents were doing their usual stuff. Then news came to us that it was Boko Haram. Few minutes past five, Boko Haram invaded our hometown and started shooting repeatedly and massacring people. By 6:00 pm the gunshots were already too much. Gunshots continued until late into the night and stopped. We assumed they had left the town, since, occasionally, when they came around, did their shooting and killing, they would go away, or sometimes the security agents would overpower them and then they would flee. When there was silence in the land, we, the people, thought that was the case. We

thought they had gone back, and so we relaxed. Late into the night, we heard outcries and we saw people running towards where we were. They brought us news that they [Boko Haram] were entering homes, going from house to house and slaughtering people. By this time, they had halted their shooting. Everybody was looking for a place to hide. Everybody was doing whatever they could do. Some were praying. Then the gunshots began. They started going from house to house and were killing everybody. When they came to your house, if they felt like killing you, they would kill you. If your time in this world had come, they would kill you wherever they met you—in your house or even on the road. A full day passed, and they were still in town. Thursday came, they were still in our hometown. Elderly people didn't know what to do with themselves. Women were crying. We, the youth, some of us entered the toilet, some even entered a soak away. Somebody also hid himself inside an old well. Some people hid in the roof of their homes. The wait continued. Those whose time came, they caught them, and killed them. Those whose time hadn't come like us, when we saw that the attack would not end, we planned to leave. Usually, about 1am the gunshots would end, and peace would reign again in the land. Maybe that was when they were resting or sleeping, or maybe they were doing something else. Rain was falling already. Those of us hiding in the ceiling came down and started fleeing the town. Before we got to the top of a mountain, some people that got there ahead of us had been killed. There we met some people who survived. Some men were dressed in female clothes. If you saw them, you would think they were women. They had shaved

their beard, worn veil, and put on lipstick. There was even a man who not only dressed like a woman but also, like a woman, backed his child and came with the child to the mountain. We spent three days on this mountain, but the attack refused to end. At night, some people followed a narrow path behind the mountain and made their way to Madagali, a town which was not under attack. On the twelfth day, some of us came together and discussed how to leave the mountain, since the occupation of our land still hadn't ended. At night, we climbed down from the mountain and started making our way to safety through a farm. It was so dark that you could hardly see what was in front of you and what was behind you. Eventually, we ran into Boko Haram. We were over a hundred that came down from the mountain. They started shooting at us. Those they killed, they killed. Those they didn't kill were those who succeeded in hiding. Some hid in a river, and some hid in places where a sane person would not hide. God helped me. I survived. Some of my friends got killed.

Reflecting on what he was doing when the Boko Haram attack that led to his displacement occurred, Mohammed disclosed:

I was the manager of a bakery when those boys [Boko Haram] attacked. I was at work at the bakery when I heard gunshots. I closed the bakery, scaled the fence, and ran to a safe place. Where I was hiding, I was given food, but my mind was not at peace, so I couldn't eat. I couldn't eat because I was worried about my family, my children, so I asked them to wait until afternoon. In the afternoon, a lady in the house informed me that the boys said they were not ready to leave our village, that they had come to stay altogether. At that point, I

went crazy, scaled the fence, and again entered the house of another person. There was a heavy rainfall. Together with some other people, we managed to get to Madagali. My colleagues said we should stay there, but I told them I couldn't stay there, and headed to Mubi in a car. From Mubi, I went to Yola, and from Yola came to this place, Maiduguri.

Unlike Mohammed, Ibrahim was not so lucky, as Boko Haram not only caused his displacement but also abducted his wife and children. Prior to his displacement, he served as a pastor and a translator. He told his own story:

They [Boko Haram] came and snatched my wife and my six children. It has been five years now since they abducted them. Since then I have been looking for them but haven't seen them. I reported the case to some pastors, and they have been praying very hard for their release, but still no positive result. When I was looking for my family, some soldiers arrested me and kept me in their barracks for about a year, claiming that some pastors too had a hand in Boko Haram. I told him we were not involved, that our conscience wouldn't allow us to abduct people and start killing them. Eventually, I got released...It's by the grace of God I'm surviving in this camp. If it's not God, who else can I complain to? Who can I report my problems to if it's not God...? Right now, I'm living in this camp all by myself.

Regretting his inability to protect his family from Boko Haram abduction, Ibrahim was visibly overcome by remorse. He continued to long for the day he would be reunited with his family; as a result, he refused to remarry like some fellow IDPs who had lost their spouses in the conflict. "I can't break my matrimonial vows and

remarry,” he underscored in our conversation, “I can’t do that.” Of the attack, he further revealed:

When Boko Haram came to my village, I ran away and left my family behind. They abducted them, but not only them, other people’s children were also abducted. They planned to brainwash them and turn them too into Boko Haram. I pray that God will help the government to ensure the release of our wives and daughters from Boko Haram. That’s my prayer. I’m still expecting them to come home. If they’re still alive, let God make it possible for them to return home. I hope they’re still alive. I pray every day and night for them to be alive.

Humanitarian Needs of IDPs

Mainstreaming the humanity of IDPs into humanitarian interventions presents enduring opportunities for plugging gaps in aid administration in Nigeria and across the world today. Understanding that IDPs are members of the human community would go a long way in galvanizing support for their wellbeing. Unfortunately, many systems of power across the world often downplay, as Walter Brueggemann observes in *The Prophetic Imagination*, the ideals and realities of our shared humanity in their dealings. For them, “the notion of human justice and compassion is rarely a foremost factor in ordering a community” and they “find ways of treating it as the last question and never the first question about human reality” (Brueggemann 22). Ironically, the humanitarian community, which should know better, often does not place the shared humanity of IDPs at its center during interventions and, as a result, IDPs habitually get subjected to sub-human treatments in their interactions with humanitarian actors.

Unable to fend for themselves, IDPs depend on humanitarian actors to meet their basic needs.

Narrating IDPs' struggle for survival in the camp, Bulus underlined:

We have a lot of problems in this camp. Granted, they give us food here, but the food does not come regularly. It comes at intervals. This period the interval is too long. Right now, my family, we don't have food at home. Apart from food, even getting Omo [detergent] to wash your clothes or for you to give to children to wash for you is a big problem. Even ways through which you can get a pair of shoes to wear are not available. It's not as if the government will come and distribute these basic needs to you. Look at my tent. See how it is. It's already tattered. If it gets windy, you get terribly anxious hoping the wind doesn't destroy what is left of the tent. Your heartbeat increases. That too is a very big problem for me. The problems in this camp are too numerous to mention. In this place, our lives have been reduced to nothing. Even today, if I have some money for business, I'll leave this camp, move to a different location, and engage in business. If that happens, some of the useless experiences I face now will reduce. No matter what I face after leaving the camp, at least, I'll know that I'm the one in charge of my life, that I'm not waiting for alms from anyone.

Ado also narrates his experience in the camp, stressing their basic needs:

To be honest, the problems we are facing in this camp are many. While at home, you could go out and do your business. All the basic things you need to have a meaningful life, you had them at home. Then you came to this place.

To begin with, you couldn't even have a meaningful shelter. Well, thanks be to God, NEMA is giving us food. That's what we are relying on to survive here. Without the aid, we cannot survive here. This is heat period. If you enter our tents, the place is terribly hot. It's fasting season now and we're fasting. We have to look for a place where there's shelter from the heat and then rest. There's also the problem of unemployment. You have a family to cater for, and you don't have a job. You don't even have anything to do. And you are a businessman. You've always been used to doing business. You don't have the money to use in doing your business and you don't even know where you could secure it...You're a family man. You don't have a job. You cannot provide for your family. It's not funny at all. To be honest.



Illustration 16: Long wait for water in Bakassi camp

Hassana also complained about the unemployment challenges IDPs face:

We're in serious trouble. We have many men in this camp. Because of unemployment, many of them cannot get married. Women will say they are hungry and cannot marry a man who cannot provide for himself let alone provide for them. If you tell a man to go out there and look for opportunities, he'll ask you to tell him where he should go to find such opportunities. There's no place for him to go. Even the trees they often go to the bush to fell and sell as firewood, Boko Haram has abducted some of the men in the process. Yet, some men take the risk to go to the bush so they can provide for their families. Lack of jobs is a big problem for us in this camp. Our children are stealing. Our daughters are prostituting.

Baring his mind about aid in the camp, Mahmud explained:

In this camp we have a lot of serious problems. I've been here for two years. First, our children don't have access to quality education. I won't say there's no school here. There's a government school here, but the education there is poor. I don't know whether the teachers are not being paid well or they are simply not making efforts to teach. If you desire to take your child to a private school, you can't afford it. You're a displaced person. You're poor. You don't even have a job. So, you can't afford it, and then your child is denied quality education. Secondly, healthcare is another major problem. If you're sick and you go to the hospital, at best, what they will give you is genocid and paracetamol. We also have the problem of potable water. Shelter is another problem too. We don't have a place where we can stay with dignity

with our family, no shade, nothing. We don't also get enough food. If you're lucky, the food you get will last you for only fifteen days. Also, no oil, no beans, no firewood, nothing to use to prepare the raw food you get. And here you are as the head of the family, and you don't even have a job that can help you raise N600 [i.e. US\$1.67] for you to use in preparing food for your family. It's a big problem. Life here is a struggle for survival. If you're lucky, sometimes you leave the camp, run into someone you knew before you became displaced, and the person will help you. Sometimes, you go to a fellow displaced person who has something, and the person will help you with N1000 or N500 to support your family. When I first came to the camp, I was going into town to work in a bakery, but then I had an accident and broke my leg. Since then, I haven't been able to secure a job.



Illustration 17: Students learning inside an IDP classroom

Although the growing number of IDPs and the paucity of humanitarian aid have frustrated humanitarian actors' efforts to meet the needs of IDPs, thereby

widening the gap between the met and unmet needs of IDPs, cases of corruption and misplaced priorities among state and non-state humanitarian actors have also contributed to worsening this gap. In the discharge of their duties, many humanitarian actors have become an island unto themselves, disengaging themselves from the appalling realities besetting IDPs while also profiting from their suffering. In her cerebral book, *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt aptly describes as thoughtlessness this human failure to see beyond oneself and one's narrow world—a failure to understand our participation in the shared plurality of humanity.

The Menace of Drug Abuse

Many IDPs never really escape Boko Haram. The horrors of the terrorist assault continue to haunt them long after their flight, burdening them with incessant nightmares, posttraumatic stress, and everyday hardships of camp living. To cope with the challenges of their new reality, many IDPs, young and old, turn to drugs for a modicum of solace. In an interview with Lawal, an IDP in the Durunmi camp, he explained that long after fleeing Boko Haram rampage, IDPs continued to experience “severe trauma because of what happened to them in the northeast. Not just young people, but also adults, including women, experience trauma” and that “[b]ecause of the trauma they are experiencing, they take drugs so they can gain relief from their suffering and forget what is happening in the northeast.”

Explicating drug abuse among IDPs, he added:

The environment causes many young people to take drugs. But not all young people here do drugs. There are those who don't. Only a few of them, in fact, are using drugs, especially hard drugs such as cocaine. Some of them use this

hard drug or other drugs in order to feel good about themselves...No matter the religion you practice, the use of hard substances is not good. They can affect a person negatively, in terms of health, productivity, and interaction with others in the camp. As a result of drug abuse, you can see many of our young IDPs picking things from refuse dumps, becoming mentally disturbed, and even fighting and engaging in disgraceful behaviors. Some people abuse these drugs and nothing happens to them, but there are those who do that and end up behaving like animals, becoming aggressive, insulting people, and constituting nuisance. This is especially true for those taking cocaine and marijuana. Only a few people use these hard drugs because they are expensive. Some use medicinal drugs like 'alabukun' and such inexpensive drugs which they buy for about N50 and N100. And these medicinal drugs are handy. You can easily find them.



Illustration 18: IDPs in Durunmi performing drug abuse among IDPs

Like Lawal, Buratai condemned the abuse of drugs among IDPs, but went ahead to blame the abuse on illiteracy and unemployment among IDPs and advocated for employment opportunities for IDPs. He explained:

Illiteracy and unemployment are a major problem among IDPs. Many young IDPs are unemployed. When you wake up in the morning and you are not sure of your next meal or where your life is headed, anything can happen to that kind of person. It's not easy for a person who is doing nothing to survive. That's why some of our young people are taking drugs and some are even selling it secretly. Religious organizations, both Christian and Islamic, have come to the camp to raise awareness on the harmful effects of drugs. But the fact of unemployment remains among our people. They don't even have capital, no matter how little, to start a business, even a small kiosk. So that is the major problem affecting us. This problem attracts the problem of drug abuse.

Apart from cocaine, cannabis, alabukun, and codeine-contained cough syrup, many IDPs turn to tramadol—a medication used to relieve moderate to moderately severe pain. The medication works in the brain to influence how a person's body responds to pain. IDPs have even gone ahead to prescribe this medication to themselves as a pain relief from hunger, taking many tablets on an empty stomach until the drug engenders within them similar euphoric effects as heroin. Some IDPs who managed to escape from Boko Haram got familiarized with the use of Tramadol during captivity and spread the use of the drug within IDP camps. Boko Haram often gave it to their young captives to excite them to execute terrorist attacks. Addicted to

this drug, many IDPs spend the little money they possess to procure the drug, thereby leaving themselves worse off.

Despite periodic arrests of IDPs and drug peddlers made by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the opioid problem persists, although with more clandestine sophistication that involves a syndicate of importers, peddlers, and local pharmacies. Costing as little as \$.30 USD for a 10-tablet strip, a combination of factors such as corruption, regulatory shortfalls, and harsh living conditions, has boosted the inflow of this drug into IDP camps.¹⁴

On Family Planning and IDPs

High birth rates among IDPs, no doubt, contribute to increasing the gap of unmet needs in IDP camps. This growing gap lends credence to the need for family planning among IDPs. Although aware of the availability of family planning services, many IDPs choose not to access them for socio-cultural and religious reasons. For instance, the gendered expectations of culture, which stigmatize young unmarried women seeking contraceptive use by portraying them as loose, plays a huge role in women's reluctance to access family planning services in IDP camps located in northeast Nigeria. During the research, it did not take long before I appreciated not just the significance of family planning among IDPs, but also the important role of men in the use (or non-use) of family planning among IDPs in Nigeria.

¹⁴ See Philip Obaji's *Aljazeera* report "After Escaping from Boko Haram, Nigerian IDPs Addicted to Tramadol." 14 April 2019.

Sanusi, an IDP, shared his unique way of understanding family planning using the analogy of a shepherd:

Rearing children is like shepherding animals. If you have one, two, up to four animals, and you go grazing with them, you know you can control them—these four or even seven animals. Even if there are farms to the left and to the right and they are in the middle, and one strays from the path, you can easily go and redirect it. But when the number increases to fifty, can you alone take them out to graze? Certainly, you must look for assistance. That's how I see family planning. It's not just about giving birth. We can't simply say God gave me the children and therefore God will provide for them. If your wife is at her fertile period and you make love to her and she becomes pregnant, who brought it about? It's you. You brought it upon yourself. You must check your greed. If one cannot manage his greed, there are things the person can do to avoid pregnancy. You see a man whose last child is barely 40 days old, and the wife is already pregnant. Such a man has cheated the woman. He has cheated the one in the womb. He has cheated himself too.

Another IDP, Jibril, also shared his thoughts on family planning with me:

Family planning is good. It's good especially when you're poor. Right now, I have three children and my wife is pregnant. When she became pregnant it wasn't my desire for it to be that way. It was the will of God. Right now, I'm broke and I'm complaining. If today she gives birth, if nothing miraculous happens to save me from embarrassment, how can I take her to the

hospital? And what if I get there and they want to do CS? I don't have money. So, family planning is good.

Bashir equally volunteered his take on family planning:

Before bearing children, it's good for someone to have the means to control the children. Controlling them means going out and making efforts to provide for their upkeep. If you've made these efforts, leave the rest to God. It's God that has control over the outcome of our efforts. After having your first child, when the second one comes, you need to beg God to provide you with the means to provide for their upkeep. You should pray for wealth. You should pray over the child, asking God to make the child responsible.

For Abdul, the question of family planning is subjective, and he urges anyone considering it to make an informed decision. He explained:

Before our time, there have been people who have been giving birth. If you're a religious person, even if you want to look for a way to stop or reduce childbearing, you need to seek knowledge about the process. You can't simply say because you have given birth twice or thrice, that's enough for you, or that you want several children, so you keep on giving birth. If you don't make an informed decision in either situation, you'll not be successful. You may give birth to a child or even two, and the child(ren) will disappoint you. Another person may have ten children and will be living a good life...In Gwoza there was a man that had only a son. He loved him so much. The boy eventually disappointed him. He became a robber and was arrested. The father sold his house to get the child released. Until this day, the boy is not much of a son.

The man no longer has a house. And he doesn't still have peace of mind. And there's another man with three wives and many children. In our locality, no one had more children. He had at least twenty children. Not even a single child has become wayward. Now, when he's at home resting, this child will bring him gifts, and another will bring something as well. He's blessed. We need to seek knowledge from our elders.

Female IDPs also contributed to the question of family planning use in the camp. According to Maimuna, many female IDPs are aware of the availability of family planning services in the Bakassi camp but are reluctant to use it for a few reasons. With respect to her own situation, she explained:

I have two children. I gave birth to one of them in this camp. If God gives me more children, I won't refuse them. But at the moment, with the kind of problems we're facing in this camp, I don't want to have more children. I'm not using family planning services. My husband has stopped me from doing family planning. The services are available here in this camp for free, but my husband has stopped me from accessing them. Whenever the question arises, he'll ask me: "Don't you want to have kids with him or what?" Even though I don't desire to have more children, as it is now, if God gives me more children, I won't run away from the responsibility.

In the case of another female IDP, Amina, her near-death experience with pregnancy made her husband to consent to her use of family planning. Yet, she still had to contend with overbearing administrators of family planning in the camp who would not want to give her their service until her husband approved of it. She narrated:

I've had eight children already. The eighth one was not born alive. When I was pregnant with him, I was bleeding badly, so I went for check-up. They did a scan and told us that the child was already dead. So they washed my womb. Then they called my husband and told him that this was my eighth pregnancy and that he should have mercy on me and allow me to rest, and he agreed. They asked him to bring me for family planning injection after a while. After I had recovered for a week, my husband asked me to go with him to see the health officer for the injection. In the camp, we were told that we could also have it here and that we wouldn't have to pay for the one in the camp. So I went to the family planning center in the camp to have them insert a rubber for me, but they refused, saying they wouldn't do it for me until I came with my husband. By this time, my husband was already burdened with the stress of poverty and not being able to cater for our family, so he didn't refuse. He told them to insert the rubber. They asked him to know how many years he wanted the thing to last, and he said if there's the one for three years, they should give to me.

Zainab equally bared her mind on the importance of family planning use among IDPs against the backdrop of the socio-economic challenges they continued to face in the camp. Likewise, she stressed the need to understand children as gifts from God that must not be rejected:

I have never used family planning services. I have been planning my children without using any family planning services. My eldest child is eleven years old, the next is seven, and this little one I'm carrying is one year old. God has

always helped me so that I don't have to deal with the problem of family planning, except now that I'm pregnant and my last child is one year old. The problems one faces determine whether the person will use family planning. In our condition of displacement, it's unwise to give birth to many children. But you can't refuse children if God keeps giving them to you. Nevertheless, considering the kind of life we're living in the camp, if you keep having children, you're simply adding more problems to the ones you already have. Problems everywhere. You're not making progress. Your child too is not making any progress. After giving birth to this child, I plan on going for the family planning injection. We have it in this camp and I'll go for it. They give it to us free.

In her discussion of family planning use among IDPs, Hajara emphasized the almost non-existent support from male IDPs for their wives who intend to access family planning services. She relayed her personal experience:

I started using family planning when I discovered I was pregnant again when this child was only about sixty days old. At first, I didn't even know I was pregnant. Against all odds, I had to go for family planning because I knew the trouble I was facing with the little child I was carrying. I felt bad when I realized I was pregnant. My boy was only about two months old when I realized I was pregnant, and I felt I had cheated him. The problem here is that our men are not supporting us to go for family planning. Some men will tell you openly that they don't want it. They'll say it's God who gives children. I have used family planning only twice. They give it to us for free here in this

camp. I still plan on having children though. I don't know how many children I'll have, but I know, among them, there'll be an imam, a doctor, and a lawyer.

While many female IDPs desire to use family planning, they must first convince their male partners on the importance. Oftentimes, they are unsuccessful in convincing them. Many men, according to some female IDPs, consent to their wives' use of family planning only after complications with pregnancy or childbirth. This was the case with Rakiya. In an interview, she recounted her childbirth complication:

I had a horrible experience during the birth of my last child. I lost so much blood. It was as if I didn't have a single drop of blood left in me. I didn't have anybody to assist me. I didn't have any family member in this camp. I didn't have a mother or a father here. I didn't have anybody, except anyone that God touched to support me.

The above stories underscore that in the Nigerian society, as in many others across Africa, men play a dominant role in family planning decision-making, despite being overlooked in many reproductive health programs for reasons bordering on religion, culture, politics, finance, and interventionist ideology. The few attempts to include their voices in such programs have relied heavily, albeit problematically, on information gleaned from their female partners. This almost habitual snubbing of men's input inadvertently gives the wrong impression that family planning is solely a woman's responsibility, even though studies have shown that men's attitude towards family planning greatly influence women's use or non-use of contraception (Ismail, 1998).

Home and Belonging

IDPs, just like many other minoritarian subjects, retreat to their homes to find safety and solace. In the absence of their original (physical) homes, IDPs reside in tents provided for them, and remain under surveillance by the instruments of power running the camps. While many IDPs do not consider these camps as home since they cannot be themselves there, some IDPs have come to accept the camp as their new home, especially as there seems to be no imminent end for their reality of displacement. However, there is yet another group of IDPs who have made a home for themselves only in their minds, hearts, and dreams.



Illustration 19: A little girl standing in front of an IDP tent in Bakassi

One of the interviewees, an IDP I'll call Yakubu, expressed his frustration with camp life, wishing he could return home:

We're trying to survive here [IDP camp]. The government and other people too are making efforts to feed us. The food doesn't come regularly but we have to remain patient. Sometimes we must go into town and look for unskilled labor to do. We'll do this and do that in order to have something to feed ourselves. There's no kind of job I won't do if I have the capacity to do it. Sometimes I go to the market and help people carry their loads on my head. I also help people fell trees for firewood. I do such tasks so my family can have food to eat. To be honest, our stay in this camp is not fun.

He continued:

We pray to God for peace and security in our home so we can return. If we return now, we are still not safe. Our houses have even been destroyed. You can't just go to your farm emptyhanded with nothing to plant or use in making it productive. If the government restores security to our hometown, and we are able to get a little cash, we are ready to return home and rebuild our homes and our lives. Even if it's just a single room we are able to erect, we are ready to move in there with our families and figure our lives out. It's better than squatting in this camp.

For a 61-year old IDP, Hamza, returning home remained his priority, but only when security of lives and property could be guaranteed:

What we want right now is to return to our village, enter our homes and not hear gunshots. Everybody wants to go home, but if you go, from time to

time, you'll hear gunshots and you are not at peace. You don't even have business to do. Your house has been burnt down. Some people's homes have been rebuilt, but most of us haven't had ours rebuilt. If we go home now, housing is a huge problem. What we want the most is for the boys [Boko Haram] to be chased away from the bush altogether. They should leave our land for us so we can go back and farm like before. We've always relied on our farm for survival. We were producing beans which people would take to the East. We were cultivating maize. We were cultivating onions. In our village, we're very good at farming. That's what we do. But they're in the bush now. You cannot walk beyond 1 kilometer without getting shot. You step out, they see you, they shoot you. We want the boys chased away completely. Then we can go back home, do business, and return to living life like before.

Hadiza has already made peace with her reality of displacement and has chosen to make herself as comfortable as possible in her displacement. Yet, she still worries about her children's access to quality education and the highhandedness of humanitarian actors during aid administration. She explained:

What I appreciate about living in the camp is that I have peace of mind. I'm able to live with my family in peace, far away from the threat of any terrorist attack. However, I feel bad that there isn't a good school for my children to attend here. It bothers me that my children are not acquiring the knowledge they need at school. We want our children to be learned. We want them to have the kind of education they were getting before we got displaced. While we were at home, we had decent housing. But today, look at us. We are

sleeping on top of polythene sheets. And the heat is severe. Sometimes also, when they [camp officials] come to give us food, after already collecting our details and knowing how many we are in our tents, they will still ask us to bring a list of the occupants of the tent before they will give us food. When our children may have already gone to school, how do they want us to call them back from school for them to confirm our number before giving us food? When they want to come for data collection for food distribution, they won't even tell us beforehand to gather all our children. Sometimes, we tell them if they want to give us food, let them give us. If they don't want, well, we leave them with the food.

Years after being displaced, many IDPs have refined their understanding of home. Home, for many of them, is no longer essentially a geographical location (e.g. house, camp, village, local government area, or country). They seem to have expanded the frontiers of home-space to include anywhere or any position where an individual enjoys a sense of belonging. Home-space becomes a position or even period of retreat from the predatory forces of the majoritarian sphere that dwell so much on one's otherness to the detriment of one's happiness and creativity. I find this understanding instructive because space no longer refers to a physical location that could easily incarcerate someone but a fluid position where one feels safe. This offers IDPs, though essentially incarcerated, the freedom to decide their comfort zones, while also relieving themselves of the burden of attachment to physical locations that do not offer them peace, respect, or the opportunity to be their authentic selves.

Research Reflections

Vulnerability

In its exploration of the mimetic relationship between performance and real life, not in terms of copying but re-representation, coupled with its initiation of a critical distance from the world as it is in order to allow for an honest dialogue between what happens on stage and what obtains offstage, this research demands a rethinking of the prevailing understanding of IDP vulnerability as passivity and helplessness. This re-evaluation relocates the multifaceted issues of internal displacement from the ivory tower of displacement policymakers to the pragmatic realm of community and individuals, and then interrogates the gap between the real and the ideal worlds of IDPs through a process of critical analysis. Through this approach, the research asks critical questions about how performance creates heterogeneous and inclusionary space for political, historical, and socio-cultural counter-narratives aimed at bridging the lingering gap between the real and the ideal in the lives of IDPs.

Through the ethnographic performance, *Displaced*, this study demonstrates that the performance of internal displacement is not just about the misery of IDPs nor is it primarily about a static concept or attribute, but about a signifying process of a continually self-replicating and self-spreading configuration. This implies that internal displacement, just like history, is not fossilized in the past; rather, it is in constant conversation with the present and relentlessly poses a question for the future within the context of the fluid boundaries and barometers of statehood and humanitarianism. *Displaced*, therefore, denounces as partial and exclusionary the dominant narratives of

suffering and helplessness that project the reality of IDPs to the outside world, thereby tasking the proponents of such narratives to probe their motives and put at the forefront of their operations the shared humanity of IDPs. In the end, the performance demands that, as humanitarian actors, we ask ourselves a number of questions, two of which are: (1) “When I look at IDPs, what do I see?” and (2) “When they look at me, what do they see?”

In their relationship with IDPs, nothing is more attractive to many humanitarian actors than the vulnerability of IDPs (narrowly construed as lack or helplessness). In addition to filling humanitarian actors with a self-aggrandizing feeling of doing good, such a narrow construal of vulnerability mines the suffering of IDPs, while simultaneously disregarding their yearning for freedom and a return to their original home. Setting such a misguided priority gives the impression that humanitarian actors seek to perpetuate the existence of IDP camps in order to ensure the continuation of humanitarian missions and the flow of aid, thereby constituting a blatant exploitation of the vulnerability of IDPs.

On my first visit to Maiduguri, the driver of the taxi that took me to my hotel from the airport believed that many NGOs working in Maiduguri had ulterior motives, one of which was to do nothing about ending the Boko Haram crisis so the NGOs could remain in operation. He told me a story of how many wealthy people in Maiduguri secured plots of land in the highbrow areas of the town, built duplexes, and leased such massive houses to NGOs for a period of up to fifteen years. He posed two questions to me at the end of his story. The first was: “Do the NGOs really want this crisis to come to an end, since they’re paying for leases of up to fifteen years?” His

second question went like this: “Do NGOs know something we don’t know, and is that why they’re willing to commit such huge amounts of money to lease for such a long period of time?” He ended by saying that God will bring to justice all those involved in the perpetuation of the insurgency that has displaced so many people in the country.

When construed as a failure of self-sufficiency, dependence becomes problematic when we intertwine it with vulnerability in such a way that being vulnerable automatically means being enduringly dependent. Several times during the fieldwork, IDPs expressed their frustration with the lack of jobs, which had rendered them dependent on humanitarian actors for aid for too long. Narrating this frustration, Ahmadu noted:

I don’t have a job. When I wake up, I’ll simply go to the gate and sit down and pray to God. If someone takes pity on me, the person will give me something. If nobody feels sympathy for me, that’s just how I will sit and idle away. What’s happening in this camp, well, we thank God and we thank the president. We thank camp officials. We’re many here and the responsibility is huge. What we want, our prayer is for there to be an end to this Boko Haram problem, so we can all go back home, start our lives all over again and live in peace. At home, everybody can hide their secrets and maintain their dignity. You’ll decide for yourself what to do to make ends meet. You decide whether you want to farm or do business. That’s my prayer.

About his exasperating dependence on aid, despite being an accomplished trader before his displacement, Nasiru, another IDP, lamented:

I'm a trader. I'm not really into farming like some of my colleagues. I trade in female clothing. When Boko Haram attacked, they demolished my shop. My shop was not a small one at all. I was a distinguished businessman. The manual labor I do from time to time now is because I don't have money for business. With money, I know how to go about my business and get my life back in order. My stay in this camp is not dignifying. It's not even a reasonable thing to do. I'm not enjoying my stay at all.

The foregoing depicts that many IDPs are exhausted with camp life. Contrary to the reality of IDPs' exhaustion with camp life, many humanitarian actors portray IDPs as being content with living in the camp and relying on humanitarian actors for aid. Such a portrayal of IDPs places on IDPs the burden of vulnerability as perpetual dependency and leads to the conceited call for IDPs to live in perpetual gratitude to both state and non-state humanitarian actors, without whom they would have all perished. When, on the contrary, we frame vulnerability as a failure of self-sufficiency and then understand a failure of self-sufficiency as an indubitable human truth, an inalienable human reality, one that is intricately tied with our finitude and our being in the world not as atoms but as social animals, our framing of vulnerability will assume a new meaning and a fresh purpose. It will no longer project dependence as a parasitic, one-way, top-down relationship between two parties, but as a symbiotic, multi-way, reciprocal relationship that is not so much about *dependence on* but about *inter-dependence among* people. This kind of framing when used to understand the vulnerability of IDPs unburdens IDPs from the colonial stereotypes associated with

dependency and recognizes the need for everyone to support IDPs, as fellow human persons, to contribute meaningfully to their own wellbeing and the progress of society.

Role of men in family planning decision-making

Certainly, there are compelling reasons to involve men in family planning decision-making. Their involvement lessens conflict in relationships and strengthens the bond between partners, just as it also imprints on men the need to take increased responsibility for the children they father (Grady et al, 1996). And apart from the fact that the sexual practices and reproductive choices of men have far-reaching impacts on family well-being, population growth, and maternal and child health, men also command an enormous influence over decisions concerning sex and reproduction in Africa. Hence, the importance of targeting research and intervention programs on this influence and using it to change beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors on contraception cannot be overstated. The good news is that, in recent years, there has been a growing, albeit slow, interest in men's role in family planning on the continent (Jangu 2013). This research builds on this growing interest and takes it forward to the domain of IDPs where family planning use remains vastly underexplored.

In my examination of this immensely underexplored subject, I adopt the postcolonial theory of culture as its conceptual framework (Moore-Gilbert 1997; Gyekye 1997). This theory emphasizes the interlinked dynamics of culture and power in shaping the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and practices of people in society. However, my understanding of culture is divorced from the structural-functionalist interpretation which (mis)construes culture as a set of prescribed norms that deterministically direct attitudes and behaviors of people in society. My conceptual

understanding of culture also distances itself from the diffusionist school which sees the culture of local people in developing nations as antithetical to development and behavior change and, as such, advocates the diffusion of Westernized, high-modernist innovations to local communities in developing nations. Under this diffusionist purview, culture in the global south is closed and fossilized in the past. As a result, proponents of this idea of culture indiscriminately paint developing nations' traditional belief systems and practices as barriers to contraceptive use and the reproductive health of women.

However, based on a postcolonial concept of culture as open-ended and dynamic, as Behrman, Jere R., et al. suggest, we will be able to understand that social norms do not foreclose decisions on family planning use among local people (713-38). Rather, decisions occur through a recurrent process of negotiation among individuals, kinship clusters, religious organizations, and social networks in society. This conceptual framework deepens our understanding of why IDPs in a given cultural context behave in the manner they do towards family planning, and this understanding will, in turn, help humanitarian actors respond appropriately to the emergent realities of IDPs concerning family planning and related matters.

The foregoing, however, is not oblivious to debates surrounding the effectiveness of family planning over the years. While some scholars (Casterline and Sinding 2000) have applauded the contribution of family planning to a decline in global fertility, others such as Lant Pritchett (1994) have rather attributed the decline to a reduction in the demand for children. Still, another group of scholars argue that social networks, through a diffusion of the idea of the social appropriateness of small

families, have expedited the global decline in fertility (Coale and Watkins 1986). While not discounting the merits of the above arguments, one needs to be cautious in presenting a homogenous picture of fertility decline across the globe. While it is true that there has been a remarkable decline in fertility in the global north, the same cannot be said of the global south, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and more so in Nigeria which is the context of my research. Besides, in climes where there has been an appreciable reduction of fertility occasioned by a reduction in demand for children, one still cannot overlook the importance of family planning in reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies even amidst fertility decline. Additionally, family planning continues to present benefits to families in developing countries, including improved reproductive health, reduction in maternal mortality, and an increased opportunity for educational accomplishment, paid employment, and higher income for women (Bulatao 2003).

Narrative Reclamation through Ethnographic Performance

One of the deliverables of this research is the performance of the ethnographic drama, *Displaced*. Ethnographic performance allows us to listen to, and understand, in a profound way the stories people tell. It also provides an opportunity for marginalized populations to reclaim their own narratives from misperception. A narrative constitutes an explanation or normalization of stories or events that have occurred. It represents a positioning of individuals or communities in time and space and, orders, as well as interprets, what has either happened or has been imagined to have happened to individuals or communities. As Arthur W. Frank articulates in *Letting Stories Breathe*, “stories are crucial actors not only in the making of narrative selves...but also

in making life social” and the “selves and collectivities animated by stories then animate further stories: revising old stories and creating new ones” (15). Through narratives, we unveil how individuals or groups experience reality and how they assign subjective or inter-subjective meaning to it. In the narration of stories, both the tellers and the listeners forge a sense of unity of purpose as they interact on the altar of engagement. In the end, the story told will affect each person individually, eliciting different actions or reactions from the persons. Stories may, as Frank emphasizes, give some people a unique sense of subjectivity, just as stories may also propel some people to a deeper understanding of their shared realities and then convince them to assemble for collective action (49-63).

In today’s global village, one of the most important assets individuals need to have is the capacity to understand somebody different from themselves. Difference, though a human reality, has been the battlefield upon which many wars have been fought throughout history. This same battlefield exists today and, unfortunately, many battles are still being fought—battles that relate to ethnicity, religion, race, class, gender, ideology, and one’s position in society. IDPs’ precarious position in society situates them at the frontier of this battle. If only we could understand their difference as an opportunity for us to gain unique knowledge about the reality of forced displacement, we will treat them better than we do today. Such unique knowledge will impress upon us the unpredictability of displacement and the fact that it does not discriminate across class, age, gender, race, ethnicity, ideology, or religion. It can happen to any of us any day, anytime, anywhere. This project, which has resulted in an ethnographic drama of internal displacement, presents an opportunity for us to reach a

deeper understanding that a distinct population in a unique circumstance, such as IDPs, have exclusive knowledge that others can use.

As an ethnographic performance, this play affords IDPs the embodied opportunity to narrate their own stories and, in the process, reclaim their narratives that have for so long being distorted in the shrine of humanitarianism. It emphasizes experiences of IDPs over findings about the IDP community. It equally stresses co-compositions of stories over a top-down outright telling of a people's story. The ethnographic performance balances the researcher's expert knowledge with the act of listening to the voices of the IDP community. Such an act of listening treats the IDP community not as an object and, certainly, not as an assemblage of mere subjects, but as an assemblage of knowing subjects from whom a researcher can learn a lot through a co-generative and co-developmental process of collaboration that deepens not just learning but also trust, understanding, and partnerships.

In allowing for IDPs' reclamation of their narratives, the ethnographic drama recognizes the uniqueness of IDPs' cultural context and how they, through their own distinct or shared experiences, memories and histories, can act upon the world in which they live—in ways that are constructive and creative. As Clammer underscores, the ability of theatre and other art forms to ensure change habitually lie “in more subtle directions: in influencing the emotions, creating new images, in making one think or see differently” (75). Such is the power of theatre in presenting counter-narratives that, through “the more subtle mechanisms of raising awareness, changing perception, modifying emotions and presenting potentially transformative

alternatives,” it could help effect and even institute positive change in society (Clammer 78).

As an IDP-centered narrative of internal displacement, *Displaced* provokes researchers and humanitarian actors to understand in a precisely personal and practical manner the history, voice, perspectives, expectations, conflicts, fears, challenges, beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors, and encumbrances of IDPs. In *Telling Stories to Change the World*, Rickie Solinger, Madeline Fox, and Kayhan Irani present vivid examples of how storytelling has been used across different continents to speak out for justice, to critique society, and to galvanize people for collective action. Reflecting on the work with the Maya people in Guatemala, Czarina A. Thelen notes that “[s]tory contributes to social justice struggles by affirming the value of oppressed peoples’ cultures and re-igniting their embattled will to survive and defend their land and way of life against the destructive forces of oppression” (41). Since narratives do not emerge from a vacuum but from the interstices of relationships, for us to better understand them, we need to also understand the context from which they emanate, as well as what I have called the “5 Ps” of narratives—that is, the perspective, properties, process, purpose, and period of the narratives. In other words, we need to know the “where”, “what”, “how”, “why”, and “when” of narratives to deeply grasp the stories of the individuals or community under consideration.

Indeed, narrators employ narratives as a device to make sense of individuals, groups, spaces, objects, or events *to themselves*, or to make sense of them *to others*. As narratives, counter-stories “permit people whose identities have been damaged by oppression to see themselves, and to be recognized by others, as morally trustworthy

persons” (Nelson 34). They help affect the belief and value systems in society in such a way that they shape how people in society construe acts, events, and personae, thereby paving the way for interpretations and re-interpretations of reality (Nelson 11-2). Narratives similarly afford narrators the opportunity to relay stories either in the first-person, as in the case of recounting personal experiences or in the third person, as is obtainable in talking about the experiences of real or invented others. But beyond the point-of-view of the narrator, narratives also represent the human person to the world in ways that transcend the physical body.

Terrence Turner pinpoints in “The Social Skin” that the surface body represents the frontier of the social self, which serves as the shared frontier of society. Therefore, the “surface of the body becomes, in any human society, a boundary of a peculiarly complex kind, which simultaneously separates domains lying on either side of it and conflates different levels of social, individual and intra-physic meaning” (503). The social self, in other words, manifests itself in society in a myriad of narratives forged in affinities to creed, age, class, race, gender, and ideology, amongst others. In the case of IDPs, the forged narratives include laziness, misery, helplessness and, even in some cases, violent extremism, and infectious diseases. This performance ethnographic project, therefore, serves as an avenue for IDPs to peel back the debilitating layers of identity that they carry about. By subjecting these narratives to critical analysis in the form of a play within a play, the project offers a deepened understanding of IDPs, their realities, and their positions in the world. Above all, it presents IDPs with a unique opportunity to retell their own stories their own way and reclaim their narratives on their journey towards emancipation.

The photos below show IDPs engaging in meaningful tasks to help themselves in contrast to the dominant narrative that IDPs are lazy and always idling away:



Illustration 20: A displaced tailor at work in the camp



Illustration 21: An IDP-run cinema in Bakassi camp



Illustration 22: IDPs making hats for sale



Illustration 23: An IDP kiosk in Durunmi camp

Concluding Remarks

Throughout history, performance scholars and practitioners have relentlessly intervened in society to better the lives of people. Nevertheless, the literature assessing performance as a tool for elucidating the lived experiences of IDPs as a distinct group remains sparse at the global level and, worse still, in the African context. A worse fate applies to literature exploring the interlinkage between family planning and internal displacement, let alone the role of men in family planning decision-making among IDPs. This is a crucial gap because arts-based approaches such as performance ethnography enlarge the prospects of conventional empirical research. Arts do not only generate a different kind of data, but also enter personal spaces and evoke feelings, histories, and memories in such a way that the researcher is able to gather and construct unique perspectives from the research (Harper 21). Consequently, by exploring the underrated and underserved social context of IDPs, this research underlines Christine J. Walley's view that "personal narratives of nondominant groups can be highly revealing given the way they expose dominant viewpoints as particularistic rather than universalistic" and also in the "additional sense that the personal is not only political but also analytical" (627).

By adding creative perspectives and unique case studies from IDP camps in Nigeria to the existing body of knowledge on internal displacement, this project has sought to illuminate the long-overlooked nexus between internal displacement, family planning, and performance in the humanities. It has also encouraged human and resource interactions among academics, humanitarian actors, health/population professionals, policymakers and performance artists by its sheer engagement with

issues that span disciplines and have theoretical and practical implications at the local and global levels for individuals, governments, and international organizations. This interdisciplinary, collaborative engagement will further problematize current understandings of durable solutions for conflict-induced internal displacement in Africa; expose significant gaps in family planning research, policy, and intervention among displaced populations; and proffer ways through which performance could help bridge theory with practice and humanitarian ideals with everyday reality of internally displaced persons.

Tellingly, through its employment of ethnographic performance, the humanistic knowledge generated from the findings of this research have been made easily understandable, accessible, and actionable in simple, creative, and retentive ways to the researched subjects and relevant stakeholders in academia and the public policy industry. By privileging the lived experiences of IDPs over mere numerical data on displacement, this project has likewise repurposed the value of IDPs and has positioned their stories, perspectives, culture, and agency as the focal point for research on internal displacement. This research, I hope, will pave the way for the voices of these socio-politically excluded people to be heard, their feelings felt, and their memories privileged in humanitarian interventions and family planning programs, both locally and globally. In the end, I am excited at the theoretical and practical prospects of this research for the academy, the humanitarian community, and the many members of the displaced community in Nigeria, as well as the tens of millions in other parts of the world for whom a scaling up of this research holds promise. In recalling Conquergood's quote at the beginning of this chapter, I hope this

research which has been a dialogical performance of internal displacement will not only bring “together two sensibilities,” the sensibilities of IDPs and humanitarian actors, but will, at the same time, serve as “a vivid reminder that each voice has its own integrity,” that the voice of IDPs matters too (77).

ACT II

DISPLACED: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC DRAMA OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects.

—Paulo Freire¹⁵

It is how a goat stands in the market that determines how it gets priced.

—Nigerian proverb.

DISPLACED

A Play

by

Elaigwu Ameh

¹⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p.85.

CHARACTERS

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| FATIMA | 18-year-old lady. Petite, shrewd, bold, impulsive, and dressed in neat, colorful hijab. |
| MUSA | Fatima's unkempt uncle, with whom she has lived since the death of her parents when she was two years old. |
| THE MASK | A middle-aged man; a persona representing all the symbols of authority in the camp, including government, security agents, camp officials, humanitarian actors, and influential IDPs. |
| PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER | An omniscient persona announcing, clarifying, interrogating, and interpreting events as they unfold in the play. |
| BINTA | A middle-aged internally displaced person known all over camp as a jester. |
| SOLDIER | 20-year-old man, tall and sturdy. |
| Ensemble | Six young individuals playing multiple roles as allegory performers and audience members. |

PROLOGUE

An auditorium in the United Nations Headquarters, New York. Projection reveals the UN Logo. PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER enters, waves to the audience, and goes to the pulpit. Projection:

Topic: Necropolitical Implications of Internal Displacement

Presenter: Performance Ethnographer

Venue: United Nations Headquarters, New York

Date: World IDP Day

Dressed in grey suit, white long-sleeved shirt, oxblood tie, black belt, and black shoes, he delivers his speech with poise:

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER: Shepherds of the earth, I greet you!

Some people call me narrator, playwright, *amebo* or talk talk.

But I call myself Performance Ethnographer:

I conduct and perform ethnographic research.

Beat.

Today, I present to you what I call the ALLEGORY OF THE NEW SOVEREIGN.

Young people enter and dramatize the allegory. Projection: A photo of tents in an unidentified internally displaced persons' camp in Nigeria.

Imagine yourself taking a walk in a pregnant market square
On a devilishly cold day, watching how people,
In droves, pour into the arena.
Someone walks up to you, puts a pistol to your head
And strips you naked from neck to feet,
While everybody else watches,
Some in complete glee, some in shattering shock,
Some showing sympathy, some taking selfies—
Each doing something but nothing to apprehend your aggressor,
Or even berate him for you,
You, now an unprotected bundle of bare flesh
You, a prey for pornographers of suffering.

Beat.

Nobody offers you clothes to wear,

Except a sheet of transparent nylon
With which you now clad yourself
Even though you know your nakedness remains everyone's feast.

What would you do in your naked righteousness?
Would you use your hands to cover yourself in shame?
Or fight to retrieve your clothes, risking being shipped to the after-party of
afterlife?
What else would you do?
But remember, you can't flee from the scene
Because the crowd has encircled you—and,
The loaded gun is still staring at you.

*The performers freeze. A tableau. Projection: "Living with your
assaulter is a very intimate experience of hell."*

Before you dismiss this allegory as unbelievable,
Know that it represents the lived experience of internally displaced persons—
aka IDPs.

The person under attack represents IDPs.

The market square denotes the society—both global and domestic
Within which IDPs find themselves.

The person with the pistol embodies all the forces
That have conspired to cause and sustain internal displacement.

You can call these invisibly visible forces "The Mask"

The crowd represents all of us, individuals and organizations,
Who watch as the encampment and subjugation of IDPs persist year after year,
But do nothing to end the displacement and ensure

The enduring return of IDPs to their original homes.

The sheet of transparent nylon and its giver symbolize

Well-intentioned humanitarian actors—both individuals and organizations

Who, rather than work to end the displacement, provide a palliative response

To the displacement in the form of relief cocktails and political talk shows.

Frankly, humanitarian actors, our success is only durable when we become
redundant.

Let's work harder until we put ourselves out of work.

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER and performers exit stage.

THE NIGHTMARES

SETTING

A camp of internally displaced persons in North-Eastern Nigeria.

TIME

Morning

Janbuza camp for internally displaced persons in North-Eastern Nigeria. It is morning. A scorching sun. MUSA is in his tent with the door wide open, lying on a shabby mattress. A small radio, clothes, cooking utensils, books, etc litter the floor. Acronyms of international organizations cover the tent's walls. While MUSA sleeps, Boko Haram fighters enter from backstage and through the audience. They are in military outfits and turbans, exposing only their eyes. They carry guns. One of them is holding the black Boko Haram flag (which looks much like the ISIS flag). MUSA twists and turns in his sleep as gunshots from the group intensify. In the nightmare he is experiencing, members of the group are pacing up and down, and hurling insults and threats on the government and 'infidels.'

Death to infidels!
Death to the government!
Our way or no way!
Nigeria for Islam or death to all!

Terrorist 1:

Terrorist 2:

Terrorist 3:

Terrorist 4:

FATIMA, dressed in a colorful hijab, enters, oblivious to everyone, and speaks:

FATIMA: Throughout history, people have hidden under the name of God to commit evil.

(Pointing at the terrorists on stage)

To you, merchants of death, I dedicate this poem entitled: "Under God's Directive?"

Beat.

What celestial being worthy of the name God, perfect infinity
So affectionate and so compassionate
So placid and so lucid

So omnipotent and so omniscient
Would command us, mere mortals, perfect imperfection
So frail and so pale
So volatile and so vile
So myopic and so cryptic
To do his bidding here on earth, imperfect realm
Fighting for him as if he's powerless—an embryo
Killing for him as if he's bloodthirsty—a carnivore
Avenging for him as if he's remorseless—a zombie
That's not God but an anthropoid, imperfect form from egg and tail made
Unveiled to faces ripe or green
In plain or eerie dwelling
In finite time mimicking infinitude

The terrorists now freeze on stage. Gunshots end. Now pointing at the terrorists and rebuking them with her eyes, FATIMA continues:

Imprudent creatures today and of yesteryear
Tell me, the aces you turned to ashes
Those babes bombed at their mothers' busts
Those patriots trailed, maimed in your abattoir of perdition
Those encyclopedias slaughtered on the slab of creed
That budding nectary axed before its juice could form
Did you truly do all these under God's directive?
Did you?
Did you kill under God's directive?

In time, the Almighty will judge you
Will expose you and your paymasters
Before then
Tell me, in the twilight of your years
In the lull of your entombed heart
In your chance exit from the sanctuary of zealotry
In the pensive embrace of your fading essence
In your ascent to the tabernacle of reason
Tell me, why did you do all these?
Did God truly send you to kill?

Lowering her voice, FATIMA continues:

Tell me, in your worn whispers of shame
Or in your buoyant boom of sham
Did you truly do all these under God's directive?

Did you?
Did you truly kill under God's directive?
Did you?

MUSA screams in his sleep, and everyone exits. Now awake, Musa lets out a huge sigh of relief, grabs a pair of scissors, and exits the tent. He takes the container he uses to fetch water and cuts the rope from it. He puts the rope around his neck. The rope drags on the floor as he returns to the tent. He clasps a photo to his chest. Projection: a photo of Musa with a woman and two girls, smiling. Birds begin chirping and, almost immediately, stop as MUSA begins to speak:

MUSA (*soliloquy*): My mind is a pressure cooker of memories; it's a matter of time and the lid will blow off.... Four years ago, I had everything. At present, I've lost everything, even myself. You all tell me to hold on, to believe in a better tomorrow. But how can I believe in something that's not guaranteed? And how can I live with myself when I despise myself? Living like I do now in this camp, I can't amount to anything in life. Why should I continue living like this? Why? How can I ever forget that day? It keeps coming back to me...four years ago that's like four seconds ago. They came, they maimed, they stole, they slaughtered, and they left. They left with my wife and two daughters...

(now gesturing with his left fingers)

FOUR years ago. Are my wife and daughters still breathing? Are they now their captors' wives? (*Beat.*) They took my family away...They keep coming back to taunt me, to haunt me... in my thoughts and in my dreams. But I won't dignify them with my tears. A displaced man they've made me, but a dead man they can't. I'll fight them. I'll fight back, not with bullets or knives, but with something mightier. My will. I'll fight them with my will. My life I won't allow them take. That's weakness. My life I'll take myself.

Musa writes a suicide note. A recording is heard:

(DEAR FATIMA, YOU HAVE BEEN A JOY TO ME SINCE I BECAME YOUR FATHER AFTER YOUR FATHER PASSED IN A RIOT AND, YOUR

MOTHER, OVERWHELMED BY GRIEF, JOINED HIM BEFORE HE COULD EVEN BE BURIED. I HAVE WATCHED YOU BECOME A STRONG YOUNG WOMAN, SOMETIMES TOO STRONG FOR YOUR AGE AND YOUR IMMEDIATE SURROUNDING. I WISH I COULD BE AS STRONG AS YOU ARE. BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS NOTE, I MUST HAVE TAKEN IN MY LAST BREATH. FATIMA enters stage. He doesn't notice her until she's close. YOU MAY NEVER UNDERSTAND WHY I HAVE TO END MY LIFE THIS WAY. BUT, PLEASE, FORGIVE ME—)

FATIMA: What are you writing, uncle?

MUSA stops writing.

Hope it's not another suicide note

MUSA (*squeezes the letter and puts it in his pocket*): Call it a poem.

FATIMA (*stretching her hand*): May I—

MUSA: Not yet! Let me complete it first!

FATIMA: We can perform it together this afternoon. Big people are coming to the camp. Big politicians!

MUSA: They remember us only when elections are a breath away.

SOLDIER walks by, clasping books in one hand, and waving at FATIMA and MUSA with the other.

MUSA (*to FATIMA*): Look, he's waving at you!

FATIMA looks in the direction of SOLDIER, waves back, smiling and asking:

FATIMA: Won't you stop by to say hi to my uncle on your way to school?

SOLDIER smiles and begins walking towards FATIMA and MUSA.

MUSA (*laughing*): Are you sure it's me you want him to come say hi to? Sense will not kill you!

FATIMA: Leave me alone jor!

SOLDIER arrives. Sending a smile to FATIMA, he greets MUSA.

SOLDIER: I salute you, sir!

MUSA: How are you doing, my son?

FATIMA: Very well, sir!

MUSA: You now speak for him?

SOLDIER: I wonder!

MUSA enters the tent and shuts the door.

FATIMA: I've been trying to ask you a question.

SOLDIER: Okay?

FATIMA: You ever think of leaving the army?

SOLDIER: Somebody has to defend us and defend the nation's territorial integrity.

FATIMA: Must the person be you?

MUSA (*shouting from inside the tent*): Hmm! Somebody is in love o!

FATIMA (*Laughing*): Stop it! I'm serious (*Then to SOLDIER.*) What will make you

quit the military?

SOLDIER: Nothing.

FATIMA: Not even the dreaded terrorists?

SOLDIER: Nothing.

FATIMA: Not even your loved ones?

SOLDIER: I'm in it till death. Anybody who falls in love with a soldier knows what they're getting.

FATIMA: What if I tell you I want to be with you every second of my life.

SOLDIER: I'm a soldier, tomorrow is never promised us.

FATIMA: I am tomorrow. I promise you me.

BINTA enters stage, singing and dancing, while carrying a big bag on her shoulder. In the absence of a 'Ghana-must-go' bag, any other big traveling bag is okay. The bag is stuffed with her belongings. MUSA retreats from the tent, joining FATIMA and SOLDIER in looking amusingly at BINTA. MUSA reaches for his radio as BINTA sings and dances. BINTA stops singing and dancing, as the news filtering in from the radio grabs everyone's attention.

RADIO: ...following reports from a whistleblower, the foremost anti-graft agency in the country has apprehended senior officials of the National Agency for Disaster Relief. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been confiscated from their homes. Millions of dollars have also been traced to their domestic and foreign bank accounts, and also to their girlfriends' accounts. In another breaking news story, a soldier has posted a scathing criticism of the military on his Facebook page, revealing that the deadly terrorist group has taken over their base, killing over one hundred of his colleagues, forcing many others, including himself, to run for their lives. Calls made to the military headquarters to shed light on this matter have not yet been picked. Updates to come your way as we get them. Meanwhile, let's enjoy this brand-new music from—

MUSA turns the radio off.

BINTA: Soldier, you're lucky you were sent here to teach. Your colleagues are dying for nothing.

SOLDIER: They're dying for us to be safe.

MUSA: Must they die for us to be safe?

BINTA: Must they die like chickens?

FATIMA: Exactly!

SOLDIER: We've sworn to protect you all with our last blood.

MUSA: As a last resort, yes. Not as a first option.

SOLDIER: What do you mean?

MUSA: Don't act like you don't know what's happening to your colleagues!

SOLDIER: Educate me, please!

MUSA: Haven't you heard about young, innocent lives slaughtered in battle because their weapons were old school, despite the ever-growing potbelly of our defense budgets?

BINTA: Potbelly, indeed!

FATIMA: Haven't you seen soldiers in this very town protesting their unpaid allowances?

BINTA: What about the allegations of moles jeopardizing operations?

MUSA: Haven't you heard the spouses of fallen soldiers crying over their inability to feed their children?

SOLDIER: I have to go now.

FATIMA: Is that all you have to say?

SOLDIER: Why bother about what you can't change?

FATIMA: Really?

SOLDIER: Really! (*Beat.*) I'm just a soldier. I take orders. I fight for my country. I'll die for my country.

MUSA: There's a difference between dying for your country and being murdered by your country.

BINTA: Deep words, Musa! Displacement has not displaced your brain!

Laughter ensues.

SOLDIER: I have a class to teach in a bit. I have to go.

BINTA: You live in denial because you're a teaching soldier, not a fighting soldier.

SOLDIER: For your information, I've been posted to the battlefield. I leave tomorrow.

FATIMA: It's a lie!

SOLDIER: I leave tomorrow.

FATIMA: Tell me you're joking!

SOLDIER: Who jokes with potential death!

SOLDIER exits, as THE MASK enters, wearing a yellow neon jacket on which is inscribed "Camp Official." FATIMA and MUSA are shocked to see him.

THE MASK (*to BINTA*): What's in this big, ugly bag that you carry everywhere?

BINTA: Everything that's not your business.

THE MASK (*visibly angry*): What did you say? (*Begins scribbling on a piece of paper*) I'm writing your eviction letter already.

BINTA (*touching THE MASK on the shoulder*): Can't somebody joke with you again?

THE MASK: (*Squeezing the paper*) That was an expensive joke. (*Puts the paper back inside his pocket*) It could send you away from this camp.

BINTA: Any little thing, you threaten us with expulsion from this camp.

THE MASK: You're hereby expelled.

BINTA: I was only joking. Okay...this bag here...it contains everything I fled home with.

THE MASK: Why do you carry it everywhere you go?

BINTA: I don't belong here in this camp...in any camp. My bag reminds me that I'm on a journey. This is not my home. And I refuse to make it my home.

THE MASK: Your burden, your problem.

BINTA walks away from stage, dancing to the same song she sang earlier.

FATIMA (*beat*): That's so cruel of you! "Your burden, your problem!"

THE MASK (*to FATIMA and MUSA*): Both of you are performing this afternoon for our special guests.

MUSA and FATIMA remain mute. FATIMA glances at MUSA.

THE MASK (*to MUSA*): You have a problem with that?

MUSA shakes his head.

THE MASK: Thank you. See you soon.

Begins walking away and stops, turns:

(*To MUSA*) But if at all you have any problem with my request—no, my command—feel free to come and collect your eviction letter and leave this camp immediately. In fact, you have 30 mins to confirm your participation in the performance. 30 mins!

THE MASK walks away.

MUSA: Our bodies are their sport. They sit down and watch us play our misery, and make a fortune out of our misery. I wish we could refuse his request!

FATIMA: Why couldn't we?

MUSA: A man who's purging doesn't cherry-pick toilet.

FATIMA: Soon, this purging will end.

MUSA: Until then, hurry to The Mask and confirm our participation in the performance! We're performing a cultural dance.

FATIMA: I have another idea.

FATIMA whispers something into MUSA's ear. MUSA looks frightened. A goat bleats. FATIMA runs offstage, forgetting her phone on the table. Seeing that she's offstage, MUSA removes the suicide note from his pocket, completes writing it, puts it on the floor, and places FATIMA's phone on top of it.

MUSA: She's forgotten her phone again. One day she'll forget herself.

He gets the rope, climbs a table, hangs it from the tree, and slides his head into the loop already created, until the rope now encircles his neck. FATIMA returns onstage.

FATIMA: No! Uncle, no!

MUSA: What brought you back so quickly?

FATIMA: My phone. Forgot my phone.

MUSA: Don't come near me!

FATIMA: Please, don't do it!

MUSA: You come any closer to me, I kick the table...and it'll be over.

FATIMA stops, talks to him from a distance.

FATIMA: It doesn't have to end this way.

MUSA: Every end is an end.

FATIMA: This one is for cowards.

MUSA: Cowards don't commit suicide.

FATIMA: Only cowards commit suicide.

Pause.

You're such a coward, a hopeless one at that. Why can't you be bold for once in your life? My father, your brother, was attacked and you ran away, leaving him to die. You couldn't join him to fight back.

MUSA: Don't go there again!

FATIMA: Insurgents overran your school in broad daylight, took away female students, and only what you could do was lock yourself up in your office until the harm had been done. Couldn't even call the police right away.

MUSA: Why are you replaying my mistakes, my regrets?

FATIMA: Terrorists attacked our community, our home and, once again, your cowardice got the better of you. You ran away leaving your wife, your two daughters and me. I managed to escape.

MUSA: Why are you worsening my grief?

FATIMA: Now you want to run away and leave me to make sense of life all by myself. When will you stop being a hopeless coward?

MUSA: I'm not a hopeless coward.

FATIMA: You're a coward, at least.

MUSA: I'm NOT.

FATIMA: You ARE.

MUSA: I'm not.

FATIMA: You can't face your problems head on. You run. Always running. Usain Bolt!

MUSA (*raising his voice*): That's enough.

FATIMA: I'm the head of this family from now on.

MUSA: Enough!

Beat.

FATIMA (*crying*): I'm sorry. (*beat.*) Hold on a little longer for me, please. Hold on for your wife and children. They'll come home to us. One day. Wait a little longer...tomorrow, after all, is another opportunity—

An explosion erupts. MUSA and FATIMA fret. Through a reflex action, MUSA has already discarded the rope at the sound of the explosion and is now holding tightly onto FATIMA. They both look scared. Smoke is everywhere. Sounds of commotion filter through the speakers. People run on to and off stage from different directions, confused. Then everyone freezes. PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER enters stage and tries to make sense of what just happened.

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER: January 17, 2017...a bomb blast in a neighboring IDP camp. The military have just apologized on TV for what they call an "accidental air strike." Some people say it wasn't accidental. What to call what just happened, I don't know. Whose version of the event to believe too, I don't know. What I know though is that many people are dead and many more are injured. And just like other cases in the past, this too will go unpunished. Nobody will be made to face justice. There'll be noise made on the streets, on social media and on TV and radio, and then everybody forgets it ever happened. That's how things work around here. Some lives don't matter! Displacement is indeed a very special kind of death row.

Everyone exits.

THE PERFORMANCE

Afternoon in the camp.

An open field next to MUSA's tent in the IDP camp. Chairs have been set up for the VIPs. THE MASK enters.

THE MASK: As a camp official, an aid agent in my own right, I greet you. Hundreds of thousands of our brothers and sisters remain displaced across the country for no fault of theirs. Help us to help them. IDPs have suffered too much already, yet their enthusiasm, courage, and hope remain incomparable...they inspire me daily. Since I'm not a person of many words... a doer not a talker, I welcome you all to this camp, and ask you to enjoy the brilliant mixture of performances which IDPs have put together for our enjoyment today. Just like the rest of you, I don't know what they'll present to us today. But I vow it'll be a blast. Enjoy!

MUSA and FATIMA enter.

MUSA: To my fellow IDPs, it's how a goat stands in the market that determines how it gets priced. Henceforth, we stand like kings and queens to assert our human dignity in this camp. We are more than our situation. We are displaced but we are not our displacement. For those who have been itching to speak their minds on this and other sensitive issues for so long, but still can't, let this poem do the speaking for you. It's called "Today We Speak."

FATIMA: Internal displacement is incarceration

Inside your own home
And IDPs are inmates on death row
Suffering for a crime they never committed,
Waiting for charity sometimes from their abuser.

To you our lives are a breathing joke,
A joke we've always missed—
A joke too real to be funny
From where we stand, forgotten but begotten
Of God, who sits watching
As our hope fades into despair,
As our dreams sleepwalk into nightmares.

MUSA: For years, we swallowed silence,
Afraid we'd say something wrong—a bomb;
For years, we lost our voice
Among the carcasses of fears
Caged in the casket of the mind.

FATIMA and MUSA: Beaten down, gasping for breath,
Yet we have an ocean of life left in us—
Blessed children of a bastard union.

Beaten down, gasping for breath
Yet we're taking back our voice,
Long lost in your noise,
Buzzing bees in our heads.
Today we speak!

FATIMA: Today we speak!
Today we'll detonate you
With the grenade of our words,
Ripping your narratives of us into shreds
To reveal our own version of events
Long denied broadcast on your humanitarian station of perdition

MUSA: We don't care if our stories nobody else trusts;
The fence around us does—
An impartial witness to the fears and hopes, pains and joys,
We carry like scars on our bodies.

FATIMA and MUSA: Like water from a broken tap,
We'll weep until we get our plumber's devotion.
Like water from a broken tap,
We'll weep until our plumber comes

If you our honesty upsets
Don't crucify us; thank us instead
For nudging you to be a better you—

Before you sell one more calumny
About us to anybody else,
Today we tell our own story.
Today we speak!

Applause. THE MASK is not too pleased, but claps nonetheless—reluctantly, as the stage is being prepared for the next performance. A projection comes on:

UNTIL THE LIONS HAVE THEIR OWN HISTORIANS, THE HISTORY OF THE HUNT WILL ALWAYS GLORIFY THE HUNTER—CHINUA ACHEBE

ANY SITUATION IN WHICH SOME MEN [AND WOMEN] PREVENT OTHERS FROM ENGAGING IN THE PROCESS OF INQUIRY IS ONE OF VIOLENCE; ...TO ALIENATE HUMANS FROM THEIR OWN DECISION MAKING IS TO CHANGE THEM INTO OBJECTS—PAULO FREIRE, PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED

The next performance is about the re-bagging and reselling of aid. MUSA puts on a mask and a yellow neon jacket with the words “Camp Official.” Now playing the role of The Mask, Musa transfers rice from a World Food Program bag to a new bag with no label. Onstage are bags of re-bagged rice loaded on top of each other. His phone starts ringing.

THE MASK (*picks call*): I’ve been waiting for your call like the second coming of the Great One. Are you guys on your way? (*beat.*) Good. Of the 50 trucks of food that are meant for IDPs in Janbuza camp, you’ll take only 10 trucks there...no...let’s make it 35, so we don’t raise suspicion. Or just reduce it to 30 trucks. I need to settle too many people. Send 30 trucks to the camp and send 20 to my warehouse. I’m there now. My boys will re-bag all the bags of rice and sell them off within two days. Buyers are on ground. But I need you to get me another group of buyers. These current buyers are becoming too greedy. Imagine, they’re asking for more discounts after the heavy discounts we’ve given them already. One even had the guts to tell me that stolen properties should be sold very cheap. Imagine that! He called them S-t-o-l-e-n properties. How dare he? So, I’ve now become a thief. Am I a thief? (*pause*) No response? Alright. Later. (*There’s commotion growing outside. He ends the call, covers the bags and boxes with a sheet, and opens an imaginary window. He sees IDPs holding placards, protesting their abuse and the poor sanitary conditions of the camp. He shuts the window.*)

What have I just seen? Protest by IDPs? Hmmm! Let the world end already.

(FATIMA enters from the opposite direction, playing the role of a mother, MAMA JIBRIL. She’s dressed in hijab. Underneath the hijab is a baby she’s carrying in her arms. She knocks on the imaginary door to The Mask’s office. She doesn’t get any response, so she opens the door and enters. MUSA still dressed as The Mask but now wearing an orange neon jacket that says “Security Agent” stares at her angrily.

MAMA JIBRIL: Save my baby, sir!(*She raises her hijab to expose the infant*)

MUSA: Is that how to greet? You IDPs, you’ve lost all your home training. Save my baby, sir! Is that how to greet? Get out of my sight, NOW!

MAMA JIBRIL (*kneeling before him*): So sorry, sir! Good afternoon, sir!

MUSA: What do you want in my office this time, Mama Jibril?

MAMA JIBRIL: Same thing as the last time.

MUSA: My sweet sugarcane?

MAMA JIBRIL: Food...food for me to eat...so I can feed my baby.

MUSA: Then you know what to do.

MAMA JIBRIL: I can't, this time. I only gave birth last month. I'm still sore down there.

MUSA: Then I can't help you, Mama Jibril.

MAMA JIBRIL: You know I'm not like those that say no to you when you ask them for it...I just can't now.

MUSA: You're not in need. When you are you know what to do.

MAMA JIBRIL: See...(Touching her breast with one hand and holding the baby with the other.)...No matter how hard I press it, no milk will come out. I've not eaten in days, and my milk has stopped coming out...give me food to eat, I beg you, so my baby won't die.

MUSA: But you got food at the end of last month. It's not yet month end and your food has finished?

MAMA JIBRIL: Our food doesn't last more than 15 days...people like us who manage it well, we can make it last for 20 to 21 days...and the rest is prayer and hustle and trade by barter. I don't have anything to use for barter, and I have prayed enough...that's why I've come to you—

MUSA: To hustle! You've come to hustle me?

MAMA JIBRIL: No. I mean, yes.

MUSA: Then you know what to do....

THE MASK becomes angry and chases the performers offstage.

THE CONVERSATION

SOLDIER enters holding a dictionary and walks into MUSA and FATIMA's tent. While he's inside, BINTA enters from elsewhere, dancing. Her bag is hanging on her shoulder. Just as she's about to dance past the tent, SOLDIER comes out without the dictionary, attracting her attention.

BINTA: Fatima is not at home!

SOLDIER: Who asked you?

BINTA: Nobody!

SOLDIER: *Amebo!*¹⁶

¹⁶ "Amebo" means rumor monger in Nigerian pidgin.

BINTA laughs vigorously at the insinuation that she's a gossip. SOLDIER enjoys a good laugh too.

SOLDIER: You're such a joke!

BINTA: My whole life's a joke, I know.

SOLDIER: That's not what I meant.

BINTA (*making herself comfortable on the bench*): It doesn't matter. Sit with me let me show you something.

SOLDIER: I must rush to school to handover my notes. I leave for the battlefield tomorrow.

BINTA (*dragging SOLDIER's hand*): Sit, please!

SOLDIER (*Sitting down*): I have been here about a year. Never seen you sad before.

Always cracking jokes, always dancing despite your situation of displacement.

BINTA (*removing a photo album from her bag*): I can't kill myself. When life has turned you into a joke, the best you can do is laugh at the joke you've become. A naked woman doesn't put her hand in the pocket.

SOLDIER (*hugging BINTA*): It's well.

BINTA: Yes, even in the well. (*Beat.*) I try to stay positive. That the road is bent doesn't mean we have to bend whenever we're walking along it.

SOLDIER: True talk!

BINTA: I was a photographer before the attack that brought me here. I still am. I also farmed. Every farming season, my husband and I had at least 50 bags of rice, 50 bags of maize, 50 bags of beans, 50 bags of millet. But now, I must struggle every month to get enough food to feed myself and my two sons. My husband died in the attack. We had four children, two died from starvation when we were hiding for weeks in the bush.

SOLDIER: You're a strong woman.

BINTA: I'm also a good photographer. One day I'll take pictures that will change my life forever. One day soon.

SOLDIER: Why not give your photos to these NGOs coming around and get some money in return like some people do?

BINTA: They don't want my kind of photos.

SOLDIER: What kind of photos do they need?

BINTA: Photos of malnourished children with running nostrils and flies in their eyes. I don't take such photos.

SOLDIER: How's what you do different from what they want?

BINTA: I focus on compassion not pity, on PEOPLE with problems rather than the PROBLEMS of people. That's why I'm different.

SOLDIER: And that's why you'll remain a poor photographer.

BINTA: Exactly! But I don't mind. One day, I'll meet humanitarian workers with

heads on their shoulders and humanity in their hearts, and everything else will be history. You don't need to shock donors to raise money for our upkeep. If you must, then you don't need funds from such people.

BINTA then shows SOLDIER pictures in her album. Performers already seated with the audience speak up one after the other.

MEMBER A: My name is Amina Yusuf. I'm a displaced nurse, and I'm not an infectious disease.

MEMBER B: Philip Yusuf is my name. I'm a displaced tailor, and I'm not a lazy person.

MEMBER C: My name is Murtala Murtala. I'm a displaced farmer who now begs for food to survive, but I'm not my begging.

MEMBER D: Rakiya Abdul is my name. I'm a displaced girl, and I'm neither a suicide bomber nor a prostitute.

BINTA: I'm Binta Yakoko. I'm a poor and suffering photographer, and I'm neither my poverty nor my suffering. I'm a human being with dignity.

Beat.

We all had a life before our displacement. Don't treat us like lepers. We wouldn't ask you for help, if we could help ourselves. But not every help is help. We need the HELP that will help us to help ourselves.

FATIMA returns home with a bundle of yams on her head, keeps them inside the tent and squeezes herself between SOLDIER and BINTA. They look at a few photos together, then BINTA waves goodbye, and exits. The sound of a moving plane filters in and fades almost immediately.

SOLDIER: Sorry, I missed your performance. I was told that you guys killed it.

FATIMA (*laughing*): And The Mask almost killed us soon after! My uncle hasn't returned home since the show.

SOLDIER: Why?

FATIMA: Maybe he's afraid The Mask will come looking for us.

SOLDIER: I feel for him, your uncle!

FATIMA: Me too! His eyes have seen too much suffering. He once had it all. Wife, children, money, respect, power. He had his own secondary school, you know. He was headmaster there. But look at him now, nobody. Everything lost.

SOLDIER: He still has his brains though. Those poems you just performed. He wrote them, right?

FATIMA: He did, yes!

SOLDIER: I brought the dictionary and inspirational books you requested for him.
FATIMA: I saw them inside. Thank you.
SOLDIER: Anything for you.
FATIMA: Really?
SOLDIER: Really.
FATIMA: Then don't leave me.
SOLDIER: I can never leave you.
FATIMA: But you're going to war tomorrow.
SOLDIER: I'll carry you with me.
FATIMA: Really? But I'm not a soldier.
SOLDIER: I taught you how to use my gun. Didn't I?
FATIMA: I won't survive a second on the battlefield with only that crash course.
SOLDIER: I'll carry you with me nonetheless.
FATIMA: With you, I'll always be safe.
SOLDIER: Sure!
FATIMA: I need to tell my uncle I'm leaving with you.
SOLDIER: No need!
FATIMA: Why?
SOLDIER: I'll carry you only in my heart as I leave tomorrow.
FATIMA: You can't leave me here alone.
SOLDIER: You have your uncle.
FATIMA: I love you.
SOLDIER: I know.
FATIMA: Is that all you can say?
SOLDIER: What do you want me to say?
FATIMA: I can't believe my ears! You've not left and you're already acting strange.
SOLDIER: I love you too.
FATIMA: Must I force it out of your mouth?
SOLDIER: I love you. I really do. I'm not just ready for a relationship.
FATIMA: You don't love me?
SOLDIER: You know I do. But how far can we honestly go with a relationship?
FATIMA: Until the end. We'll get married, have kids and grow old together.
SOLDIER: We're still young. You're eighteen and I'm only twenty.
FATIMA: We won't be young forever.
SOLDIER: How are we going to raise kids by ourselves when we too are kids?
FATIMA: You have a job. I've saved some money writing letters for people in this camp. I'll look for other jobs. I can translate for NGOs visiting this camp. I'll beg The Mask to give me a teaching job. I can teach these kids how to write their names. Something many of their teachers here have failed to accomplish

in over a year of teaching them. That's why every kid wants to attend your class. You're committed to their education.

SOLDIER: Thanks, but starting a family is no joke.

FATIMA: I know. I'll be committed to it. I pledge my devotion to you. I'll love and honor and cherish you until death do us part. All the love I never got, I'll give it to you and to our kids. You'll swim in my ocean of love.

SOLDIER: Marriage is no poetry.

FATIMA: It's not rocket science either. We can figure it out. We're smart enough to do that.

SOLDIER: Pause. Breathe in and out for a moment. See...I'm being realistic here. I don't even have a home. Where are we going to live? Here in this camp? In your uncle's tent?

FATIMA: He won't mind. He holds you in high esteem.

SOLDIER: Are you listening to yourself?

FATIMA: Let's just take that first step. The future will be fine.

SOLDIER: I'm a soldier. I don't live in the future.

SOLDIER: The future is never promised.

FATIMA: Ours is.

SOLDIER: I'm a soldier, remember.

FATIMA: It doesn't matter.

SOLDIER: I'm committed to my job, to protecting my country. If I must die to keep you all safe, so be it.

FATIMA: You talk about death as if it's a trophy.

SOLDIER: Just keeping it real.

FATIMA: You're too young to die.

SOLDIER: But not too young for marriage?

FATIMA: Don't want you to be another fallen hero.

SOLDIER: How I hate that term.

FATIMA: Me too.

SOLDIER: They're not just fallen heroes. They're somebody's father, mother, sister, brother, daughter, son, husband—

FATIMA: And sweetheart!

SOLDIER: Yes, and sweetheart. (*hugging FATIMA*) I love you, s-w-e-e-t-h-e-a-r-t.

FATIMA: I like how you say "sweetheart." Say it again!

SOLDIER stands up, pecks her on the forehead and leaves. FATIMA watches him leave.

THE CONFRONTATION

MUSA returns home, sits on a mat next to the entrance to their tent, humming a song. Still inside the tent, FATIMA asks:

FATIMA: Are you back, uncle?

MUSA (*laughing*): No o! Not yet!

FATIMA: You're not serious!

FATIMA emerges from the tent with a dictionary, and gives it to MUSA.

MUSA: Where did you get this dictionary?

FATIMA: Soldier's gift to you.

MUSA: Wow! Your soldier?

FATIMA: Our soldier, yes!

MUSA flips the pages of the dictionary, while FATIMA returns inside and comes back out with a bucket full of wet clothes. She heads to the line beside her tent to spread the clothes.

MUSA: Lots of synonyms and antonyms inside this one. Don't have to crack my brain too much when I write my next poem.

FATIMA: Look! Over there!

MUSA: Where?

FATIMA (*pointing*): That girl sneaking into the family planning center.

MUSA: She's not a girl...she's married with a kid already.

FATIMA: That doesn't stop her from being a girl. She's sixteen, two years younger than I am...and you still call me a girl

MUSA: She's married. You're not.

FATIMA: That's what differentiates a girl from a woman? Mere Marriage?

MUSA: Marriage is not "mere," my dear. You'll know when you get inside.

FATIMA: Not anytime soon. I need to complete my bachelor's degree first.

MUSA: A bachelor and a bachelor's degree can go together.

FATIMA: Leave me alone!

MUSA: It's the truth.

FATIMA: Look! She's out.

MUSA: Hope her husband sanctions what she's gone there to do.

FATIMA: Does it matter? (*She stops spreading her clothes. She's holding a wet skirt.*)

MUSA: He deserves to know at least.

FATIMA: The learned ones, yes...but not the illiterates who have turned their women

into rabbits...breeding children every year as if they have something to prove.

MUSA: Don't blame them...they've got nothing else to do. How could you sit at home all day doing nothing and you're expected just to be looking at your wife without doing something? Are you a piece of firewood?

FATIMA: You...are you one? You don't have a woman now, but you're still fine.

MUSA: Who told you I'm fine? I still can't shake thoughts of my wife off my mind...I regret running away when the bad boys came...I should have stayed back to protect her and my daughters and you...I thought they came to take only the men...to force only men to join them and to kill the men who refused...but I was wrong. Had the Chibok girls been taken before they came to our village, I would have known better...I would have known that they took women too.

FATIMA: God will bring them back.

MUSA: How many years? Four years...and he still hasn't heard my grief enough to bring them back?

FATIMA: He will bring them back to us...someday.

MUSA: When I'm rotten inside the grave?

FATIMA: Don't talk about death. Talk about life. See how that little child over there is running around happy...it should give us hope...we too can be happy here...

MUSA: Go ask the child's parents if they're happy. You know how many parents starve here just to feed their children?

FATIMA: And yet many more are still bearing many children in this condition of ours.

MUSA: It's God that gives children.

FATIMA: You're now speaking like them. (*mimicking.*) It's God that gives children.

MUSA: Who else gives children?

FATIMA: Who takes care of the children?

MUSA: He that gave them life will provide for them...at least that's what my friends who have many children here tell me whenever I challenge them about their family size.

FATIMA: Good to know you don't share their belief.

MUSA: Their belief...their problem...not mine...

FATIMA: But you can at least change their minds.

MUSA: Who changes the mind of an adult? You can only explain things to an adult. Individuals change their own minds if they so desire. Nobody else can do it for them.

FATIMA: My best friend...her father has ten children...I discussed this issue with her and she said her father once explained to her that children have different stars...some will shine bright and some may not...and only God knows the

difference...so he'd rather have many children...at least one of them will have a bright star, he believes... and when such a person makes it in the future, he'll be sure of being taken care of.

MUSA: If he has only one child—

FATIMA: ...and that one has a star that will not shine bright...he's finished...he'll spend his old age begging for food in motor parks and in traffic.

MUSA: What a way to reason!

FATIMA: What a way!

MUSA: But you don't blame people for how they reason. Their level of exposure matters.

FATIMA: Some people here believe family planning is about making a woman barren.

MUSA: It's rather about spacing and timing, about giving the woman rest, about improving her health and the health of the whole family. Too many hands digging into a breadwinner's pocket can send the person to an early grave.

FATIMA: Maybe we should do a performance about that...a play...maybe a spoken-word poetry about family planning and family health.

MUSA: Maybe. (*MUSA sights The Mask. He currently wears an orange neon jacket on top of a khaki shirt complemented with khaki trousers and black military boots. The jacket has the inscription "Security Agent" clearly printed on it.*)
The Mask is coming. I must leave.

FATIMA: Stay with me. Please.

MUSA: Stay away from him.

FATIMA: Don't worry. I know what I'm doing.

MUSA: Don't say I didn't warn you.

FATIMA: I hear you.

MUSA: He's evil...and DISGUSTING.

FATIMA: You taught me not to say that of a human being

MUSA: Is that one a human being?

FATIMA: What is he then?

MUSA: Does he look like a human being to you? (*spits.*)

FATIMA: Never seen you dislike someone like this before.

MUSA: In a sane world, someone like this should be in a madhouse at best

FATIMA: And at worst?

MUSA: Should be fed to vultures in the Sambisa Forest.

(*FATIMA and MUSA enjoy a good laugh. MUSA exits stage. FATIMA looks away, as if she hasn't seen THE MASK approaching. She enters the tent and comes out holding a cup of water and a pack of tablets.*)

THE MASK: You act as if you didn't see me coming.

FATIMA: How was I supposed to act?

THE MASK: And why did your uncle leave so fast when he saw me coming here?
FATIMA: Your sight disgusts him.
THE MASK: Is that what he told you?
FATIMA: Why would he tell me such a thing?
THE MASK: Okay, I thought he told you that.
FATIMA: I haven't said he didn't.
THE MASK: Stop messing with me? Did he or did he not say that of me?
FATIMA: When did you start bothering about what people said about you?
THE MASK: Since a while ago when you teamed up with your uncle to make a fool of camp officials and security agents in the presence of dignitaries. What was that all about?
FATIMA: What do you mean?
THE MASK: You know what I'm talking about...the drama...the poetry. Why did you choose to humiliate us...in front of the high and mighty in society?
FATIMA: Why do you take everything too serious?
THE MASK: I'm a security agent not a clown.
FATIMA: And so?
THE MASK: I'm pissed. Really.
FATIMA: You didn't even ask me about the tablets I'm holding. Later you'll say you care about me.
THE MASK: Okay...why these tablets? Are you suddenly sick?
FATIMA: Is that how you'll ask me?
THE MASK: How should I then? Alright (*mockingly.*) Madam, are you sick?
FATIMA: Sick of your cold-bloodedness... (*she puts some tablets in her mouth and flushes them down with water.*)
THE MASK: You've come again.
FATIMA: Sick of your greed...sick of you people turning our misery into business...yes, I'm sick.
THE MASK: You think you're smart.
FATIMA: I'm sick of you all.
THE MASK: You knew I was coming to attack you for the show of shame you guys put up today...and you chose to attack me first...to put me on the defensive...
FATIMA: Must it always be about you? Must it?
THE MASK: Was what you did not serious enough for me to be angry?
FATIMA: You think we were happy to even put up such a performance? Such things shouldn't happen in this camp.
THE MASK: What are you talking about?
FATIMA: Never mind! That was just a performance!
THE MASK: And so what?
FATIMA: Just a performance!

THE MASK: I'm going to have you go out there and recant everything you said during the performance. In fact, I'll call in journalists and you'll apologize to me and my colleagues...and they'll run it in their news channels...all your lies against us.

FATIMA: What lies?

THE MASK: The ones you packaged as performance.

FATIMA: They're not lies.

THE MASK: But you just admitted it was all just a performance.

FATIMA: Yes, a performance it was, but a lie it wasn't. It was a performance of our truths in this camp. Everything we staged happened at some point to real people here. I call it a performance because, although every experience enacted is real, not everything happened to just one person...we created characters from the real stories of different people and only played it back to you and everyone else to see...and you know you can't deny the truth in our storytelling... *(pause.)* Can you?

THE MASK: I can.

FATIMA: Sure you can. But that doesn't mean it's untrue.

THE MASK: I can't believe I'm even having this conversation with you. I came here to eject you, your uncle, and any trace of both of you from this camp...but here I am conversing with you.

FATIMA: You know you can't help yourself whenever I'm involved.

THE MASK: I'll shock you soon...very soon.

FATIMA: You'll be the one to miss...you know.

THE MASK: Miss what?

FATIMA: Let's not go there.

THE MASK: No! We must go there.

(FATIMA bursts into laughter.)

FATIMA: You see what that girl over there is doing?

THE MASK: I'm not interested. Fatima, let this be the last time you embarrass me...or my colleagues. You guys never appreciate the protection we, security agents, give you in this camp. Without us, those blood suckers will come and finish all of you. All of you. Take this as my last warning to you.

FATIMA: Last warning taken.

THE MASK: I'm serious this time.

FATIMA: I am too...now look at that girl over there!

THE MASK: Where?

FATIMA: Look towards that fenced house.

THE MASK: You mean that family planning center?

FATIMA: Precisely.

THE MASK: What's it about the girl? You know her?

FATIMA: I can't know everyone in this camp. Tens of thousands of people...how can I know them all.

THE MASK: I thought you knew everything.

FATIMA: See...see...she just ran inside (*laughs.*)

THE MASK: Why did she have to run inside?

FATIMA: She didn't want anyone to see her entering there. Many young unmarried women want to access family planning services but fear being stigmatized...they don't want to be called whores or labelled promiscuous...even though we all know many of them are doing it...many of them just hope they don't get pregnant...the brave ones, though, go for family planning ...even if they have to hide to get it...or circle around that center until they think no one is watching...then they run inside just like that girl just did.

THE MASK: Who is she?

FATIMA: I don't know. What I know is if only the NGO that runs that center had asked IDPs, especially young women, a few questions before setting up that place, they would have known that a center exclusively for family planning would not work in an IDP camp where rumor and gossip move faster than the speed of sound. But who consults us, even on matters that concern us directly? Nobody! People just seat in their homes or offices or in their countries and decide what's best for us and just come here and implement them...and then write their evaluation reports...everything's good and they get more funding.

THE MASK: Can you tell the girl's face from here?

FATIMA: Does that matter?

THE MASK: She's sure sexually active...I need to know her.

FATIMA: I won't tell you her name.

THE MASK: You don't know her name (*pause.*) Or do you?

FATIMA: I don't.

THE MASK: I was right then.

FATIMA: Maybe

THE MASK: You're being saucy.

FATIMA: Really?

THE MASK: And difficult.

FATIMA: Then why do you keep coming back to me?

THE MASK: In time you'll know.

FATIMA: IN TIME YOU'LL KNOW. That will make a good title for a poem. Think so?

THE MASK: Provided it isn't about me....

FATIMA: I'm not obsessed with you, please!

THE MASK: You never know

FATIMA and THE MASK enjoy a decent laugh. MUSA returns onstage, sees THE MASK still with FATIMA, and turns back.

THE MASK: Your uncle doesn't like me one bit.

FATIMA: Who does? (*sips water*)

THE MASK: I love myself at least.

FATIMA: Who else?

THE MASK: You!

FATIMA pours out the water she just sipped, laughing.

THE MASK: What a wretched old man your uncle is!

FATIMA: At least, he's not as wretched as your sense of morality!

THE MASK: I must go now.

FATIMA: Does the truth hurt?

THE MASK walks away, and FATIMA enters her tent.

THE CRUELTY

Evening.

BINTA enters stage, heads straight to the door of FATIMA's tent, and knocks. FATIMA steps out.

BINTA: Sorry, I'm late for rehearsals.

MUSA: (*propping his head through a hole in the tent*): You're always late, Binta. Tell us something else.

Laughter ensues. MUSA joins BINTA and FATIMA outside. Drum rolls offstage and they begin rehearsals by choreographing shaku shaku (or another traditional dance). Drumbeats end and they stop dancing.

BINTA: (*stepping forward*): In the absence of hope we live on food.

MUSA: (*laughing*): No! In the absence of food we—

BINTA: Oh yes, yes! In the absence of food we live on hope.

MUSA: Let's go back to the dance again. I want us to get this transition right.

FATIMA: We don't have much time left.

MUSA: Okay let's skip the dance. Binta, do your thing again.

FATIMA and MUSA sit down. BINTA breathes in and out, then speaks:

BINTA: In the absence of food we live on hope. Our next performance is called
“Hope.”

MUSA: Hope, if it could ever be shushed
 Lynching would have crushed
 Its jaws in the quarry of apartheid
 And difference would have been its prey
 In the fervor of hate still sizzling today

FATIMA: Hope, if it could ever be myopic
 Bigots would have been its companion
 In the brothel of narrow-minded opinion
 And foresight would have been its tragic
 Martyr in an epicurean debauchery

Now standing, FATIMA and MUSA continue:

MUSA: Hope, if it could ever die
 Tyranny would have been its slayer
 In the wombs of Auschwitz, Rwanda and the Ottoman Empire
 History’s triple ranch of slaughter
 And Jews, Tutsis, Armenians
 Would have been its memorabilia, teary tide
 In the crematorium of genocide

BINTA whispers a traditional chorus about hope.

FATIMA: Hope, its spine so stout
 Not cracking in the primetime
 Of woes, persisting one heartbeat at a time
 In the cemetery of waterboarded promises

MUSA: If hope, if only hope had an eye
 It would be color-blind
 Yet see the rainbows in the navy sky
 It would shed tears, a trillion tears
 For all spineless athletes in this unkind
 Marathon christened life, a habitual fling with fears

BINTA sings same chorus about hope.

FATIMA and MUSA: Hope, warm like the sun's massage at dawn
 But cold in its unknotted unknown

FATIMA: Hope, that measured race of a Paralympian
 That seductive glitter of a yet unseen gem
 That bouncy smile on the cheeks of cynicism

MUSA: Hope, too practiced to choke on any problem
 That tailored cocktail for the hangover of teardrops
 That blind date that never flops

FATIMA: Hope can't stop smiling back
 Even as misery nibbles on its neck
 Hope, Hope is us!

BINTA exits as she sees THE MASK walking towards them. MUSA walks away too. THE MASK stops in front of the tent. This time he is dressed in a black t-shirt, combat shorts, and the same mask he has been wearing throughout. He is not wearing any neon jacket currently.

THE MASK (to FATIMA): They all leave when I arrive. Why?

FATIMA: Ask yourself why?

THE MASK: That's not why I came back.

FATIMA: You come to my tent a million times a day. Everybody now
 thinks we're doing something.

THE MASK: Then let's do something.

FATIMA: Why did you come back?

THE MASK: You're changing the subject.

FATIMA: Didn't you just suggest you came back for a reason?

THE MASK: Okay, you win. Tell me, Fatima, why did you use that woman's
 real name in your performance earlier today?

FATIMA: Which woman?

THE MASK: You know who I'm talking about...*(pause.)* Mama Jibril.

FATIMA: She asked me to use it

THE MASK: She did?

FATIMA: She even wanted more revealed on stage but thank goodness you stopped
 us.

THE MASK: I don't believe you.

FATIMA: You don't have to believe me.

THE MASK: Mama Jibril is a private person. Very secretive. I go for her type. She wouldn't want people to know she slept with me...especially in return for mere food.

FATIMA: Everybody in camp already knows you slept with her...and Hadiza...and Amina...and Jamilla...and...Hassana...and—

THE MASK: Stop! (*Looks around to see if someone else is listening. Goes into the tent to check if anyone is inside.*)

FATIMA: And Rakiya too...and—

THE MASK: Ssh!

FATIMA: And Ramat—

THE MASK pegs her lips.

THE MASK: If you don't stop, I'll hurt you right now. (*beat.*) Nod if you agree to shut up!

(*FATIMA nods, and he frees her mouth.*) How did you know all this?

FATIMA: You said I should shut up!

THE MASK: I'm not joking with you.

FATIMA: You said I talk, I get hurt. Don't want to get hurt.

THE MASK: Quit playing games.

FATIMA: What's your question again?

THE MASK: Who told you about me and these female IDPs in this camp?

FATIMA: I never said they were IDPs or that they were even in this camp?

THE MASK: Is Mama Jibril not an IDP or is she not in this camp?

FATIMA: Yes, and the other women?

THE MASK: Who's supposed to be asking questions here? You or me?

FATIMA: I'm sorry! What's the question again?

THE MASK: How did you know about these women?

FATIMA: Everybody in the camp knows.

THE MASK: Everybody?

FATIMA: Everybody.

THE MASK: How?

FATIMA: You get me a box of sanitary pads, I tell you.

THE MASK: I gave you a box just yesterday. Even if you had an ocean of blood since yesterday, you couldn't have finished them.

FATIMA: I distributed everything yesterday to needy girls in the camp.

THE MASK: That's your problem, not mine!

FATIMA: I know...it could never be yours since you're not a woman...since we're not your family.

THE MASK: Don't derail the conversation. How did you know?

FATIMA: I already told you.

THE MASK: What?

FATIMA: It's common knowledge in the camp.

THE MASK: Okay, I will send someone to bring the box of sanitary pads to you. Now tell me.

FATIMA: Mama Jibril...you know she's somehow related to my uncle...she came to him crying that her husband wanted to divorce her because people in the camp kept teasing him about how his wife was sleeping around for food...My uncle asked her if the gist making rounds were mere rumors...she broke down...she said she had only slept with you...and only a few times...even though rumor had it that she had slept with multiple men for aid.

THE MASK: Who spread the story then? It was just the two of us when it first happened...when it always happened.

FATIMA: You agree you slept with her, right?

THE MASK: That's not the issue now...how did other people know? She couldn't have done such a thing and gone about telling people? And I didn't tell anyone, except my colleagues and they're not IDPs...they can't stoop so low to discuss such matters with IDPs.

FATIMA: You will be shocked what men can do when they're looking for sex.

THE MASK: What do you mean?

FATIMA: Let me tell you what happened...that colleague of yours that wears white clothes all the time like an occult grandmaster.

THE MASK: My boss, you mean?

FATIMA: One of your bosses, yes! He called Mama Jibril sometime ago and demanded for sex too. She told him she was married and wouldn't want to do it...then he became angry. He said that if she could give it to you, his boy, why not him? She was shocked. How did he get to know? she wondered. He narrated to her everything that happened between both of you, step by step...where it happened...how long it took...what both of you were wearing when it happened—so she knew her secret was out already.

THE MASK: That bastard! I told him the story...he kept on asking for details and I was telling him...rather foolishly. What an old bastard!

FATIMA: True that!

THE MASK: I didn't ask for your affirmation.

FATIMA: Sorry!

THE MASK: And the other women? How did you know about them?

FATIMA: The camp is a small place. Everybody knows everybody and what happens to everybody. Something happens, one person tells another and tells the person not to tell anybody...the person agrees but then goes and tells another person and asks the person to keep it a secret and the person too agrees only to tell

another person and the cycle of rumor mongering continues...until it gets to the ears of the persons involved in the actual thing being gossiped about...that's how these women's names got to me and everyone else. Wherever these women go, accusing fingers trail them like toilet flies. It's not the sex that's the women's problem now...it's the gossip, the stigma...

THE MASK: All these bastards I have for colleagues and bosses. They want to ruin my reputation.

FATIMA: Reputation indeed! Like my uncle would say, "Someone who sells poo will never agree that poo stinks."

THE MASK: Whatever!

FATIMA: Who are you sending with my box of sanitary pads?

THE MASK: Come get it yourself?

FATIMA: You know I'm not feeling too well.

THE MASK: When you get well then.

FATIMA: Don't be mean!

THE MASK: The last one I gave you, I bought with my own money.

FATIMA: Really?

THE MASK: Really! That's how much I care about you.

FATIMA: Awww! (*clasping her chest.*)

THE MASK: Really! I think about you all the time. How do they say it? "You're the sugar in my tea?"

FATIMA (*laughing*): Save that for your wives! How many are they now? I mean your legal wives not the likes of Mama Jibril.

THE MASK: Are you coming tonight or not? I'll buy a box of pads for you if you come.

FATIMA: I'm not coming.

THE MASK: You don't appreciate me. Without us—I mean government, humanitarian agencies, NGOs, and security agencies—you IDPs would have been dead by now.

FATIMA: Without IDPs, many of you would have been jobless and broke by now.

THE MASK: Really?

FATIMA: Really! You are because we are. And that's why many of you do little to end the cause of displacement. Our misery is your goldmine.

THE MASK: You people are a handful!

FATIMA: You people?

THE MASK: Yes, you people! After we give you food, you people should figure every other thing out...pads, blood or whatever.

FATIMA: So mean!

THE MASK: Don't be ungrateful!

FATIMA: Asking for pads is now a show of ingratitude? Can't believe you! Women

bleed every month whether we like it or not. Unlike sex, sanitary pad is not a luxury but a FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT. FUNDAMENTAL. You people give us condoms, lots of them, for free to cater for something that's a luxury. Yet, you can't give us pads for free to manage what we have no control over. I don't get it. The world should just end already.

THE MASK: Why are you pouring your frustration on me? Am I the one who decides what constitutes aids for IDPs? For your information, we too we're frustrated. Some of these numbers you read in the papers...millions of dollars donated by so and so NGO or international organization or government for the welfare of IDPs...not everything gets spent on IDPs...some of the money, a huge chunk I must add...gets spent on logistics and the consultants of these people and organizations, and most times they even decide for us what to spend the money on...so your hands are tied...if you spend the money on something else...next time you get nothing from them...we too, our hands are tied...so, when they send us school bags, or mosquito nets, or even condoms for instance, you want us to refuse? And suffer afterwards? You want us to tell them, "no thanks, we don't need this kind of your donations—we need sanitary pads now!" Is that what you expect us to do? In the ideal world, yes! In this real world, you do it they pack their things and leave forever. FOREVER!

FATIMA: I get your point. But you can do well to inform them about our real needs too. Our needs vary from camp to camp and from time to time and from gender to gender and from age to age...and there's nothing wrong in hearing from us IDPs, what our real needs are...not the needs you guys imagine for us...from your ivory bubbles. Our voice matters too, YOU PEOPLE!

THE MASK: Sincerely, what do you IDPs truly want?

FATIMA: We want to put you guys out of employment.

THE MASK: I'm serious.

FATIMA: I am too. We want an end to our displacement.

THE MASK: What else?

FATIMA: Home.

THE MASK: Erect more tents to accommodate you guys?

FATIMA: That too is good. But no! We want to return home.

THE MASK: It's not yet safe for you guys to return home.

FATIMA: Then integrate us into society.

THE MASK: How do you mean?

FATIMA: We too are citizens of this country. Build our capacity. Retrain, resettle and employ us. We don't want to be fed continuously like babies. Sincerely, it's demeaning.

THE MASK: We don't have the means to do everything for you guys. See... Not every

donation you see on social media or hear on the news gets to us one hundred percent in this country.

FATIMA: And the one that enters the country...your bosses take their own share...right?

THE MASK: You won't use my head to break coconut!

FATIMA: And then you guys, his boys, take yours just before it gets to us...right?

THE MASK: I don't know what you're talking about.

FATIMA: I didn't expect you to agree. (*beat.*) Do you know that some girls here stuff rags into their underpants when they're on their period?

THE MASK (*chuckling*): How would I know?

FATIMA: I'm serious!

THE MASK: I'm serious too. If I say I know, do you know what that means?

FATIMA: Seriously...some women even make their own pads. They sew a piece of cloth together, put sand or whatever inside and seal it up, and use it as pad.

THE MASK: You're kidding me!

FATIMA: Ask Mama Jibril. Her daughters do that. I gave them a pack of pads to share yesterday after they showed me what they were using.

THE MASK: Oh no! Beautiful ladies! They should have asked for help!

FATIMA: From you?

THE MASK: From anybody...me, camp officials, security agents...anybody that can help.

FATIMA: They asked me and I helped them.

THE MASK: Did you tell them I gave the pads to you?

FATIMA: Didn't know I was supposed to do that.

THE MASK: Tell them when next you see them. They're so beautiful...just like their mother.

FATIMA: Thanks for stopping bye.

THE MASK: Are you sending me away?

FATIMA: Thank you for your time.

THE MASK: No, thanks! I want us to continue talking.

FATIMA: You guys don't know the pain you bring to families in this camp.

THE MASK: We bring joy not pain.

FATIMA: Say it to all the women you slept with for food.

THE MASK: There you go again. Why are you always combative?

FATIMA: Say it to the men whose wives suffer this indignity in your bed.

THE MASK: Are those ones men?

FATIMA: So what are they?

THE MASK: Maybe they're men but not husbands.

FATIMA: What's the difference?

THE MASK: A husband that can't feed his family and provide for his wife, is that one

a husband?

FATIMA: Listen to yourself...just listen to yourself.

We hear noise offstage. It soon filters onstage through the speakers.

THE MASK: What's happening behind your tent? So much noise.

FATIMA: Riot maybe.

THE MASK: There can never be riot in this camp...in any IDP camp.

FATIMA: Keep deceiving yourself.

A woman holding a bag runs onstage, begging THE MASK to save her. There's blood on the bag. She's dressed in a hijab.

THE MASK (*motioning to the crowd, in the direction of the audience*):

Stop there! Don't you come close to her!

Four audience members stand one after the other, reading out the notes they've been given before the start of the show.

MEMBER A: She's a terrible, terrible person!

THE MASK: What did she do?

MEMBER B: She's a bad woman! Very, very bad!

THE MASK: Woman, what did you do?

She continues crying.

MEMBER C: Look inside her bag, you'll know what she did.

MEMBER D: She killed her newborn and was trying to throw him away when we saw her.

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER (*offstage*):

Hold on! Did you see her kill her baby?

MEMBER D: Well, strictly speaking I didn't.

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER: Did any of you see her doing that?

MEMBER A: Not really!

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER: How sure are you then that she killed her baby?

MEMBER B: We saw her attempting to discard her baby.

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER: But that still doesn't mean she KILLED the newborn.

THE MASK: How terrible for her to want to even discard her baby, dead or alive!

FATIMA: How terrible, yes! But why?

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER: Thank you, Fatima! Why? What would make a woman carry a child for nine months only to throw the child away? And where's the person that got her pregnant in the first place?

FATIMA: Maybe she impregnated herself!

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER: THANK YOU, Fatima! And under what

circumstances did she conceive? By coercion or by consent? What purpose would her shaming serve you? Who's the father of this child?

FATIMA: And where is he?

THE MASK (*to the crowd*): All of you can go now. I got this.

The four audience members sit down.

What do you have in your bag?

The woman opens the bag, to reveal her newborn, wrapped in blood, dead. Projection: An image of the woman and her baby. Solemn music follows. Ends after a while.

Wait for me over there.

The woman goes backstage.

FATIMA: Thank you for saving her life.

THE MASK: I'm handing her over to security.

FATIMA: For what?

THE MASK: It's the right thing to do.

FATIMA (*sarcastically*): It's the RIGHT thing to DO

THE MASK: You're just like the rest of them, IDPs.

FATIMA: How do you mean?

THE MASK: A bunch of ingrates...We do a lot for you people here in this camp.

FATIMA: You people!

THE MASK: Yes, you people! There're people outside this camp...in nearby villages who are not IDPs and don't even enjoy one-third of what we give you here...face it...that's the fact.

FATIMA: And so? Is that how life's supposed to be?

THE MASK: But that's life in this state...in this country...on this continent...in this world. Face it...and stop asking questions...just pray life's fair to you and yours...stop asking too many questions.

FATIMA: We aren't supposed to question anything, right? We're supposed to be zombies...suffering and smiling...We're only supposed to take everything you guys give us...and say thank you sir, thank you ma...and smile...even if all is not well...If we ask questions, we become ingrates, right? Because we don't matter. (*pause.*)

THE MASK: Your problem is too much. Let me go over there and see who has come to share food...Mama whatever follow me! (*The woman comes onstage with her baby in the bag.*)

FATIMA: Goodbye.

THE MASK (*walking away*): Good, goodbye!

FATIMA: And please, tell the humanitarian workers sharing food to also provide

canopies for IDPs. It's not only them that deserve shade from the burning sun.

THE MASK: Fighter!

FATIMA: Yes, I'm a fighter. I'll fight on. *(Pause. Then she talks to the audience).* We aren't human beings. We don't need canopies over our heads, but they do. They make us stand under the sun for hours just because they want to give us aid...they act as if we're animals. Why do our tents have numbers when they know they won't be using the numbers in administering aid? Why can't they go tent by tent and attend to us, if they can't provide us with canopies to shelter us from the sun or the rain like they do for themselves? Can't wait to go back home. Home is forever home. We too are human beings.

FATIMA looks up and sees THE MASK walking towards her.

You can't just go away. Can you?

THE MASK: I can't help myself whenever I set my eyes on you.

FATIMA: Go away!

THE MASK *(trying to grab FATIMA's waist)*: Your body is built for sin.

FATIMA: My body?

THE MASK: Your body, yes! Why waste it acting like a saint?

FATIMA: I'm not your willing victim.

FATIMA runs into her tent. THE MASK enters too, shutting the door behind him. We can only hear FATIMA screaming, commanding him to stop, and then the command recedes into a plea, and the plea fades into silence. Then the bleating of a goat punctuates the silence temporarily. Performers return to stage and assume the last tableau. Enters PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER. Projection: the UN logo.

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER: To our earlier allegory,

the allegory of the sovereign, we return.

Your aggressor currently sits beside you,

Devouring pizza while feasting on your shame.

He offers you a slice of pizza

And a cup of soda.

You accept them because you're hungry.

You stare at him while taking a bite.

You notice his pistol is no longer in his hand.

It's on the table beside his bottle of soda.

Beat.

Let us imagine that, this time,

While you're still standing naked,
Someone steps into your circle of shame
And sneaks a grenade into your hand.
Or worse still, you grab a grenade from someone standing in the circle.
How would you feel now?
Would you feel any less vulnerable than you felt before?
How would the crowd react to your new reality?
How would your aggressor react?
Who has the balance of power now?
What would you do with the grenade?
What can this grenade do for you?

Beat.

I don't have answers to these questions.
Perhaps, you don't too.
You don't need to feel bad about it if you don't.
Even if you have an answer to each of the questions,
It still doesn't mean your answers will match what you'll do
If the scenario described in the allegory happens to you.
In life, we surprise ourselves when we reach breaking point.
This is even truer in the case of IDPs.
They don't know what will happen when they exceed their elastic limit
We don't too. Nobody does.

If The Mask had seen a grenade in Fatima's hands,
Would he have treated her differently?
If given a grenade, what would she do to The Mask?
In desperate times, reason is never guaranteed
And fear is never an option.

*FATIMA lets out a piercing scream. Performers exit stage. PERFORMANCE
ETHNOGRAPHER follows immediately.*

THE REDEMPTION

*SOLDIER enters, bearing his military backpack and a gun dangling from his
shoulder. He knocks at the door a few times and, after getting no response,
pushes it open and enters the tent. He quickly steps back out, with FATIMA
trailing him.*

FATIMA (*kneeling and holding onto SOLDIER's leg*): It's not what you think.
SOLDIER: Let go of my leg!
FATIMA: It's not what you think.
SOLDIER: I saw him next to you, pants down, on the mattress.
FATIMA: Let me explain.
SOLDIER: Explain what?
FATIMA: Hear me out before you judge me.
SOLDIER: Why give it to him? Why that monster? Why?
FATIMA: I didn't give it to him. Have you forgotten that all my life I've worked hard to keep it until my wedding? I've worked hard to keep it for you.
SOLDIER: So sad those that hurt you the most are the closest.
FATIMA: He forced himself on me!
SOLDIER: I came to tell you I was leaving for the battlefield. As it is now, I might as well say goodbye to you for good.
FATIMA: Why can't you believe me?
SOLDIER: Didn't I warn you about letting him come too close to you?
FATIMA: Are you blaming me for what he did to me?
SOLDIER: Yes...I mean, no! What am I even saying? (*pause.*) I'm sorry.

SOLDIER pulls FATIMA close to him and gives her a hug. THE MASK comes out of the tent all dressed in haughtiness and makes to leave.

SOLDIER (*pointing his gun at THE MASK*): Get back inside before I shoot off your head!
THE MASK (*hesitating*): Me?
SOLDIER: No o! My mother! (*screaming*) Get back inside NOW!
THE MASK: Shouting at me? Don't you know who I am?
SOLDIER: Don't you dare me!

THE MASK hesitates still, but returns inside as SOLDIER springs towards him, following him inside. FATIMA follows, shutting the door behind her, after she spots MUSA heading for the tent. As MUSA opens the door and enters the tent, gunshots and screams are heard. Silence. MUSA then gets out of the tent, carrying his bag. FATIMA comes out too. SOLDIER follows.

SOLDIER: Both of you, leave before the crowd gathers.
FATIMA: I'm not leaving you behind.
SOLDIER (*to MUSA*): What are you still waiting for?
MUSA: I'm not leaving without my daughter.
FATIMA: Don't wait for me!
MUSA: I've been running away from trouble all my life, but trouble keeps pursuing me. I won't run anymore.
SOLDIER: Both of you need to run away so you don't have to serve as witnesses.
MUSA: I remain here. Fatima should leave right now. She doesn't have to stand as a witness.

SOLDIER: You think I'm joking?
MUSA: You didn't shoot him. Fatima didn't either. I did. I must remain behind.
FATIMA: Are you out of your mind?
MUSA: My days are far spent...both of you...yours are just beginning. Allow me to prove myself a man for once in my life.
FATIMA: You don't have to prove anything to me.
MUSA: I have something to prove to myself, at least.
SOLDIER: Are you high on weed or something?
MUSA: I'm high yes, but on regrets. Fatima is right. I can't keep running away all my life. I don't want to die a coward.
SOLDIER: Don't act stupid!
MUSA: But you just acted stupid yourself. You offered to take the blame.
SOLDIER: I'm a soldier.
MUSA: Both of you have a bright future. Embrace it. My life's wasted already.
SOLDIER: Do you know what you're about to do?
MUSA: I know death awaits a murderer. A murderer I have become so my brother's daughter, my daughter, can live.
FATIMA: Why are you doing this?
MUSA: Redemption.
FATIMA: Forgive me for putting you in this situation.
MUSA: There's nothing to forgive there. You didn't intend for it to happen.
FATIMA: I didn't. I don't know what came over me.

After hugging Fatima, he tells her:

Go inside, grab a few things, and leave now! Go somewhere far away from this camp until your soldier comes for you. *(To SOLDIER)* Lead me to the police station.

MUSA grabs the gun, caresses it all over, and lifts it above his head with both hands. He then gestures with his head for FATIMA to leave. Just as she's about to open the door, THE MASK bursts it open. Reclining and soaked in his own blood, THE MASK ignores FATIMA who's standing next to the door in utter shock and walks warily towards exit. SOLDIER dashes to him and helps him offstage. BINTA and other onlookers who now appear on stage trail them. MUSA walks to FATIMA who's visibly shaken, and tells her:

MUSA: You'll be alright.
FATIMA: But he's alive!
MUSA: You'll be fine. You will survive.
FATIMA: How?
MUSA: Somehow.
FATIMA *(broodingly)*: Even if I do, to have to live with one's abuser is a very intimate experience of hell.
MUSA: One breath at a time, we'll make it.

MUSA and FATIMA exit stage, hand in hand. PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER returns to stage, dressed as he was in the beginning. Projection: UN logo.

PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHER: Anybody anywhere can become displaced at any time. Like every one of us, IDPs are humans too. When IDPs reach their elastic limit of tolerance for the forces of incompetence and greed that keep them in captivity, anything can happen. Pushed to the limit of absolute exposure—of the feeling of nothingness, nobody, not even IDPs themselves, can tell what they will do.

BLACKOUT

THE END

THEATRE FOR CONCERTED CHANGE

T4CC

In Partnership With
TROPES & ICONS LTD

Presents

DISPLACED
(AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PLAY)

Date: 22nd June, 2019.
Time: 7:30pm
Venue: Drama Village A.B.U, Zaria

Engaged Cornell

Playwright: Elaigwu Ameh
Cornell University
Talkback By: Prof. Debra Castillo
Supported By: Engaged Cornell

Illustration 24: Banner for the premiere of *Displaced*

ACT III

A MULTIVALENT ANALYSIS OF *DISPLACED*

...what we know is linked to how we know it, and it seems urgent to recuperate embodied practice as a way of knowing and transmitting knowledge. The past is not dead; it's not disappeared; it's not even hidden from view. Current practices always exist in conversation with past events, sites of remembrance, and embodied traditions. The repertoire and the archive work in tandem, transmitting knowledge in different but usually complementary ways—Diana Taylor¹⁷

If, in fact, my life is worth as much as the colonist's, his look can no longer strike fear into me or nail me to the spot and his voice can no longer petrify me. I am no longer uneasy in his presence—Frantz Fanon¹⁸

A child who doesn't know his mother's lover calls him his uncle—Nigerian proverb. (Meaning: Ignorance is misleading)

Caught between forced displacement and enforced emplacement, resignation and action, internally displaced persons (IDPs) live in relentless mindfulness and dread of the ubiquitous yet imperceptible, ever-present yet outlandishly aloof panopticon of biopolitical forces at work and, most times, at war, on their bodies and in their lives, and they must decide, in a raw moment of truth, what choices to make, what alliances to forge, and what roles to perform, in order to ensure their survival as individuals and as a collective. The quest for survival stimulates a whole web of interdependence among IDPs and between IDPs and humanitarian actors. Aware that the variety, quantity, and regularity of the humanitarian aid they receive depends mostly on the performance of (1) their vulnerability and (2) their dependence on humanitarian actors, performance, for IDPs, indubitably transcends the realm of

¹⁷ See Diana Taylor's "Scenes of Cognition: Performance and Conquest." *Theatre Journal*. Vol. 56, No.3. October 2004:372.

¹⁸ See page 10 of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, 1968.

entertainment, and entrenches itself at the multiplex interstices between emancipation and servitude, life and death. Simply put, for IDPs, to survive is to perform.

Predicated on the conviction that performance-based humanities can catalyze radical positive change in society, I embarked, in 2017, on an onsite performance ethnography research with and about IDPs in Nigeria. The dreaded Boko Haram terrorists operating chiefly in northeast Nigeria were responsible for their displacement. On June 29, 2018, I had already left the Bakassi IDP camp in Maiduguri, northeast Nigeria when I learned about a crowd composed mainly of IDPs parading a fellow IDP within the confines of the camp, which housed over 35,000 IDPs. The internet in Nigeria was already agog with photos of the paraded IDP in her public humiliation. She was clinging onto a sack soaked in blood. Another photo showed her sitting on the ground beside the now unveiled sack, on which her newborn now lay on his side, bathed in blood. The baby looked to be at peace, only that he was no longer breathing.

The woman had been caught in her attempt to discard her newborn somewhere in the camp. Before being handed over to security operatives, some people in the camp compelled her to carry the already lifeless child around the camp in the same blood-drenched sack. Children and adults alike trailed her like nosy flies as she trudged to the dictates of the mob in her visceral theatre of shame. Nobody cared to ask illuminating questions. Who got her pregnant? How and when did the baby die? What prompted her to discard her baby? What was the state of her mental health? Why did she allow herself to conceive in the first place since there were family planning

services in the camp? What purpose would her shaming serve? So many questions to ask and answer, but the concern of the crowd was simply to shame her.

The IDPs involved in the shaming ritual might have done so as a self-regulation mechanism aimed at using derision to reinforce social norms in the camp, especially the ultimate belief in the sanctity of human life. However, the shaming act ironically demonstrates how minoritarian subjects could turn on members of their own community in self-righteous rage upon assumption of a position of power, no matter how momentary, misleading, or self-imposed that position might be. As much as IDPs crave empathy from the wider Nigerian society and the global humanitarian community, their shaming of the woman depicts their failure to treat the woman the same way they yearn to be treated—that is, with empathy. The derision depicts their failure to attempt to understand, from her perspective, what might have pushed her to do what she did, just as it also intensifies the personal sense of failure that the woman already feels; therefore, pushing her into isolation and weakening her capacity to cope amidst internal displacement. This woman would eventually become a character in my ethnographic drama¹⁹ on internal displacement, *Displaced*. This play is one of the deliverables of my performance-mediated dissertation research.

Displaced draws attention to the traditionally underrepresented, underexplored, and underappreciated voices of IDPs whose mixed marginalized experiences present unique perspectives and opportunities that can enrich artistic research and

¹⁹ I prefer the term “ethnographic drama” to “ethnodrama” because, like D. Soyini Madison emphatically elucidates in *Performed Ethnography and Communication: Improvisation and Embodied Experience*, the latter term, apart from shortening ethnography, carries with it the burden of the traditional definition of “ethno.” This traditional definition denotes race, ethnicity, tribe, culture, or caste, while ethnography “as a full term, captures both ontology and epistemology where knowledge production and the nature of life lived together are both included in the term” (Madison xxxi).

humanitarian action. It recuperates “embodied practice as a way of knowing and transmitting knowledge,” signifying that the “past is not dead; it’s not disappeared; it’s not even hidden from view,” but remains alive in us as embodied repositories of knowledge (Taylor 372). By querying the real and imagined lines of separation between IDPs and humanitarian actors against the backdrop of how increased muzzling of IDPs paradoxically produce transgression, the performative nature of the discourse about internal displacement gains extra lucidity.

In *Displaced*, this performative nature of internal displacement takes center stage, especially as it showcases the often-hushed distasteful interactions between IDPs and humanitarian actors. However, rather than read *Displaced* as a vilification of humanitarian actors or as a clash of cultures between IDPs and humanitarian actors, we need to understand it, first, as a visceral x-ray of the existential situation of IDPs in Nigeria and then—more importantly—as an evocation of the rude awakening that comes from the demystification of the colonizer. Martin Espada eloquently portrays this rude awakening when he notes:

if every rebellion begins with the idea
that conquerors on horseback
are not many-legged gods, that they too drown
if plunged in the river,
then this is the year. (“Imagine the Angels of Bread”)

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon, too, accentuates this Copernican awakening in his elucidation:

The colonized subject thus discovers that his life, his breathing and his heartbeats are the same as the colonist’s. He discovers that the skin of the colonist is not worth more than the “native’s.” In other words, his world receives a fundamental jolt. The colonized’s revolutionary new assurance stems from this. If, in fact, my life is worth as much as the colonist’s, his look

can no longer strike fear into me or nail me to the spot and his voice can no longer petrify me. I am no longer uneasy in his presence. (10)

This reawakening occurs when IDPs recognize that the “conquerors on horseback” and the “colonists” that exploit their reality of displacement are not “many-legged gods,” but are fellow human beings, whose presence, rather than petrify them, should challenge them to demand respect and equity at the table of humanity and in the country which they call home and to which they pledge allegiance.

In the demystification of the colonizer, there occurs a demolition of the colonizer’s phantasm of power and domination that has long instituted both the feeling and the perception of inferiority and impotence within the colonized, who, in this case, are IDPs. Shocked into a consciousness of their agency as human persons and of their own identity as citizens of a country whose commonwealth has been denied them as displaced persons, IDPs, in *Displaced*, no longer represent a disposable population, but a fecund collective capable of agitating for social change. Under this epistemological purview of radical reawakening, the importance of performance—through its visceral temple of creativity where reason and affect interrogate and elucidate culture, history, attitudes, behaviors, values and beliefs, while simultaneously morphing them into embodied data for understanding our collective heritage as human persons—cannot be overemphasized.

My employment of performance as a lens for understanding the existential conditions of IDPs in Nigeria stems from performance’s history-long demonstration as a crucial laboratory for promoting positive change in society, and its intrinsic allowance for a balanced, wide-ranging tackling of contentious issues in human society, of which aid administration among internally displaced persons is inarguably

one (Abebe 28). Also, ethnographic performance, specifically, provides space for varying groups to pay close attention to the politics, culture, history, and economics that underpin aid administration, thereby allowing for a critical and detached understanding of integral issues.

Over the years, researchers in theatre and performing arts have used different approaches to explore social issues, including gender, incarceration, homelessness, poverty, alcoholism, abortion, inequality, race, sexuality, and divorce.²⁰ These methods, per se, are not about validating the authority of the research or the researcher, but about the engaged production of systems “wherein tacit understandings, inferred practices and theoretical assumptions can be made explicit and can, in turn, be queried and contested” (Kershaw and Nicholson 2). Through the visceral medium of ethnographic performance, which embodies creativity, agency, affect, dialogue, and reflexivity, performance lends itself as a valuable process through which an unbiased, transparent exchange can happen between people on different sides of the aid administration debate in IDP camps. Thus, what more effective way to engage the minds and hearts of people on the hyper-charged debate than through ethnographic performance? Such a lens does not just focus on performance in informal spaces but also privileges the lived realities, agency, voices, and cultures of ordinary people who often get relegated to the margins of discourses and decision-making processes that concern their lives and livelihoods.

²⁰ See Soyini Madison, 2018; Finley and Finley, 1999; Denzin, 2003; Foster, 2007; Gibb, 2004; Fabian, 1990; Barone, 2001; Mienczakowski, 1995; Ellis and Bochner, 1992; Turner, 1986; Saldana, 2003; Conquergood, 1998; Kalb, 2001; Coopey, 1998; and Clark and Mangham, 2004.

This kind of performance equally calls for a critical distance from one's prejudices and reified beliefs in order to allow for the dynamic unveiling of multiple truths nestled in the nuanced boundaries of human interactions and our divergently complex but enriching historical, religious, political, and sociocultural contexts. It extends beyond the domain of entertainment to the realm of critical intervention in society where it challenges the status quo and demands a reconfiguration of our value systems and behaviors both as individuals and as members of society. It is in this vein that Norman Denzin maintains that "performance is an act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism, a way of revealing agency" which uses the aesthetic and the performative as public pedagogies "to foreground the intersection of politics, institutional sites, and embodied experience" (209). Thus, ethnographic performance does not just reflect the intersectional reality of human life, but also engages with this intersectionality to draw attention to attitudes, practices, and norms that require social change.

Like performance in general, ethnographic performance does not happen in a void; it also permeates every facet of our lives as human beings. The sheer "recognition that our lives are structured according to repeated and socially sanctioned modes of behavior," as Marvin Carlson affirms, "raises the possibility that all human activity could potentially be considered as 'performance,' or at least all activity carried out with a consciousness of itself" (70). Through performance, we can make sense of the world via an engagement of our sensory and cognitive faculties. Ethnographic performance, in particular, empowers us to recognize and respect the dialectical nature of knowledge production and meaning-making in our world—a recurrent process of

actions and reactions from which we glean new understandings of ourselves and the world around us.

As Diana Taylor aptly pinpoints, “meaning is not a thing but a practice that requires the tireless and repetitive process of doing, making, unmaking, revising, retheorizing, and reconfiguring the many, many parts” (372). This meaning-making process that an ethnographic performance engenders underscores not only performance’s repetitiveness, but also the liveness of this kind of performance—that is, its personified representation of our being-in-the-world as it occurs in and through our facticity, which comprises the sum total of our existence and the embodied space where stories and histories get enacted and re-enacted. This liveness, within the context of research, also allows for a co-creation of meanings between the researcher and the researched at the interstices of their encounters in the field.

A multivalent analysis of *Displaced*, therefore, will afford us the opportunity to pause and reflect on the cartographies of power at play in the apertures of the relationships among IDPs, and between IDPs and humanitarian actors—relationships that drastically affect the variety, quantity, quality, and regularity of the aid IDPs receive. Such an analysis seeks not only to provide new insights and fresh perspectives into our understanding of the players, scripts, and publics involved in the lives of IDPs, but also promote common grounds, foster political accommodation, and ensure consensus action among varying groups (Deng 1993). It will also help to shift the way we conceive the polemics of the varying groups, while equally evidencing how performance assists in creating the micro-publics needed in tackling issues surrounding IDPs and humanitarian actors.

Displaced, jointly set in an IDP camp in Nigeria and at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, follows a performance ethnographer as he relives and reframes—through omnipresent narration, choreographed flashbacks, and embodied performances—the stories of IDPs in northeast Nigeria. The central narration comes from the vantage point of Fatima, an eighteen-year-old woman who, orphaned as a child, must negotiate survival in an IDP camp with her uncle, after their near-death encounters with the bloodthirsty Boko Haram terrorists. Rather than parade her misery like a trophy or attempt self-annihilation like her suicidal uncle—in the face of the biopolitical forces of control, exploitation and subjugation in the camp—Fatima takes the oppressive system head on, using metatheatrical performances as both a liminal space and a potent tool for change.

Displaced presents encamped internal displacement as a play within the play. From Aristophanes to perhaps yesterday, playwrights have conjured the ghost of this dramaturgical stratagem to unmask uncomfortable truths, voice silences, illuminate nuances, spotlight connections, unravel convoluted realities, and challenge systems of oppression. In a project such as this that explores populations who are not just displaced, but are also continuously enduring a plethora of injustices that worsen their already disconcerting experiences of displacement, this strategy presents a huge opportunity to understand internal displacement and its consequences from the unique perspective of IDPs themselves. Through this strategy, the cast, their interlayered relationships, their scripts, their setting, motivations, aesthetics, directors, stage managers, and even audiences, all come to light.

As Vulcan's stithy. Give him heedful note,
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,
and after we will both our judgments join
In censure of his seeming (Act 3.2).

Like Hamlet, Fatima deploys theatrical re-enactment to get at the truth. She enlists her uncle to re-enact IDPs' exploitation in the camp (13-16). The re-enactment reveals IDPs' susceptibility to inducement and the humanitarian actors' abuse of power. To negotiate survival in the camp, many IDPs give in to persuasion from powerful figures. This persuasion may be in the form of accepting sexual advances in a bid to secure food for oneself and one's family. Caught between a predator's appetite for sex and the pangs of starvation, a female IDP may well choose to have sex with influential people in the camp for her family and her not to starve. Through the characters of Mama Jibril, a married and child-bearing woman, the re-enactment leads us into the world in which IDPs use sex to negotiate survival. Couched as a play-within-a-play, a dialogue between Mama Jibril and The Mask presents a picture of the negotiation process. The Mask figuratively represents all the symbols of control in the camp, including camp officials, security agents, and aid workers. In the dialogue that follows, Musa plays the role of The Mask, while Fatima embodies the character of Mama Jibril:

MUSA: What do you want in my office this time, Mama Jibril?

MAMA JIBRIL: Same thing as the last time.

MUSA: My sweet sugarcane?

MAMA JIBRIL: Food...food for me to eat...so I can feed my baby.

MUSA: Then you know what to do.

MAMA JIBRIL: I can't, this time. I only gave birth last month. I'm still sore
down there.

MUSA: Then I can't help you, Mama Jibril.

MAMA JIBRIL: You know I'm not like those that say no to you when you ask

them for it...I just can't now.

MUSA: You're not in need. When you are you know what to do.

MAMA JIBRIL: See...(Touching her breast with one hand and holding the baby with the other)...No matter how hard I press it, no milk will come out. I've not eaten in days, and my milk has stopped coming out...give me food to eat, I beg you, so my baby won't die. (16)

Preceding this dialogue, some prominent figures have come to the camp, and a camp official (The Mask) has asked IDPs to stage a performance for the entertainment of the guests. Sensing an opportunity to make their plight known to the visitors, Fatima and her uncle, Musa decide to re-enact IDPs' experience of sexual predation for the visitors and other IDPs to see, to the chagrin of The Mask who's seated at a corner of the stage as the performance takes place. The performance serves as an embarrassment for The Mask, since it not only takes him unawares, but also contradicts the opening remarks he made while welcoming the dignitaries to the camp and to the performance. In the remarks prior to the performance, he had proclaimed: "Hundreds of thousands of our brothers and sisters remain displaced across the country for no fault of theirs. Help us to help them. IDPs have suffered too much already, yet their enthusiasm, courage, and hope remain incomparable...they inspire me daily" (13). Such remarks paint a picture of a benign camp official who is concerned about the welfare of IDPs. However, what the play within the play reveals is camp officials' brazen contribution to the suffering of IDPs.

Fatima and Musa's re-enactment of Mama Jibril's encounter with The Mask exposes the double-facedness of The Mask, and by extension, of humanitarian actors working within the context of internal displacement in the country. Unable to bear what is being staged, The Mask invades center stage and disrupts the performance,

chasing the performers offstage. In the next scene, The Mask will confront Fatima, and, in this confrontation, we learn about other women with whom he has been involved in the sex-for-food predation. In an ironic acceptance of the efficacy of the play within the play, The Mask warns: “Fatima, let this be the last time you embarrass me...or my colleagues” (25). In *Hamlet*, Claudius also confirms the efficacy of the play within the play when he admits his guilt in the soliloquy:

Oh, my offense is rank, it smells to heaven;
it hath the primal eldest curse upon 't,
A brother's murder...
...But, oh, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? “Forgive me my foul murder”?
That cannot be since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder— (Act3.3).

The play within the play seriously upsets Claudius, forcing him to leave, even though it is his nephew, Lucianus, who gets portrayed as the king's murderer. In the play, he sees a correlation between the murderer and himself, and becomes more aware of the threat Hamlet poses to him, especially as the play might as well drive Hamlet to avenge his father's death in the same manner that he was killed. Unlike Hamlet, who sets out to avenge his father's death by killing King Claudius following the confirmation from the play within the play, Fatima and Musa's vengeance is indeed defined by the play within the play they have performed. The play succeeds not only in exposing The Mask and his cronies, but also in humiliating them right before IDPs, the exact people they have so long mortified.

In addition to the sex-for-food predation, Musa re-enacts, still as a play within a play, humanitarian actors' reselling of aid meant for IDPs. Under the liminal guise of

this performance device, Musa re-enacts this despicable activity as The Mask, his guests, and IDPs watch. The stage direction reveals:

The next performance is about the re-bagging and reselling of aid. MUSA puts on a mask and a yellow neon jacket with the words "Camp Official." Now playing the role of The Mask, Musa transfers rice from a World Food Program bag to a new bag with no label. Onstage are bags of re-bagged rice loaded on top of each other. His phone starts ringing. (15)

Then, Musa (still acting as The Mask) picks the call, and the following conversation ensues with an imaginary accomplice:

I've been waiting for your call like the second coming of the Great One. Are you guys on your way? (*beat.*) Good. Of the 50 trucks of food that are meant for IDPs in Janbuza camp, you'll take only 10 trucks there...no...let's make it 35, so we don't raise suspicion. Or just reduce it to 30 trucks. I need to settle too many people. Send 30 trucks to the camp and send 20 to my warehouse. I'm there now. My boys will re-bag all the bags of rice and sell them off within two days. Buyers are on ground. But I need you to get me another group of buyers. These current buyers are becoming too greedy. Imagine, they're asking for more discounts after the heavy discounts we've given them already. One even had the guts to tell me that stolen properties should be sold very cheap. Imagine that! He called them S-t-o-l-e-n properties. How dare he? So, I've now become a thief. Am I a thief? (15).

Although the term 'play-within-a-play' suggests the existence of two plays, with one being inside and the other being outside, the locus of inquiry transcends the realm of the inner or the outer play, as it also includes the borderline between the two. According to Caroline Sheaffer-Jones, as "the distinction between the inner play and the outer play is transgressed before the spectator's eyes, so too is the limit between the play and so-called reality and thus what constitutes playing needs to be redefined" (48). In *Displaced*, at the borderline between the two plays rests the transgression of the hitherto reified power dynamics between IDPs and humanitarian actors.

Though, at first glance, the power differential between both groups lie firmly in favor of humanitarian actors because of their control of humanitarian aid, a close

scrutiny reveals that this differential has the potential to shift in favor of IDPs, upon IDPs' recognition and assertion of their agency. Thus, we need to understand Musa and Fatima's improvised play-within-a-play as representative of IDPs' radical reawakening—that is, their recognition and assertion of their own power in the face of the domineering exploitation of camp officials and security agents. In a sense, the play within the play represents a reaction of power to power—that is, the reaction of the long-repressed power of IDPs to the overreaching influence, if not tyranny, of the overbearing humanitarian actors who for too long have controlled not only the political superstructure of camp life, but also the multiple channels of aid administration available.

Nevertheless, rather than exert physical strength against the domineering group, IDPs, as minoritarian subjects, employ arts-based power to expose the follies in the systems of oppression that incapacitate IDPs. Beyond the exposition of these follies, this arts-based approach presents the problems of IDPs in a clear and simple way, showcases the nuances involved, and then suggests solutions to the problems. The role swapping that happens during the play within the play blurs the line between the play and reality, and it is “as if the play were almost a game with multiple possibilities in which actions are at once mimed and realized, neither played nor accomplished once and for all” (Sheaffer-Jones 51). Furthermore, as Sheaffer-Jones rightly mentions, “through the transgression of the space between the inner and outer plays, the spectator's role is shown to be inextricably bound to that of the actor” and the “shifting limits between actor and spectator, play and reality, are at stake” (51). More so, as Gerhard Fischer and Bernhard Greiner affirm, the play within the play

serves as “an artistic agency of self-reference and self-reflection, i.e. as imaginative play that refers back to itself;” hence, it “appears as a meta-theatrical mode of aesthetic expression, in terms of its own specific nature as play and representation as well as with regard to the function of the stage-audience relationship and in view of the self-reflection of its acting protagonists” (xii).

In its employment of the play-within-the play, *Displaced* exposes the meta-theatrical world of internal displacement, voicing its silences, parading its cruelty, and illuminating its complexities. Serving as dramatic irony, this theatrical device unveils the inner workings of internal displacement through an emphasis on both the self-consciousness of the actors and the self-reflexivity of the performance itself. In *Displaced*, this device allows for the performance IDPs have staged about their experience of domination to reflect on itself. It also permits the IDP actors, through the embodiment of other characters on stage, not only to reflect on their own existential situations in the camp, but also to reflect it back to themselves on stage—and, by extension, to the audiences both on stage and in real life.

Displacement undoubtedly subjects IDPs to psychological and emotional harm. Having lost family members in the attack by, or flight from, insurgents, many IDPs still experience traumas. Some of these traumas take the form of nightmares assaulting them in their sleep. In its opening scene, *Displaced* captures the nightmares IDPs experience, first as a bad dream and next as a gush of bad memories. In this scene, we see an IDP, Musa twisting and turning on his shabby mattress as he dreams about Boko Haram’s invasion of his village. A projection transposed onto the body of his beleaguered tent gives the audience a vivid picture of the gunshot-filled rampage and

the torment Musa is undergoing in his sleep. He screams himself awake, but this gives him no relief as, this time, the bad dream has dissipated into bad memories of the loss of his wife and two daughters to Boko Haram. These memories continue to haunt him, even after his bad dream has ended. Now wide awake, he soliloquizes:

My mind is a pressure cooker of memories; it's a matter of time and the lid will blow off.... Four years ago, I had everything. At present, I've lost everything, even myself. You all tell me to hold on, to believe in a better tomorrow. But how can I believe in something that's not guaranteed? And how can I live with myself when I despise myself? Living like I do now in this camp, I can't amount to anything in life. Why should I continue living like this? Why? (7)

Then he reflects on Boko Haram's abduction of his wife and daughters:

How can I ever forget that day? It keeps coming back to me...four years ago that's like four seconds ago. They came, they maimed, they stole, they slaughtered, and they left. They left with my wife and two daughters...

(now gesturing with his left fingers)

FOUR years ago. Are my wife and daughters still breathing? Are they now their captors' wives? *(Beat.)* They took my family away...They keep coming back to taunt me, to haunt me... in my thoughts and in my dreams. But I won't dignify them with my tears. A displaced man they've made me, but a dead man they can't. I'll fight them. I'll fight back, not with bullets or knives, but with something mightier. My will. I'll fight them with my will. My life I won't allow them take. That's weakness. My life I'll take myself.

Musa writes a suicide note. A recording is heard... (7)

As a performance ethnographer this was both an excruciating story for me to process and an agonizing scene for me to write. The visceral gush of anguish from the man whose experience primarily inspired this scene kept tearing at my insides whenever I attempted to write the story. But, at the same time, I was inspired by his unflinching faith in a better tomorrow. Just like the character in the play, the real person whose story it is has refused to remarry in the hope that one day his wife and daughters will

return to him. More than four years have passed since their capture, but he is still hoping against hope.

His experience, like this scene, calls for rethinking memory's value in the survival performances of displaced persons. This scene's recognition of the value of memory as embodied history mirrors Paul Ricoeur's investigation in *Memory, History, Forgetting* of the reciprocal interaction between remembering and forgetting, and how the relationship between the two affects both the observation of historical experiences and the construction of historical narratives. In this scene, Musa negotiates his position within the slippery spectrum that has memory and forgetting as polar opposites—a negotiation that presents history in its cultural entrenchment not as an artefact in the museum of voyeurism, but as an embodied archive persistently in a flux and in opposition to being construed as an event that is fossilized in a static past. This inhabited history involves what D. Soyini Madison in *Performed Ethnography and Communication* refers to as “embodied techniques and practices learned and enacted in our everyday lives and that are inscribed upon our nervous systems, musculature, hearts, and minds” and constitute “the very resources and residues that not only structure our identities, but are inseparable elements of every performance we make and that makes us” (26). Thus, as human persons, we are inevitably breathing stories. Our bodies and memories are a web of living histories, of stories. Just as we tell stories, stories also tell us.



Illustration 25: Fatima pleads with Musa not to commit suicide in *Displaced*, A.B.U. performance

Through the characters of Musa and Fatima, *Displaced* tells stories that have immediate and pressing bearing on the lives of IDPs, while also seeking to transform spectators' perception of this displaced population. Through Fatima and Musa, the play positions IDPs as people capable of pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps and taking charge of their own emancipation, amidst the seeming unending exploitation of IDPs by an amalgamation of forces in the humanitarian circuit. The following poetic performance gives a glimpse of IDPs' capacity for emancipatory resistance:

FATIMA: Internal displacement is incarceration
Inside your own home
And IDPs are inmates on death row
Suffering for a crime they never committed,
Waiting for charity sometimes from their abuser....

MUSA: For years, we swallowed silence,
Afraid we'd say something wrong—a bomb;
For years, we lost our voice
Among the carcasses of fears
Caged in the casket of the mind....

FATIMA and MUSA: Like water from a broken tap,
We'll weep until we get our plumber's devotion.
Like water from a broken tap,
We'll weep until our plumber comes.

If you our honesty upsets
Don't crucify us; thank us instead
For nudging you to be a better you—

Before you sell one more calumny
About us to anybody else,
Today we tell our own story.
Today we speak! (13-15)

This poem seeks to demystify (and decolonize) camp officials and security agents by subjecting IDPs to a mental house-cleaning exercise which enables them to see that they too are human beings not only deserving of a decent living, but also possessing of intrinsic power to change the status quo for their overall good (Ngũgĩ 1986). The above synchronization of the lines of Fatima and Musa figuratively represents a united front against the forces responsible for keeping IDPs in continued displacement and subjugation. The physicalization of the positions of power involved in the rendition of the poem portrays a vivid picture of how a simple movement or the relocation of an object, a person or a body part on stage, can swing the balance of power from one person, object, or place to another. The imagery of a weeping broken tap signifies how, through persistence, that which is broken and overlooked can instigate a productive action. Even if one has no interest in fixing a leaking tap in one's home, the lingering danger that the drops of water pose may well make the

person notice the broken tap and do the needful. Such is the potency of the passive aggression (protest) of IDPs, provided they do it with purpose and persistence. The above poem, intended to serve as a device for resistance, equally articulates the need for humanitarian actors to recognize the voices of IDPs and mainstream them into their humanitarian policies and projects. Until this is done, the narratives surrounding IDPs will remain partial and exclusionary, no matter how well-intentioned humanitarian actors and their ‘interventions’ may be.

In *Displaced*, Fatima represents a female IDP who understands both the negating and empowering effects of power transmitted through the uncanny logic of patriarchy relentlessly at work in the camp and in her gendered destiny. Yet, she continues to make herself available to this power, sometimes to exploit the power for her personal gains and, at other times, as an impetus for staging resistance. Refusing to be shoehorned into reified cultural stereotypes associated with young women from northeast Nigeria, stereotypes that include passivity, submissiveness, shyness, and discreetness (especially at the interstices of their relations with men or patriarchal figures), Fatima not only gives vent to her desire for power over her life, but also braces herself for the confrontation that comes with such a move.

Unlike Musa, Fatima does not wear her despair outwardly. She dresses in neat, colorful clothes. She exercises her agency by asserting herself and taking an oppositional position to the male-fantasized hegemony of the camp and the entire humanitarian architecture of internal displacement administration in the country. Through Fatima’s sustained and calculated exercise of her agency as a determined, strong-willed, and opportunistic young woman, she upsets the socio-cultural decorum

and gendered poses of her society. Fatima's agency is shaped in her encounters between her selfhood and her immediate milieu. Although she lives in an acutely patriarchal society that fosters the idea that women are secondary to men, the character of Fatima problematizes and subverts this dominant stereotype.

In a way, Fatima embodies camp life. Her life evidences how IDPs labor to survive the circus of encampment after enduring the tortuous flight from Boko Haram terror. But, more than simply embodying IDP travails, her life also serves as a beacon of hope and a pragmatic lesson in survival for many people whose lives displacement has ravaged and who remain clueless about the processes of getting through the attendant depression and seeming infinitude of displacement. Buoyed by her unflinching belief in her capacity to turn adversity into opportunity, Fatima would not allow adversity to define her life. She smells opportunity where some other people easily see futility. When The Mask compels Fatima and her uncle to perform for dignitaries coming to the camp, Musa wallows in despondency while Fatima manages to turn the compulsion into an opportunity to demand positive change. Musa's response to The Mask's request is another round of lamentation: "Our bodies are their sport. They sit down and watch us play our misery and make a fortune out of our misery. I wish we could refuse his request" (10). He then acquiesces to The Mask's demand and suggests to Fatima that they put up a cultural dance for the entertainment of the dignitaries. Fatima, however, has a different idea. Aware that many people outside the camp may not be privy to the corruption in operation within the camp, she whispers an idea into Musa's ear. We eventually learn that the idea involves a dramatization of camp officials' reselling of humanitarian aid meant for IDPs. It also

involves a re-enactment of the sex-for-food experience of female IDPs, as well as a spoken-word poem underscoring the capacity for resistance of IDPs.

A focus on her youth, biological sex, petite frame, colorful hijab, and religio-cultural context aligns Fatima with the typical Muslim young woman from Northeast Nigeria. The difference, however, is that she does not allow her femininity to define her identity or choices in life. That is why, for instance, she is uncomfortable in her feminine roles as a niece and a female IDP and would subvert the stereotypes associated with them in her quest for self-affirmation and self-accomplishment. Orphaned at a tender age, Fatima has had to live with her uncle, Musa for over a decade. After Boko Haram's rampage, which leads to the abduction of Musa's wife and daughters, Fatima and Musa flee to an IDP camp. Overwhelmed by regrets, Musa habitually flirts with suicide. He continues to blame himself for the disappearance of his wife and daughters, believing he should have stayed back and fought off the armed terrorists. Fatima, on the other hand, has since gotten over the ugly incident, including the passing of her own parents, and urges Musa to confront his problems instead of trying to bolt from them through suicide.

Rather than cowering in defeat or wallowing in despair, Fatima has gathered herself together and has even assumed the leadership of their family, declaring herself "the head of this family from now on" after Musa's last failed attempt at suicide (12). By assuming headship of the family, Fatima takes up a role that is statutorily delineated for men, thereby subverting the gender expectations about the roles of men and women in society. Fatima's assumption of the headship of the family evidences a mimetic portrayal of the changing roles of women and children in IDP camps—a

change which stems from the fragmentation, if not erosion, of many social norms governing the lives of IDPs prior to their displacement.

During my fieldwork, many elderly IDPs complained to me about the blatant disrespect they suffered regularly from young IDPs in the camp, something that rarely happened while they were still living in their pre-displacement communities. They also lamented the drastic loss of parental control over their children. They explained that many of their children no longer respected them since they were technically no longer the breadwinners of the family. Together with their children, they would queue up under the scorching sun for aid, sometimes pushing and shoving each other on the queue—and, in the process, lose whatever modicum of respect their children and other young people in the camp had left for them.

In northern Nigeria, society expects its men to shelter their children and women from strife, provide food for them, and protect them from seeing or experiencing harm. But Boko Haram terrorism and the displacement have destroyed these ideal expectations. Men have lost the ability to protect their women and children from harm and from witnessing atrocities. Witnessing the spectacle of terrorist attacks alone has set in a reconfiguration of gender expectations that has radically framed camp living. The deprivation and hunger in the camp know no gender, and this harsh experience further troubles the dichotomy between men and women in the camp—a dichotomy Fatima soon conflates in her deviant redefinition of gender roles in the time of crises. The encamped reality of internal displacement has domesticated her uncle and many other male IDPs, and this provides an opportunity for Fatima's unapologetic impersonation, if not usurpation, of the traditionally male role of breadwinner. In the

new world order of internal displacement, the person with proximity to aid and humanitarian actors has the most power, and the person with the most power has the most aid and utility. Men often fall short in this regard.

Recognizing the fragmentation of the socio-cultural order within which IDPs live, Fatima swiftly exercises her agency in a bid to give her feminine voice a chance in a society that has basically relegated women to a subordinate position. In her relationship with men, particularly The Mask, Fatima deploys cunning as a demonstration of her agency. For example, after the embarrassment to which Fatima and Musa subjected him in their play-within-the-play performance, The Mask heads to their tent to chastise them. Upon arrival, he finds only Fatima at home. He unloads his anger onto her in a verbal outburst. Rather than shudder before The Mask, Fatima delicately steers the conversation to sexual abuse within the camp and makes him understand that his sexual predation in the camp has become common knowledge among IDPs, even though no one would confront him about it. This piece of information jolts The Mask, forcing him to want to learn more about how his supposedly clandestine acts have become common knowledge. Ruffled, he turns to Fatima, who seems to know everything happening in the camp, for information. Immediately spotting an opportunity to help herself, Fatima requests sanitary pads in exchange for the information. The dialogue between Fatima and The Mask goes:

FATIMA: You get me a box of sanitary pads, I tell you.

THE MASK: I gave you a box just yesterday. Even if you had an ocean of blood since yesterday, you couldn't have finished them.

FATIMA: I distributed everything yesterday to needy girls in the camp.

THE MASK: That's your problem, not mine!

FATIMA: I know...it could never be yours since you're not a woman...since we're not your family.

THE MASK: Don't derail the conversation. How did you know?
FATIMA: I already told you.
THE MASK: What?
FATIMA: It's common knowledge in the camp.
THE MASK: Okay, I will send someone to bring the box of sanitary pads to you. Now tell me. (30)

And then the dialogue continues:

FATIMA: Who are you sending with my box of sanitary pads?
THE MASK: Come get it yourself?
FATIMA: You know I'm not feeling too well.
THE MASK: When you get well then.
FATIMA: Don't be mean!
THE MASK: The last one I gave you, I bought with my own money.
FATIMA: Really?
THE MASK: Really! That's how much I care about you.
FATIMA: Awww! (*clasping her chest.*)
THE MASK: Really! I think about you all the time. How do they say it?
"You're the sugar in my tea?" (31)

Fatima's request for sanitary pads in the middle of The Mask's sizzling anger depicts her ability to use her shrewdness to get what she wants from The Mask. She knows he cannot help himself whenever he sets his eyes on her and she is determined to squeeze whatever favors she can get out of him, while simultaneously watching him burn in his inferno of lust. It is a tantalizing game, but one that Musa has warned portends danger.

Interestingly, Fatima's request for pads does not necessarily translate to selfishness; rather, it presents her in her nurturing role as an intercessor for young people, especially young women, in the camp. As The Mask rightly but cruelly notes above, even if she had "an ocean of blood" she couldn't have exhausted a box of sanitary pads in 24 hours. But, as Fatima reveals in her rejoinder, she has "distributed

everything” to “needy girls in the camp” (30). This demonstrates her willingness to put herself in harm’s way to provide for her fellow IDPs. Aware of the danger The Mask represents to any IDP woman, Musa has warned Fatima against getting comfortable with him, but she will not listen. Fellow IDPs too have noticed Fatima’s unusual closeness to The Mask and have insinuated that both must be enmeshed in a romantic relationship. “You come to my tent a million times a day,” Fatima once told The Mask, and in recognition of the insinuations, she adds: “[e]verybody now thinks we’re doing something” (29). Unbothered by the allusions, The Mask urges her, “Then let’s do something” (29).

Though dismayed by the loss of her parents, the Boko Haram assault on her village, and the deplorable reality of encampment, Fatima knows full well that her life’s purpose is grander than an attachment to the past, and quickly picks herself up, believing that “tomorrow, after all, is another opportunity.” This illustrates her ability to overcome loss and move on to the next phase of her life. Negative conditions do not define her life; rather, she defines them and the role they will or will not play in her life. Fatima also demonstrates this same quality of rapidly sublimating her losses when she refuses to becloud her mind with thoughts about the possibility of losing her best friend, the soldier, upon his reassignment from the camp to the battlefield to confront Boko Haram terrorists. Until his reassignment, he was a teacher in the camp’s makeshift school.



Illustration 26: Fatima and Soldier, her boyfriend, in *Displaced*, A.B.U.

Like young women her age in the IDP camp, Fatima craves the security and respect that marriage brings. She wants the soldier to take their relationship a step further, consummating it in holy matrimony. But, aware of his status as a young soldier and the financial and social insecurities that come with that reality, he expresses his reservation about marriage:

SOLDIER: I love you. I really do. I'm not just ready for a relationship.

FATIMA: You don't love me?

SOLDIER: You know I do. But how far can we honestly go with a relationship?

FATIMA: Until the end. We'll get married, have kids and grow old together.

SOLDIER: We're still young. You're eighteen and I'm only twenty.

FATIMA: We won't be young forever.

SOLDIER: How are we going to raise kids by ourselves when we too are kids?

FATIMA: You have a job. I've saved some money writing letters for people in this camp. I'll look for other jobs. I can translate for NGOs visiting this camp. I'll beg The Mask to give me a teaching job. I can teach these kids how to write their names. Something many of their teachers here have failed to accomplish in over a year of teaching them. That's why

every kid wants to attend your class. You're committed to their education.

SOLDIER: Thanks, but starting a family is no joke.

FATIMA: I know. I'll be committed to it. I pledge my devotion to you. I'll love and honor and cherish you until death do us part. All the love I never got, I'll give it to you and to our kids. You'll swim in my ocean of love.

SOLDIER: Marriage is no poetry.

FATIMA: It's not rocket science either. We can figure it out. We're smart enough to do that.

SOLDIER: Pause. Breathe in and out for a moment. See...I'm being realistic here. I don't even have a home. Where are we going to live? Here in this camp? In your uncle's tent?

FATIMA: He won't mind. He holds you in high esteem.

SOLDIER: Are you listening to yourself? (19-20)

And then the following ensues:

FATIMA: Let's just take that first step. The future will be fine.

SOLDIER: I'm a soldier. I don't live in the future.

SOLDIER: The future is never promised.

FATIMA: Ours is.

SOLDIER: I'm a soldier, remember.

FATIMA: It doesn't matter. (20)

Here we see Fatima strategizing for the future, which though uncertain, is not devoid of promise. This decision, paradoxically, also portrays Fatima's choice of living in an eternal present—one that remembers the past, but only as a motivation for progress and one that dreams of the future, but only as a fulfillment of calculated endeavors. For her, the "future will be fine."

But Fatima's agency should not be misconstrued as omnipotent or always effective. There are times when the exercise of her agency does not yield the desired results. For instance, when she pleads with the soldier to marry her or even take her with him to the place of his new assignment, she does not get her wish. Also, her

assertion of agency does not deter The Mask from assaulting her. Enthralled by Fatima's voluptuous body or, better still, engulfed by his lasciviousness, The Mask tells Fatima that her "body is built for sin" and then chides her: "Why waste it acting like a saint?" (36). To ward off the predation of The Mask after his relentless attempts to have sex with her, Fatima runs into her tent. The Mask follows her inside, sexually assaults her and, in the process, robs her of her virginity which until then she has jealously guarded with the intention of offering it as a gift to her dream man after their wedding. In response to her rape, she shoots him. She tells Musa: "I don't know what came over me," cementing the inadvertent nature of the gunshot (39). So, a major distinguishing factor in Fatima's exercise of her agency is not so much her success or occasional lack of it, but her resilience, heightened sense of self, and dogged commitment to her goals.

Unlike Mama Jibril, Fatima does not resemble the typical northeast Nigerian woman in that she does not embody the standards of submissiveness, humility, and quietness used in measuring how much of a lady a woman is. As a deviant belle, Fatima extricates herself from the hackneyed mold of femininity and asserts her autonomy and authority in a male-dominant world by being neither restrained nor submissive. Through Fatima's exercise of agency, the play debunks the prevailing myth that all women in northeast Nigeria and, indeed in IDP camps, are homogenous and subservient to men.

Though Fatima may sometimes come across as annoying, one cannot deny her bravery and knack for survival. Fatima, like many IDPs, wants to vacate the camp and have a better shot at life, but rather than transferring that responsibility to someone

else, she makes calculated decisions to achieve her goal. Through the exercise of her agency, she extricates herself from the cult of domesticity, ever exuding the belief that, against all odds, she will find her way. Against the court of public opinion, she grants herself the permission to break free from male-fantasized hegemony and pursue dreams and interests beyond the confines of societal norms. The displacement has come with opportunities for a redefinition of the northeast Nigerian woman, and Fatima does not fail to seize them and make them work for her. While Fatima's strong character may bring her disapproval in some tradition-steeped quarters, this same character has won her the admiration of many spectators during the performance of this ethnographic piece. Whichever way we view her character, we must not forget that she depends on it for her survival.

Fatima rebuffs the dominant narrative of the African woman as that woman who languishes in perpetual subordination, passivity, and subjugation. Such a narrative, perpetrated through the heteronormative gaze of the media hegemony in the global north, periodically portrays African women as machines for procreation. No doubt, there exists evidence that allows for such a social construction of the African woman even in IDP camps, where many of the female IDPs suffer recurrent, 'undesired' childbirths. However, Fatima, as an embodiment of the new African woman, resists this kind of social construction. Fatima represents "The African Woman Today," to use the title of Ama Ata Aidoo's essay. This kind of woman resists a confinement of African women to a traditional past, and seeks to rather re-represent the African woman as a dynamic being capable of impacting society and plotting a

roadmap for her present and her future in spite of political, socio-cultural, and religious encumbrances. In a scathing criticism of western journalism, Aidoo states:

The image of the African woman in the mind of the world has been set: she is breeding too many children she cannot take care of, and for whom she should not expect other people to pick up the tab. She is hungry, and so are her children...it has become a cliché of Western photojournalism that the African woman is old beyond her years; she is half-naked; her drooped and withered breasts are well exposed; there are flies buzzing around the faces of her children; and she has a permanent begging bowl in her hand. (39)

The above picture of the African woman is pathetic, to say the least. Not only is it myopic, it is also grossly misleading. Any consignment of African women to a monolithic narrative, as Aidoo affirms, denies them their differences, individuality, and creative enterprise. African women are not all confined to the kitchen or to the bedroom. Many others have embraced a spectrum of careers and have excelled therein. Denying that such African women exist dishonors the multiplex plurality of African women just as it equally reinforces Anna Julia Cooper's stance that the female population has endured ostracism and marginalization for so long, even though they possess the moral power necessary for the integral and sustainable development of society. Cooper aptly notes:

In this period, when material prosperity and well-earned ease and luxury are assured facts from a national standpoint, woman's work and woman's influence are needed to bring a heart power into this money-getting dollar-worshipping civilization; needed to bring a moral force into the utilitarian

motives and interests of the time; needed to stand for God and Home and Native Land versus gain and greed and grasping selfishness. (44)

Interestingly, Cooper made this statement in the last decade of the 19th century and within the context of a gathering to honor the first women ever appointed to manage in a national capacity in the United States. Many decades have passed since the declaration, yet women's struggle the world over for recognition and equality in many facets of life continues.

Pertinently, Fatima's cordial relationship with her uncle and her soldier boyfriend on the one hand, and her rapport with The Mask on the other hand, both suggest her disavowal of any binarism between men and women in the IDP camp and in society generally. Although she denounces the immorality of The Mask, she does not dismiss, as brutes, the entirety of the male race. Thus, she has attempted to recover African feminism from the grips of anti-male feminist propagandists, and has elevated it to the realm of shared humanity with men, while equally positing that feminism, at least within the African context, is not in diametric opposition to men, but is in collaboration with them for the overall good of everyone in society, irrespective of individual identities or affiliations. Rather than sinking a wedge between men and women in society, Fatima redirects our attention to the forces behind the displacement and incarceration of IDPs, therefore bringing into focus the question of an end to displacement that many humanitarian actors have conveniently sidestepped.

Displaced underlines how ethnographic performances have emerged as an effective way of drawing attention to the veiled stories, priorities, and perspectives of

vulnerable populations. In the dialogue between Fatima and her uncle, and the one between her and The Mask, the play explores the much-overlooked intrinsic importance of men's role in family planning decision-making among IDPs in Nigeria, against the backdrop of a spike in birth rates among displaced persons in the country and a concomitant swell in displaced persons' demand for humanitarian aid. Fatima laments how some IDPs have "turned their women into rabbits...breeding children every year as if they have something to prove" (22). Musa attempts to explain it away by asking: "How could you sit at home all day doing nothing and you're expected just to be looking at your wife without doing something? Are you a piece of firewood?" (22). The dialogue between Musa and Fatima represents the pervading feeling among IDPs concerning childbirth. Many of them believe that children are gifts from God, and God will always provide for them. Similarly, some IDPs give birth to as many children as possible in the hope that, at least, one of them will be successful in the future and will be able to cater for them in their old age. Fatima explains this scenario:

My best friend...her father has ten children...I discussed this issue with her and she said her father once explained to her that children have different stars...some will shine bright and some may not...and only God knows the difference...so he'd rather have many children...at least one of them will have a bright star, he believes... and when such a person makes it in the future, he'll be sure of being taken care of. (22-3)

Connected to the question of childbearing, Fatima also engages The Mask in a conversation about female IDPs' unease with being seen entering a family planning facility, let alone being seen using family planning services. She explains that young and unmarried female IDPs often fear stigmatization from their fellow IDPs and, as a result, rarely access family planning services. If they must, they devise covert ways to

access the services. Fatima bares it all to The Mask, after spotting a female IDP running into the only family planning facility in the camp:

She didn't want anyone to see her entering there. Many young unmarried women want to access family planning services but fear being stigmatized...they don't want to be called whores or labelled promiscuous...even though we all know many of them are doing it...many of them just hope they don't get pregnant...the brave ones, though, go for family planning ...even if they have to hide to get it...or circle around that center until they think no one is watching...then they run inside just like that girl just did. (25-6)

Sex, according to the socio-cultural framework of the society in which IDPs find themselves, is meant for married people. Unmarried people (especially women) who engage in sex are labelled promiscuous. Rather than concern himself with the issue of stigmatization and the attendant problems associated with the use of family planning among IDPs, The Mask's interest lies in deciphering the face of the girl who just snuck into the family planning center, so he could have carnal knowledge of her. "She's sure sexually active...I need to know her," he mumbles (25).

Disappointed with The Mask's remark, Fatima redirects his attention to the family planning issue with a poignant message—a message that, in fact, ought to be understood as meant not just for The Mask onstage, but also for NGOs and other humanitarian actors who are offstage doing their humanitarian work in almost complete neglect of the inputs of those they so meaningfully desire to serve. In her message, Fatima emphasizes:

...if only the NGO that runs that center had asked IDPs, especially young women, a few questions before setting up that place, they would have known that a center exclusively for family planning would not work in an IDP camp where rumor and gossip move faster than the speed of sound. But who consults us, even on matters that concern us directly? Nobody! People just seat in their

homes or offices or in their countries and decide what's best for us and just come here and implement them...and then write their evaluation reports...everything's good and they get more funding. (26)

The scene on family planning calls for rethinking the humanitarian interventions on family planning that have little or no recourse to a meaningful participation of IDPs from conception to execution. The scene also underlines the gap in family planning literature among IDPs and the need for more research in this area.

Despite the prominence of population growth in literature on internal displacement and an increased interest in family planning as a means of reducing unplanned pregnancies and improving child and maternal wellbeing, there remains a dearth of understanding of family planning use among IDPs in Nigeria and the circumstances under which knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, practices and social norms affect the use or non-use of family planning among these displaced persons (Jangu 2013; Acsadi et al, 1972). And even though studies in other parts of the world have shown that men's attitude towards family planning greatly influence women's use or non-use of contraception, creating due space at the tables of academia and theatre for the exploration of internally displaced men's role in influencing family planning use remains underexplored.

Although conflict is responsible for most of the displaced persons in Nigeria, the recurring insurgency alone does not account for the high number of IDPs in northeast Nigeria today. The high fertility rate of IDPs is also another crucial but disregarded factor. The baby boom does not translate to an automatic increment in the flow of humanitarian aid to IDPs, thus ramping up the pressure on humanitarian actors to bridge the widening gap of IDPs' unmet needs. In response to this anomaly,

however, the overarching conversation should not be whether displaced persons, given their situation, should be having sexual intercourse at all. The emphasis ought to be on the fact that they are having sex regardless and should be provided the opportunity to protect themselves from unplanned pregnancies and other unsavory reproductive health issues.

Part of this opportunity is to remove barriers to the use of family planning.²¹ These barriers are not limited to family planning access, high cost of most contraceptives, and the educational attainment of local people (Acsadi et al, 1972). There are also, as Florida Uzoaru pinpoints, the gendered expectations of culture, which stigmatize young unmarried women seeking contraceptive use by portraying them as loose (“Unmet Reproductive Health Needs”). In undue disregard for the cultural dimension of family planning use, many research and health programs across Africa fail to recognize the enormous influence men wield in family planning decision-making in African societies (Jangu 2013). Thus, they miss the opportunity to invest in them and use their influence to change attitudes, behaviors, and social norms that serve as barrier to contraception use.

Like Fatima, The Mask represents an important character in the performance of internal displacement. Through the shenanigans of The Mask, *Displaced* demonstrates how competing understandings of vulnerability wage war daily on the bodies and in the lives of IDPs, thereby exacerbating their conditions of displacement and the tensions they already feel within. The Mask represents all the forces of governmentality and paternalism in the lives of IDPs. This character needs to be

²¹ In the context of this research, “family planning” refers to the use of birth control methods to achieve the preferred number of children and timing of births.

embraced as a persona that embodies different ways through which IDPs experience power both as good and evil in their relationships with humanitarian actors. In these relationships, we cannot deny the vulnerability of IDPs, just as we cannot also deny their resilience—their ability to anticipate, manage, and recuperate from the pressures that their reality of displacement has brought upon them.



Illustration 27: The Mask in *Displaced*, A. B. U

Beyond representing the ‘facelessness’ and taciturnity of the biopolitical forces perpetuating the displacement and subjugation of IDPs, the character of The Mask symbolizes humanitarian actors’ crass transgression of the metaphysical communion between the ancestors and the living in African society. By his promotion of callousness and the abdication of his obligation of empathy towards his fellow members of society, The Mask upsets the cosmic order of most African cultures. Rather than uphold empathy and the sanctity of life as enshrined in the ethical codes,

religious rites, and belief systems of most African cultures, he degenerates into buccaneering, aggrandizing himself from the purse of the indigent in society.

Masking, in African performance, goes beyond mere aesthetics. It bears a metaphysical meaning. For instance, within the Igbo society of West Africa, as Okagbue depicts, masking plays a religio-cultural role. The “Igbo masquerade characters,” he remarks, “are ancestors or spirit forces that have taken on material form and returned to the human plane at the invitation of the living” and masking, therefore, becomes “a highly developed socio-religious activity whose sustaining ethos is that it enables the Igbo to establish a physical relationship and communion with the spirit world of their ancestors and deities” (19). Nevertheless, “the masked characters are...also recognized as human actors playing roles before a critically appreciative audience” and these roles include “the performance paradox of ‘invisible presence and present absence’” (Okagbue19). In other words, the “masked performer constantly challenges the spectators with his absence but at the same time he confronts them with the ‘obvious’ presence of the character” (19). In *The Mask*, the invisible realm of the ancestors and the visible world of IDPs come together and bring into focus our responsibility towards one another as members of one big cosmic family.

How else might one understand the complex character that is *The Mask*? One way, I suggest, involves the thoughtlessness undergirding *The Mask*’s attitude and behavior. Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* helps us to understand *The Mask*. Eichmann’s case, as Arendt emphasizes, was not one of moral or legal insanity. Several psychiatrists had already certified that he was not insane. One of them said Eichmann was “more normal, at any rate” than he (the psychiatrist) was “after having

examined him” (25). Another psychiatrist noted that Eichmann’s entire psychological attitude toward his children, wife, father, mother, siblings, and friends was “not only normal but most desirable” (25-6). If Eichmann was not insane, how then are we to explain his role in the extermination of millions of Jews in the Nazi regime? For Arendt, the explanation is rooted in his thoughtlessness, defined not just as a lack of consideration for others, but more precisely as his inability to think empathically.

She explains that whatever he was saying to the police interrogator or to the court, or whatever he wrote in his memoirs in Argentina or Jerusalem, was identical each time and was worded in the same way. As a result, Arendt notes that the “longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else” (49). Owing to his thoughtlessness, it was difficult to engage Eichmann in a reasonable conversation, not because “he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such” (49). Arendt holds this thoughtlessness to be one of Eichmann’s main problems—not that he was a demonic monster driven by anti-Semitism and hatred to destroy the Jews, as the prosecution had presented.²²

Arendt insists that Eichmann was just a thoughtless clown (54). Eichmann’s case, according to her, was not that of an ordinary criminal, but of a new kind of criminal who had no sense of worldly reality and was thus socially dislocated from others in their shared plurality as human beings. Eichmann was not alone in this

²² But contrary to Arendt’s articulation, Norman Podhoretz maintains that Eichmann was indeed anti-Semitic. Arguing against Arendt’s position, he emphasizes that “no person could have joined the Nazi party, let alone the S.S., who was not at the very least a *vicious* anti-Semite; to believe otherwise is to learn nothing about the nature of anti-Semitism” (Podhoretz 206).

failure of imagination from the perspective of others. The eighty million people of the German society also demonstrated this same thoughtlessness by simply shielding themselves against reality through the same lies and self-deception evident in Eichmann's self-justification (52).

Like Eichmann, The Mask is a thoughtless clown. When The Mask berates Fatima about the incessant requests of IDPs and their alleged display of ingratitude in the face of the benevolence of humanitarian actors, his attitude, like Eichmann's, evidences his thoughtlessness—his inability to understand from the perspective of IDPs their reality as encamped displaced persons. He could not bring himself to understand their request for basic needs as a blighted person's struggle for survival at all cost. He could not understand the horror displaced populations face during encampment. Meanwhile, let me underline that I am not equating the Holocaust to the IDP experience of encampment. As Arendt underscores in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

There are no parallels to the life in the concentration camps. Its horror can never be fully embraced by the imagination for the very reason that it stands outside of life and death. It can never be fully reported for the very reason that the survivor returns to the world of the living, which makes it impossible for him to believe fully in his own past experiences. It is as though he had a story to tell of another planet, for the status of the inmates in the world of the living, where nobody is supposed to know if they are alive or dead, is such that it is as though they had never been born. (444)

Nevertheless, the thoughtlessness that Eichmann displayed in the genocide provides a window into understanding how the failure to see beyond oneself and one's narrow world can engender deleterious effects in the lives of others interfacing with such a person.



Illustration 28: The Mask attempting to shush Fatima after the latter calls him out for preying on female IDPs in a sex-for-food scheme

Like Eichmann, The Mask recites well-worn clichés that contradict one another and yet they make him feel good about himself. The following exchange with Fatima presents an instance:

THE MASK: You don't appreciate me. Without us—I mean government, humanitarian agencies, NGOs, and security agencies—you IDPs would have been dead by now.

FATIMA: Without IDPs, many of you would have been jobless and broke by now.

THE MASK: Really?

FATIMA: Really! You are because we are. And that's why many of you do

little to end the cause of displacement. Our misery is your
goldmine. (32)

In this exchange, The Mask rehashes the dominant narrative in the humanitarian circle about IDPs' incessant request for assistance, emphasizing that IDPs are never content with what humanitarian actors provide for them to help alleviate their plight. Ironically, accusing IDPs of ingratitude reveals much about humanitarian actors as it does about IDPs. The language of 'ingratitude,' apart from revealing the unfortunate dependency of IDPs on humanitarian actors for survival, also gives a glimpse into the messianic role that humanitarian actors have arrogated to themselves in their engagement with IDPs. As Tami Spry underscores in *Body, Paper, Stage*, "language reflects cultural values and hierarchies that perpetuate or deconstruct, that install or interrupt systems of power" (61). This narrative of ingratitude perpetuates the 'salvific' power of humanitarian actors over IDPs in such a way that otherizes and, covertly or overtly, dehumanizes IDPs. It empowers humanitarian actors to disregard the demands of IDPs that their human rights be respected and their voices mainstreamed into decision-making processes that affect their lives directly.

After dismissing Fatima's request for sanitary pads as an act of ingratitude because, for him, pads do not count as humanitarian aid, Fatima bares her mind on the perennial label of IDPs as ingrates:

Asking for pads is now a show of ingratitude? Can't believe you!
Women bleed every month whether we like it or not. Unlike sex, sanitary pad
is not a luxury but a FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT. FUNDAMENTAL.
You people give us condoms, lots of them, for free to cater for something
that's a luxury. Yet, you can't give us pads for free to manage what we have no
control over. I don't get it. The world should just end already. (32)

In utter frustration, The Mask retorts:

Why are you pouring your frustration on me? Am I the one who decides what constitutes aids for IDPs? For your information, we too we're frustrated. Some of these numbers you read in the papers...millions of dollars donated by so and so NGO or international organization or government for the welfare of IDPs...not everything gets spent on IDPs...some of the money, a huge chunk I must add...gets spent on logistics and the consultants of these people and organizations, and most times they even decide for us what to spend the money on...so your hands are tied...if you spend the money on something else...next time you get nothing from them...we too, our hands are tied...so, when they send us school bags, or mosquito nets, or even condoms for instance, you want us to refuse? And suffer afterwards? You want us to tell them, "no thanks, we don't need this kind of your donations—we need sanitary pads now!" Is that what you expect us to do? In the ideal world, yes! In this real world, you do it they pack their things and leave forever. FOREVER! (32-3)

In a rare show of understanding for anything that has to do with The Mask,

Fatima acquiesces:

I get your point. But you can do well to inform them about our real needs too. Our needs vary from camp to camp and from time to time and from gender to gender and from age to age...and there's nothing wrong in hearing from us IDPs, what our real needs are...not the needs you guys imagine for us...from your ivory bubbles. Our voice matters too, YOU PEOPLE! (33)

The above dialogues buttress the vexed relationships both (1) between IDPs and humanitarian actors and (2) between donors and humanitarian actors. To ensure the smooth flow of aid from the donors to state and non-state humanitarian actors, these actors know better not to challenge the predesigned 'interventionist' plans of donors. Such an act might lead to a failure to secure funding from them. And after securing the funding, if it gets used for purposes not earmarked in the project document, there might be serious repercussions for the actors that have embarked on such a move, even if the move was tailored to meet the pressing needs of IDPs.

Pertinently, the narrative of (in)gratitude disregards the question of whose responsibility it is to address the consequences of displacement. In the case of the IDPs in *Displaced*, the cause of their displacement is not natural disasters but insurgency; hence, it is human made. A focus on the cause of displacement helps us to understand where the blame for IDPs' dependency on aid lies: human beings, and more specifically, Boko Haram and all those profiting from the displacement and would not want it to end. Also, such a focus illuminates whose responsibility it is to address the pressures that displacement places on IDPs. A scrutiny of the drivers and beneficiaries of internal displacement reorients our perception of IDPs and takes the responsibility of care away from IDPs. It places the responsibility squarely on the forces that have conspired to make and keep IDPs displaced—forces such as government, insurgents, and all interest groups benefiting from the protracted conflict.

This paradigm shift in perception equally changes the narrative of aid as charity to a narrative of aid as a fundamental human right. Since, in the first place, IDPs neither asked to be displaced nor are responsible for their displacement, the sovereign state to which they owe allegiance and which, in turn, promises them security of lives and property, should accept blame for failing in its responsibilities to ensure the safety of its citizens. The state should also take it upon itself to provide the basic needs of these displaced people—needs which, in fact, constitute their fundamental human rights and are not necessarily a display of beneficence from the government and its aid partners.

In humanitarian actors' appraisal of IDPs, I suggest they shed the dependency paradigm. It presents a reductive and opinionated view of IDPs. It presents them as a

community of helpless mendicants in relentless pursuit of alms for survival. In other words, it paints a picture of IDPs as a bunch of despicable bodies that know nothing or have capacity for nothing else but anguish. Undoubtedly, such a narrative of misery projects humanitarian actors as IDPs' brave and benevolent caregivers—and it makes aid agents, both local and international, feel extremely important about their work and themselves. Against the backdrop of the vulnerability of IDPs, some humanitarian actors assume heroic postures as the omniscient protectors of IDPs, something akin to superheroes or the biblical messiah in humanitarian coats. I am not against feeling useful or important. I also felt useful and important working with IDPs during my field visits. What I am refuting instead is allowing our humanitarian work to get in the way of IDPs' ability to help themselves or make key decisions about their present situation and their future. Rather than being positioned to help themselves, many humanitarian 'interventions' currently happening in the camps often place IDPs in a position where they are in perpetual reception of assistance from the external world and cannot, in any meaningful way, chart the course of their own lives.

Therefore, when The Mask tells Fatima, “[w]ithout us, I mean government, humanitarian agencies, NGOs, and security agencies, you IDPs would have been dead by now,” he’s displaying, like Eichmann, a profound banality rather than some kind of inherent malevolence. The Mask just cannot see things from the standpoint of others also co-existing with him in the world. He has a shrunken idea of the world in which he lives: he cannot see beyond himself. An examination of The Mask through the lens of thoughtlessness gives us a more encompassing understanding of this complex character. He is neither a lunatic nor a malignant demon hell-bent on exterminating

IDPs. He is simply and fundamentally a thoughtless person. He lives enclosed within himself and is driven by that dogged quest for self-aggrandizement and personal advancement in his career as a humanitarian actor.

Another appalling reality that *Displaced* highlights is that good people are capable of evil. Standing in an auditorium in the United Nations Headquarters in New York, *Displaced's* embodied narrator, the Performance Ethnographer, delivers a speech which contains what he calls the “Allegory of the New Sovereign.” With poise, he presents the allegory:

Imagine yourself taking a walk in a pregnant market square
On a devilishly cold day, watching how people,
In droves, pour into the arena.
Someone walks up to you, puts a pistol to your head
And strips you naked from neck to feet,
While everybody else watches,
Some in complete glee, some in shattering shock,
Some showing sympathy, some taking selfies—
Each doing something but nothing to apprehend your aggressor,
Or even berate him for you,
You, now an unprotected bundle of bare flesh
You, a prey for pornographers of suffering.

Beat.

Nobody offers you clothes to wear,
Except a sheet of transparent nylon
With which you now clad yourself
Even though you know your nakedness remains everyone's feast.

What would you do in your naked righteousness?
Would you use your hands to cover yourself in shame?
Or fight to retrieve your clothes, risking being shipped to the after-party of
afterlife?
What else would you do?
But remember, you can't flee from the scene

Because the crowd has encircled you—and,
The loaded gun is still staring at you. (3-4)

The Performance Ethnographer then explains the allegory:

Before you dismiss this allegory as unbelievable,
Know that it represents the lived experience of internally displaced persons—
aka IDPs.

The person under attack represents IDPs.

The market square denotes the society—both global and domestic
Within which IDPs find themselves.

The person with the pistol embodies all the forces
That have conspired to cause and sustain internal displacement.

You can call these invisibly visible forces “The Mask”

The crowd represents all of us, individuals and organizations,
Who watch as the encampment and subjugation of IDPs persist year after year,

But do nothing to end the displacement and ensure

The enduring return of IDPs to their original homes.

The sheet of transparent nylon and its giver symbolize

Well-intentioned humanitarian actors—both individuals and organizations

Who, rather than work to end the displacement, provide a palliative response

To the displacement in the form of relief cocktails and political talk shows.

Frankly, humanitarian actors, our success is only durable when we become
redundant.

Let’s work harder until we put ourselves out of work. (4)



Illustration 29: Performance Ethnographer and his team performing The Allegory of the New Sovereign in *Displaced*, A.B.U.

The allegory emphasizes that the perennial quick-fix response to the plight of displaced persons, either from government or humanitarian organizations, focuses attention on victims and not on the villain; on effects of displacement and not on the cause; and on palliatives rather than on prevention or resolution. One cannot but imagine what would have happened if the enthusiasm and resources so far poured into providing aid to displaced persons had, instead, been directed at uncovering and eradicating the causes of displacement, with a view to ensuring the lasting return of displaced people to their original homes. Why are governments and humanitarian organizations treating the causes of displacement with kid gloves? Why are they reluctant or ineffective in deploying all the arsenals within their power to end protracted conflict situations such as the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria and bring to justice everyone found culpable? Do they have anything to gain from the perpetuation of displacement?

A fundamental difference between IDPs and refugees consists in the fact that, although both groups are displaced, refugees have traversed the borders of their home country, while IDPs remain within their own home country. Despite remaining in their home country, IDPs still face alarming ostracism. The second-class treatment IDPs in Nigeria face within the country echoes the seminal words of James Baldwin:

It comes as a great shock around the age of 5, 6, or 7 to discover that the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledged allegiance to you. It comes as a great shock to see Gary Cooper killing off the Indians, and although you are rooting for Gary Cooper, that the Indians are you. It comes as a great shock to discover that the country which is your

birthplace and to which you owe your life and identity has not, in its whole system of reality, evolved any place for you. (“The American Dream and the American Negro”)

This quote exposes the contradictions of the American society—a situation in which the ideals of freedom, prosperity, and human rights bandied around, both nationally and internationally, become easily accessible to some groups of people, while remaining, for some others, perpetually elusive because of systemic injustices. Similarly, IDPs, parked in bloated camps like sardines, robbed of their human dignity, and deprived of their basic rights as citizens of Nigeria, often grapple with the grim reality that the country of their birth and that to which they pledge allegiance and whose national anthem they sing, “in its whole system of reality” has not “evolved any place” for them. Left at the mercy of crumbs from the table of indigenous charities and the largess from the vaults of international donors, IDPs struggle for survival. This struggle, for some female IDPs, entails trading sex for food to feed their families. At other times, it involves improvising their own sanitary pads. As Fatima reveals, “some women even make their own pads. They sew a piece of cloth together, put sand or whatever inside and seal it up, and use it as pad” (33-4).

Tired of humanitarian actors painting a skewed picture of IDPs for their fundraising drive and, by implication, perpetuating the stereotype of the helpless, flies-in-the-nostrils IDPs, Binta, a female IDP in *Displaced*, uses her camera to reposition IDPs for the rest of the world.

In her conversation with Fatima's boyfriend, Binta gives us an insight into her life before the displacement:

I was a photographer before the attack that brought me here. I still am. I also farmed. Every farming season, my husband and I had at least 50 bags of rice, 50 bags of maize, 50 bags of beans, 50 bags of millet. But now, I must struggle every month to get enough food to feed myself and my two sons. My husband died in the attack. We had four children, two died from starvation when we were hiding for weeks in the bush. (17)

Binta's story represents the new reality of many IDPs as they grapple with life in a home far away from home. This new reality exacerbates IDPs' susceptibility to harm. For instance, IDPs are susceptible to malnutrition because of the erratic and inadequate supply of food for their upkeep. They are also susceptible to hygiene-related diseases because of the inadequate lavatories in the camp and the poor sanitary conditions of the current ones.

This susceptibility to harm on the part of IDPs can also be psychological or emotional. Having lost family members in the attack by, or flight from, insurgents, many IDPs still experience traumas. Some of these traumas take the form of nightmares and attack them in their sleep. However, Binta still seeks to turn the headline away from the misery of IDPs to the agency of IDPs, and the need for humanitarian actors to activate the agency of IDPs by empowering them to help themselves, or at least, by bringing an end to the cause of their displacement so they could return home and rebuild their lives from the proceeds of their land. Binta recognizes that vulnerability does not necessarily mean being helpless. An undue focus on the helplessness narrative shuts down conversations around other aspects of vulnerability; and this shutting down has grave implications for the lives of IDPs.

Hinging our understanding of vulnerability rather on our finitude and our interaction with others in society allows us to construe vulnerability in more productive ways—in ways other than helplessness, or even loss, harm, lack, passivity, or dependency. It allows us to see vulnerability as a condition of human existence, and then treat IDPs with empathy rather than with sympathy.

Leveraging the power of the camera, Binta seeks to reset how every other person sees IDPs. How humanitarian actors look at IDPs matters, and what they see when they look at them even matters more, since what they see plays a crucial role in their treatment of IDPs and their response to IDPs' precarious living conditions. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger underscores the import of “seeing,” when he problematizes the synonymous usage of “seeing” and “looking,” pinpointing a fundamental difference between these verbs—a difference that has serious implications for our understanding and appreciation of IDPs and—I would like to add—of life in general.

According to Berger, the “way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe” (8). He adds:

We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach—though not necessarily within arm's reach. To touch something is to situate oneself in relation to it...We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are. (9)

Thus, he posits that as humans inhabit the world, we first perceive it, and only later do we name or recreate what we see. Through photographs, paintings, films, and other such human representations, we recreate what we see. This image comes as a rendition of the perspectives of the person doing the rendering as opposed to the thing in its totality. In other words, every image carries the ideological fingerprints of the image maker, be it intentional or unintentional.

Hence, beyond the surface meaning of sight or an image, there exist manifold layers of meanings. Meaning, as Diana Taylor elucidates, is “not a thing but a practice that requires the tireless and repetitive process of doing, making, unmaking, revising, retheorizing, and reconfiguring the many, many parts” (*Scenes* 372). The process of meaning-making is not value-neutral since our experiences and affinities as beings in the world affect how we conceive or perceive objects and interactions in the world. An image can help us see what the image maker wants us to see, but it can also give us an insight into the powers, beliefs, and values underlying such an image. Within the context of IDPs, rarely do they occupy the role of image makers for themselves. Humanitarian actors such as government, international organizations, security agents, NGOs, and the press often play the role of image makers for IDPs. Hence, we have a proliferation of IDP images, both mental and physical, that offer different and often competing renditions of the lived experiences of IDPs. Some of these images, although well-intentioned, exacerbate the exposure of IDPs to exploitation and marginalization.



Illustration 30: Binta tests her camera as Soldier looks on in *Displaced, A.B.U*

Binta reinforces the importance of photos not only in documenting IDPs' stories, but also in telling the stories from the vantage perspective of IDPs. For too long, she decries, the stories of IDPs have been focused on anything but the agency and dignity of IDPs, and she is bent on turning the spotlight on these essential attributes. In her conversation with Soldier, Fatima's boyfriend, she reveals:

SOLDIER: Why not give your photos to these NGOs coming around and get some money in return like some people do?

BINTA: They don't want my kind of photos.

SOLDIER: What kind of photos do they need?

BINTA: Photos of malnourished children with running nostrils and flies in their eyes. I don't take such photos.

SOLDIER: How's what you do different from what they want?

BINTA: I focus on compassion not pity, on PEOPLE with problems rather than the PROBLEMS of people. That's why I'm different.

SOLDIER: And that's why you'll remain a poor photographer.

BINTA: Exactly! But I don't mind. One day, I'll meet humanitarian workers with heads on their shoulders and humanity in their hearts, and everything else will be history. You don't need to shock donors to raise

money for our upkeep. If you must, then you don't need funds from such people.

As depicted in the above conversation, within the context of internal displacement, photos of IDPs that humanitarian actors make often focus on the suffering of IDPs to the detriment of IDPs' agency as active players in the determination of their own lives. Donors and the public get to see only what the humanitarian actors who take these pictures want them to see. In *Cultural Struggles*, Dwight Conquergood frames this pornography of suffering as a demonstration of "the curator's exhibitionism," wherein researchers (or in this case, humanitarian actors) crave "the exotic, primitive, culturally remote" and seek "to astonish rather than to understand" (73). It takes only one visit to IDP camps to realize that, although suffering exists among IDPs, this suffering also co-exists with the productivity of IDPs and their unwavering resilience in the face of adversity.

Binta's deployment of the camera to retell the stories of IDPs indeed resonates with the growing efforts by black artists, both in Africa and in the diaspora, to present an alternative view of Africa on the global stage. As Paulla A. Ebron aptly captures in *Performing Africa*, proponents of this alternative view renounce the "dystopic images of war, famine, and regional political strife" that dominate Western representations of Africa—images that portray the continent as "a timeless story of tribal rivalries, intended to invoke in the minds of its spectators the premodern" and justify "Western administrative regimes that see their way through to postcolonial dependencies" (2-3). These Africanist advocates for the reimagining of Africa in the imaginaries of the West offer counter-narratives aimed at recuperating the African soul and reclaiming

“‘African’ culture as a potent countervision to the hegemony of the West and its efforts to totalize its reach” (3). Sadly, NGOs, both local and international, have lent themselves as compelling vehicles for this totalizing mission across Africa.

While it may not necessarily interest some NGOs to showcase the resilience and productivity of IDPs as opposed to their vulnerability and dependence, the truth remains that resilience and productivity also constitute the lives of IDPs—and deserve spotlighting. Rather than tow the path of fetishizing the other, Conquergood proposes a “dialogical performance” which enables multiple voices, opinions, values, and beliefs to have a conversation with each other in the spirit of mutual respect and growth (75). Such a conversation negates the commodification of individuals or groups based on their difference or vulnerability.

Regrettably, traits of the curator’s exhibitionism exist today in humanitarian work—and permeate how humanitarian actors treat IDPs. For some humanitarian actors, the more they mine the misery of IDPs, the more aid they can secure from funding partners. Unfortunately, taking the images of IDPs out of context and transplanting them in another milieu constitutes not only an abstraction of the images, but also an alienation of the images from the memories, histories, cultures, and emotions they embody. Taken out of the milieu from which they originate, images take on a meaning far removed from their original context. That is what happens when humanitarian actors mine pictures of IDPs for only their attributes of suffering in the global village of humanitarian fundraising. What we get, in the end, becomes the commodification of the humanity of IDPs. Such perennial (sometimes inadvertent) mining of IDPs’ misery positions IDPs as objects for the gratification of the external

humanitarian gaze. It imprints on the psyche of IDPs the obligation to be submissive and 'grateful' to both state and non-state humanitarian actors. It also makes IDPs to treat these actors as if, without them, the lives of IDPs would be meaningless. Under this veil of obligated dependency, IDPs cannot aspire beyond the dreams of humanitarian actors, and these actors cannot envision IDPs beyond their vulnerability; hence, a perpetuation of the vicious cycle of aid dependency.

Using photos, Binta reframes the identity of IDPs in such a way that their humanity takes center stage. During her conversation with Soldier, she shows him an album containing photos of IDPs. While she is on stage showing him the photos, performers emerge from the audience to vocalize unique IDP stories. One after the other, the performers speak:

MEMBER A: My name is Amina Yusuf. I'm a displaced nurse, and I'm not an infectious disease.

MEMBER B: Philip Yusuf is my name. I'm a displaced tailor, and I'm not a lazy person.

MEMBER C: My name is Murtala Murtala. I'm a displaced farmer who now begs for food to survive, but I'm not my begging.

MEMBER D: Rakiya Abdul is my name. I'm a displaced girl, and I'm neither a suicide bomber nor a prostitute. (18)

Then Binta concludes with this declaration: "I'm Binta Yakoko. I'm a poor and suffering photographer, and I'm neither my poverty nor my suffering. I'm a human being with dignity." (18). Through Binta, *Displaced* re-centers the importance of photos as an archive from which art-mediated research can unveil unique knowledge about their research population. As Douglas Harper affirms in "Talking about Pictures: A Case for Photo Elicitation," arts-based approaches such as photography broaden the possibilities of conventional empirical research since they not only

generate a different kind of data, but also evoke feelings, information, and memories in such a way that the researcher is able to garner unique reflexive perspectives from the research. Photographs, just like other art forms, “jolt subjects into a new awareness of their social existence. As someone considers this new framing of taken-for-granted experiences they are able to deconstruct their own phenomenological assumptions” (Harper 21).

Berger reaffirms the repository of knowledge that photos represent, and even goes on to enunciate how the giant strides of technology have served to revolutionize how we see art. Due to the reproductive and multidimensional natures of technology, we now see art differently than we did decades ago. He explains how Da Vinci’s “Virgin of the Rocks,” for instance, no longer gets confined to the precincts of an art gallery, but can now find a home in different sizes in people’s homes, offices, and on laptops, mobile phones, and other electronic devices. Technology, no doubt, has stripped traditional art such as paintings of their one-dimensionality, immobility, and perhaps irreproducibility. With a digital camera, for example, we can now make art multidimensional, mobile, and reproductive. Consequently, technology now augments, as well as problematizes, our ways of seeing art and the world in general. For sure, it provides multiple perspectives through which we can view art and the world. Similarly, as Binta shows, technology makes possible the proliferation of the photos of IDPs, a proliferation that does more harm than good to our perception of IDPs and their capacity to help themselves and participate actively in decision-making processes that pertain to their own lives.

Through Binta's character, *Displaced* emphasizes how this same technology (i.e. the camera) which has helped to enhance our way of seeing the world can also obfuscate, if not distort, our image of the objects or subjects we see. Since we can use a camera to magnify, belittle, or hide certain elements of an object, the person in charge of the camera can also project onto the consumers only those elements that the person wants the consumers to see or digest. Hence, this technological tool can also be used as a tool for both empowerment and marginalization.

Nevertheless, through visual images, whether still or motion, researchers can interrogate and decenter dominant narratives of minoritarian subjects whose voices and perspectives on issues that affect them we rarely hear. In addition to making the personal political, visual images can also expose deep-seated prejudices nestled in the vertical relationship between the dominant culture and minoritarian subjects. Dawn Mannay's "Who Put that on There...Why Why Why?" also gives credence to the evocative potency of visual methods in unravelling meanings when she reckons that "[v]isual images are widely recognized as having the potential to evoke empathetic understanding of the ways in which other people experience their worlds" and that the images not only limit the "intrusive presence of the researcher," but also help in "gaining a more nuanced understanding of the lives of others" (136).

Letters, like photos, reveal the relational dynamics between IDPs and camp officials. They possess the power to animate anxiety within IDPs in their relations with camp officials. We see the anxiety-creating potentials of letters at work when The Mask threatens Musa and Fatima with eviction from the camp if they refuse his request for them to perform during a visit of dignitaries to the camp. He tells them to

“feel free to come and collect [their] eviction letter and leave this camp immediately,” should they decide to reject his request, which he eventually restates as a command (11). In response to the threat of eviction, they comply immediately, even though Fatima turns this compliance into an opportunity to shame The Mask.

Another instance in the play where the deployment of a letter as a tool for control resurfaces is when The Mask asks Binta: “What’s in this big, ugly bag that you carry everywhere?” (10). Unhappy with The Mask’s description of her bag, she replies, “Everything that’s not your business” (10). The Mask did not see that kind of response coming, especially from an IDP—and an IDP that’s not Fatima for that matter. He knows full well that his proximity to Fatima has indeed bred contempt. In a show of force, he scribbles on a piece of paper, while telling Binta, “I’m writing your eviction letter already” (10). Aware of the seriousness of The Mask’s threat, Binta, touching him on the shoulder, asks him: “Can’t somebody joke with you again?” Happy that Binta has recognized the power he wields over her, he rescinds his threat of eviction, saying, while crushing the paper on which he was writing her eviction letter: “That was an expensive joke” (10). After putting the paper back into his pocket, The Mask warns Binta, as if to reinforce her disposability: “It [the joke] could send you away from this camp” (10).

Jonathan Darling’s “Another Letter from the Home Office” illuminates the importance of official letters in uncovering not just layers of meaning but also the positionality and power relations they command in a top-down relationship between the state, for instance, and subjects such as asylum seekers. An official letter is not just a governmental object, a legal document but an “affective ‘thing’ that produces,

reiterates and reconstitutes practices in and through relations” (495). So, a letter is not just technical but also material—in terms of it being an entanglement of associations and collectives; “through their effects, through the relations they enact and the affects they produce” (485). Binta, Fatima, and Musa, just like IDPs whom they represent, have indeed felt the effects of letters and the affect they produce in their relations with humanitarian actors, especially camp officials. Matthew Hull’s “Documents and Bureaucracy” also consolidates Darling’s view, buttressing that documents are not mere instruments of bureaucratic organizations, but rather constitute bureaucratic rules. They are also not just text, but an embodiment of relations among materiality and forms, technology, and practice (253).

How IDPs interact with humanitarian actors when confronted with documents such as eviction letters is itself a performance—a performance of their fear, anxiety, insecurity, disposability, and, in fact, shrewd survival strategies. Performance, as Taylor enunciates, are “acts of transfer,” which “allow for the transmission of traditions, trajectories, influences, and histories” (*Scenes* 371). As shown in the interaction between The Mask and the IDPs under his care, performance lends itself to the transmission of influences from humanitarian actors to IDPs. In fact, one could also argue that the transmission is two-way, in the sense that by acquiescing to the power of The Mask, the IDPs (i.e. Binta, Musa and Fatima) equally succeed in influencing him. They successfully influence his decision not to carry out the threat of eviction.

Their ability to influence his decision refocuses, within the context of internal displacement, the relationship between vulnerability and the exposure of the body to

power. I argue that vulnerability does not necessarily entail loss or the susceptibility to harm, but an affirmation of both our finitude as human persons and our interaction/interdependence with others in society. In other words, vulnerability reminds us of the limitations that our humanity imposes on us—a limitation that does not necessarily lead to susceptibility to harm or exploitation but opens us up to the opportunities for interdependence that being a human person in the world brings. Consequently, vulnerability, holistically construed, can be both perilous and enabling. What matters, in the end, is not so much the reality of one’s vulnerability but what individuals do with their vulnerability and what they allow it to do to or for them in their dealings with others in society. As shown in Binta, Musa, and Fatima’s acquiescence to the manipulations of The Mask, IDPs also have the power to leverage their vulnerability in such a way that they can influence the decisions of humanitarian actors.

In “Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance,” Judith Butler emphasizes this point, and explains how individuals can turn their vulnerability into a performance of resistance. She notes:

In many of the public assemblies that draw people who understand themselves to be in precarious positions, the demand to end precarity is enacted publicly by those who expose their vulnerability to failing infrastructural conditions; there is plural and performative bodily resistance at work that shows how bodies are being acted on by social and economic policies that are decimating livelihoods. But these bodies, in showing this precarity, are also resisting these very powers. (15)

Hence, vulnerability must not be construed to mean passivity, or as being antithetical to resistance. In their vulnerability, IDPs still possess agency and they can choose to deploy it through the liminal space of performance to resist all the structures of power that have caused their displacement and have continued to keep them displaced against their volition. By subjecting themselves to a mental house-cleaning exercise that enables them to see that they too are human beings deserving of decent living, IDPs can re-tool their vulnerability to serve as a potent intrinsic power for the resistance of oppression and the transformation of their lives.

Pertinently, vulnerability, broadly construed, does not necessarily entail the requirement of the protection or sustenance of paternalistic power. In other words, the vulnerability of individuals does not render them inactive in decision-making processes that involve their lives or how we treat their images, bodies, and memories. By the same token, their vulnerability does not give license to government, organizations, or other individuals to assume paternalistic control over their lives or bodies. Unfortunately, vulnerability as passivity-needing-paternalistic-power reigns in the lives of IDPs in their engagement with humanitarian actors, even among those who are well-intentioned.

The term “paternalism” stems from the Latin word “pater,” which means “father.” Hence, the underlying idea propping up paternalism is the exemplification of a father-like behavior in the life of someone else. But beyond this smoke of fatherly responsibility is often the fiery reification of a hierarchical structure rooted in a power differential that assumes that one person is more powerful, more knowledgeable, and better equipped than another person to make decisions about his or her life.

In its iteration as benevolent paternalism, which often takes place in the management of IDPs, paternalism takes this troubling form: I know what is good for you better than you do; therefore, it's my right to interfere in your life to make you better off. As a result, policymakers, security agents, camp officials, international organizations, and local NGOs often make decisions for IDPs without consulting them. Sometimes these decisions are beneficial but, at other times, they are at best misguided. In her conversation with the Mask, Fatima laments this exclusion of IDPs from affairs directly related to their lives:

... But who consults us, even on matters that concern us directly? Nobody! People just seat in their homes or offices or in their countries and decide what's best for us and just come here and implement them...and then write their evaluation reports...everything's good and they get more funding. (25)

Thus, benevolent paternalism feeds off the lingering conviction about the right to interfere with the liberty or autonomy of another person provided it is for their own good. But how well can we ever know another person, let alone know better than the person what is good for that individual? How are we sure that what we think is good for someone is actually good for the person as opposed to being the good we seek for ourselves, which may not in fact be the best choice for the person we are trying to help?

The above quote from Fatima emerges from my story circles with IDPs where they aired their frustration with the maladministration of aid in the camp. Such story circles not only helped IDPs to vent their anger but also served as a site for an engaged production of systems "wherein tacit understandings, inferred practices and theoretical assumptions can be made explicit and can, in turn, be queried and contested" (Kershaw and Nicholson 2). In these story circles, as in *Displaced*, IDPs (without

framing the question as such) question the logic and utility of benevolent paternalism at work in their lives in the camp and call for a reappraisal of the aid architecture in the country. This act of masquerading to help someone when, in fact, we are only helping ourselves, is a major flaw in benevolent paternalism. And it does not take a trained eye to notice this.

The Nigerian government's paternalism towards IDPs reminds me of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco's *Couple in the Cage* which radically performs the voyeuristic appetites of hegemonic systems wherein spectators trooped to watch the performers not for who they were as human beings but for their exotic primitivism which they interpreted as mimicking the uncouth existence of natives in Mexico (Taylor, *Savage* 164-5).

Another performance that problematizes the caging of a human person is Migdalia Cruz's *Fur*. In the play, Michael, purporting to rescue the caged Citrona from the derision and exploitation of the public, procures her, only to keep her still encaged in his house as an object for his own admiration and gratification. Whereas he thinks that what is good for Citrona is to remain in that iron cage while he continues to feed her, what Citrona believes to be good for her is her release from the cage and her winning of Nena's affection. Like Cruz's *Fur*, Gómez-Peña and Fusco's *Couple in the Cage* performs the colonialist attitude of producing the *savage other* from the bodies of non-Western minority populations for use as artifacts to be exhibited and fetishized within the hegemonic voyeuristic architecture of the West. Both performances also offer a critique of benevolent paternalism by revealing the folly in the paternalistic

assumption of authoritarian structures that present themselves as knowing better than minoritarian individuals what is best for them.

A similar scenario of benevolent paternalism plays out in one of the conversations Fatima has with the Mask in *Displaced*. Angry with the Mask's assertion that IDPs are ungrateful following her request for sanitary pads, Fatima vents her frustration in a furious assault on paternalistic tendencies, saying:

...tell them [government and non-state aid agents] what our needs are...our needs vary from camp to camp and from time to time and from gender to gender and from age to age...and there's nothing wrong in hearing from us too, IDPs, what our real needs are...not the needs that you guys imagine for us...from your ivory bubbles. Our voice matters too. (32)

This scene in the play showcases the importance of performance ethnography as a vehicle that allows, as Norman K. Denzin fittingly notes, an embodied unique kind of knowing since it creates situations in which performed experiences serve as “the sites where felt emotion, memory, desire, and understanding come together” (13). The above scene not only captures the emotion, memory, and desire of IDPs, but also demonstrates how the wanton exclusion of IDPs from decisions that centrally affect their welfare and lives generate anguish within them, increasing their sense of helplessness and worthlessness. Such an exclusion, as Freire affirms, constitutes an exploitation of one's humanity, since “to alienate humans from their own decision making is to change them into objects” (85). In a bid to mitigate the adverse effects of exclusion on their well-being, IDPs resort to trade and barter, a system that allows them to enter into an aid exchange with other IDPs who might have what they need. In the absence of someone to barter with, IDPs go into town and sell off their aid at a

relatively cheap rate and use the money derived from the sale to procure what they really need.

IDPs, because of their overwhelming feeling of liability, often find themselves lost in no-man's-land, or what Victor Turner aptly calls the space of "liminality" (79). As liminal entities, IDPs recognize that they are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial...[T]hus, liminality is frequently linked to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility..." ("Liminality" 79-80). Imagine living in the womb as an adult and the invisibility and indeterminacy such a condition foists on you. You exist; yet you cannot seize control of decision-making processes that determine the sustenance or lack thereof of your life, let alone the promotion of your freedom and wellbeing. That is how IDPs often view their lives.

The loss of control over their ability to determine their own lives and their own narratives can be debilitating to IDPs at different levels, including the physical, emotional, psychological, economic, and socio-cultural facets of their lives. Some of them even toy with the idea of committing suicide, either as an escape from a seemingly endless misery or as a show of defiance in the face of adversity. In the play, Musa soliloquizes: "A displaced man they've made me, but a dead man they can't. I'll fight them. I'll fight back, not with bullets or knives, but with something mightier. My will. I'll fight them with my will. My life I won't allow them take. That's weakness. My life I'll take myself" (7). In the soliloquy, Musa, following the loss of his wife and daughters and the seeming endlessness of his displacement, justifies his attempt to

commit suicide as a show of defiance. A bomb blast in a nearby IDP camp eventually disrupts his suicide attempt.

Tellingly, the feeling of liability engenders fear in IDPs, forcing many of them to resort to its suppression or the adoption of a life of denial where they wish away their reality or trade it for a promise of a blissful life guaranteed only in their imagination or in holy books. Contrary to the dominant view of many humanitarian actors, IDPs find it debilitating to be in perennial need of others for their own protection, welfare, and future. Deprived of the freedom to determine their own lives, IDPs suffer a great deal of trauma. They find themselves *controlled by* external forces rather than being in *control of* their lives. Having already lost control of their own wellbeing, they also face the perennial threat of erasure emanating from not being able to make concrete decisions about their own lives. They cannot decide for themselves how long their displacement will be, what quality of life they will lead, or what kinds of lives their children can aspire to.

The powers of governmentality that hold sway over their lives as displaced people make such decisions on their behalf, regardless of whether the decisions correlate with what ordinarily the IDPs would have decided for themselves and their children. Hence, a major goal of *Displaced*, as a performance ethnography project, is to tell the stories of IDPs in such a way that it does not undermine their agency and capacity for resilience in the face of adversity. As Madison precisely enunciates in *Critical Ethnography*, performance ethnographers, through their work and dealings with marginalized populations, need to demonstrate:

...a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on principles of human freedom and well-being and, hence, a compassion for the suffering of living beings. The conditions for existence within a particular context are not as they *could* be for specific subjects; as a result, the researcher feels an ethical obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions towards greater freedom and equity. (5)

Rather than treat IDPs according to dominant narratives which often portray them as a time bomb waiting to explode and kill the rest of us, or as infectious diseases warranting quarantine or extermination, or even as helpless beggars, *Displaced* heeds Madison's clarion call and, thus, seeks to provide a counter-narrative which distils IDPs' affective humanity and repurposes their otherness towards creative diversity and social cohesion.

Even though I found my experience on the field largely demoralizing because of my firsthand immersion in the human-made misery of IDPs, it has brought me to a greater understanding of IDPs' rich repositories of knowledge. It has also made me realize how far as a people we have drifted away from recognizing the humanity of others with whom we share the globe. Rather than join the bandwagon of exhibitionist humanitarianism that fetishizes and sensationalizes the misery of IDPs by opting rather to continuously decry their suffering, *Displaced*, while enunciating the suffering of IDPs, endeavors to offer to the world an image of IDPs as change agents and as people capable of working towards their own emancipation and the transformation of their living conditions—if only government and their aid partners would support an enabling environment for IDPs to exercise their freedom and agency.

In *Displaced*, just as in my conversations, interviews and story circles with internally displaced persons, displacement has been framed as a human reality as opposed to being an abstraction of statistics. Displacement, for IDPs, is not about statistics but about real people floundering at the margins between hope and despair, between the never-ending present and the elusive future, and between the allure of life and the perceived imminence of death. Any reduction of displacement to mere numbers does tremendous disservice to IDPs and their experience of displacement.

Certainly, *Displaced* depicts the interplay between IDPs and humanitarian actors as a theatre in itself. Occasionally, the interplay appears to be a theatre of the oppressed project in the Boalian sense, but, at other times, it looks like a theatre of the absurd as captured in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where we see the protagonist ceaselessly pushing his rock up the mountain only for it to roll back down each time he succeeds in getting it to the top. Irrespective of how we frame this interplay between IDPs and humanitarian actors, one thing is clear: we can neither deny nor wish away its effects on the lives and livelihoods of IDPs living in a situation where their otherness continually mediates and delineates their existence. As *Displaced* divulges, this otherness comprises as much of a burden for IDPs as it presents a potent force for the dismantling of hegemonic systems of injustice that seek to disenfranchise IDPs and keep them perpetually in subjugation.

In the end, *Displaced* refuses to fetishize the misery of IDPs. It repudiates the incentive to focus on the despairing situation of IDPs to the detriment of their capacity as change agents and self-determined people. Although aware of the systemic injustice IDPs face in camps, the ethnographic performance unapologetically resists the allure

of projecting IDPs as hapless victims. Rather than focus on the victimhood of IDPs, it re-purposes this experience of victimization for collective creativity and empowerment. This collective meaning-making needs to be understood against the backdrop of the postcolonial turn which is not bereft of candid reflections on a people's emplacement in society and in history. History here should be understood as intricately bound with the present and as a foreshadowing of the future, no matter how bleak or promising that future may be.

Therefore, an honest reflection on the use and abuse of vulnerability, especially within the context of IDPs, calls for an account that flips the prevailing understanding of vulnerability as lack or helplessness and allows for an understanding that situates vulnerability within the ontological framework of our finitude and relatedness as human beings. Such an understanding will not privilege the 'powerlessness' and dependency of IDPs to the detriment of their agency and capacity for decision-making and productivity. Under this emergent understanding of vulnerability, IDPs need not perceive their vulnerability as an inalienable burden to be suppressed or denied, but as an affirmation of their shared reality as finite beings. After all, vulnerability (ontologically construed) reminds us of the limitation that our humanity imposes on us—a limitation that does not necessarily lead to susceptibility to harm but opens us up to opportunities for interdependence. When construed as an essential constituent of being human—of being in the world—dependence becomes a human value to be celebrated and not a vice or shortcoming to be despised. It becomes a window through which we understand that no human person lives in a vacuum—that we

always live in association with others. And because nobody is self-sufficient, individuals depend on each other to live and thrive in society.

Certainly, the displacement that IDPs experience does not in any way exclude them from the human community within which interdependence presents itself as inalienable. This reality of interdependence transcends the confines of the camps of displaced persons to include the local community, state, country, continent, and the global village in which IDPs find themselves. Within this purview, aid administration assumes a new meaning—a human(e) meaning: providing aid to IDPs no longer becomes a matter of catering to IDPs’ ‘laziness’ or dependency on others for aid, but a matter of interdependence among human persons. It is their turn today; we never know whose turn it will be tomorrow. Also, humanitarian aid, under this fresh understanding, ceases to be a matter of charity but rather a fulfilment of our duty towards the wellbeing of a fellow human being. It is not essentially a case of *benevolence*; it is simply *the right thing* to do—as individuals bonded together by a shared thread of humanity.

EPILOGUE

HOPE IN THE TIME OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

No matter how long the night is morning will come.

—African proverb

Anybody anywhere can become displaced at any time. An individual is not *born*, but, rather, *becomes* an internally displaced person (IDP). Displacement, though a human reality, does not constitute the essence of IDPs; rather, it is a transient attribute constituted in time and deployed as a bureaucratic instrument of legibility to delineate a people, their lives, and their landscape. The knotty act of delineation presents a partial view of the reality of IDPs and problematizes the lives of this displaced population, most of whom find themselves at the fringes of the state in reckless abandon to the ‘invisible’ hand of international donors, the unbridled venality of local aid administrators, and the Hobbesian quest for survival within IDP camps. Treated as if their mental capacity has been displaced along with their bodies, IDPs find themselves reduced, sometimes inadvertently, to both a form of *tabula rasa* onto which the state imprints its preconceived project designs and a laboratory in which sundry humanitarian actors conduct ‘interventionist’ programs qua clinical trials.

As Judith Butler said of gender, the term IDP is “in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*” (‘Performative Acts’ 519). This stylized repetition of acts pinpoints the “social temporality” of such an identity and its performative nature, particularly its openness or susceptibility to repetitions, breaks, subversions, and transformations (520).

Therefore, displacement does not ontologically define the identity of IDPs. In other words, the identity of IDPs is not essentially about their physical reality of displacement, but about a process, a continuum, which eludes fossilization, and typifies the dynamic and lived experience of this displaced population.

Put differently, IDP is not a static concept or attribute, but a signifying process of continually self-replicating and self-spreading configuration. This implies that the identity of IDPs, just like their history, is not fossilized in the past, but is in constant conversation with the present and relentlessly poses a question for the future within the context of the fluid boundaries and barometers of human existence. This different way of thinking about IDP identity takes into cognizance the fluidity of being an IDP, and the new and dynamic modes of perceiving, conceiving, interpreting, and representing IDP identity within the context of open-ended history. More so, this kind of thinking situates an understanding of IDPs within the visceral purview of performance.

W. E. B. Du Bois' idea of double consciousness which provides a theoretical framework for understanding the experience of being black in white America also offers a conceptual window into understanding IDPs. Du Bois enunciates in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's

soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (45)

Although there are over two million IDPs in Nigeria, they remain a minority in a country of approximately 180 million people. Though they are citizens of Nigeria, they remain a minority in the eyes of the wider society that holds them in disdain, or in the words of DuBois, a society that “looks on in amused contempt and pity” while they languish in encampment unaware of when or if they would ever return home and have a normal life. Treated as strangers in their own country, IDPs look at themselves from the perspective of the majority, and habitually internalize the negative narratives attached to IDPs, thereby looking at themselves through these negativities. However, in addition to this double consciousness, IDPs experience an extra level of consciousness; hence, I opine that IDPs altogether experience what I would call a “triple consciousness”.

True, they experience a double consciousness in the sense of looking at themselves through the eyes of the dominant society that regards them with contempt. But there is an extra type of consciousness that they experience: the consciousness of their imagined selves, which happens after, or regardless of, their consciousness of self through the eyes of the dominant culture. Therein lies the hope they feel in the time of internal displacement. Within this zone of triple consciousness, IDPs live in a spectrum of liminality that ranges from utter despondency to outright hopefulness. Victor Turner aptly describes this liminal state, when he explains that “[l]iminal entities

are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial” (“Liminality” 79). This liminality, Turner adds, is “frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness...to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon” (80). For IDPs, the liminal zone of a triple consciousness of self allows them to confront the harsh vicissitudes of displacement head-on, purge themselves of negative stereotypes associated with their identity as displaced persons, and undergo rebirth through a conscious acceptance of their current reality while also aspiring for a better life for themselves within or without displacement.

Maya Angelou’s “Caged Bird” offers a metaphor for understanding the hope IDPs manifest in the time of internal displacement. In the first three stanzas, she writes:

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard

on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom. (Angelou 194)



Illustration 31: IDPs in a “cage” waiting to meet with humanitarian actors

IDPs are like Angelou’s bird that has been caged, with wings clipped and feet tied and, though afraid, still “sings of freedom.” The caged bird is a metaphor for the African American experience, especially its enduring dignity and resilience in the face of manifold incarceration. The poem juxtaposes the bird’s aspiration for freedom with its current troubling situation of imprisonment. While a “free bird leaps/on the back of the wind/...dips his wing/in the orange sun rays/and dares to claim the sky,” the caged bird “can seldom see through/his bars of rage/his wings are clipped and/ his feet are tied.” Nevertheless, in bold transgression of the panoply of forces that have kept the bird subjugated and incarcerated, the bird still “opens his throat to sing,” even if it means singing “with a fearful trill/of things unknown...for the caged bird sings of freedom.”

Like the bird in Angelou's poem, IDPs resent the "cage" in which the government and Boko Haram insurgents have put them. IDPs view the camp as a cage, a kind of imprisonment. The camp serves as a constant reminder for them of their reduction to toddlers who must depend on others for survival. It also makes them feel like diseased individuals who must be quarantined in order not to infect the rest of society. Yet, rather than wallow in self-pity by looking at themselves through the eyes of a society or world that looks down on them, IDPs, like the caged bird, dream of the "the distant hill" from which their "tune" could be heard. This distant hill appears in their imagination—that liminal space that allows for the creation of an imagined self, that self that sings of freedom from the physical, psychological, emotional, and socio-economic cage of internal displacement—and, in fact, realizes it in the realm of creative imagination. The imagined self does not constitute a dystopian idea but one that gets materialized through an individual's committed introspection and social interaction with others.

The African proverb, "no matter how long the night is morning will come," aptly captures the existential foundation of the imagined self. This imagined self does fuel IDPs' resolve to continue to negotiate survival in the camp, even as they "feel like a problem" (José Muñoz). As Muñoz articulates in his theorization of minoritarian subjects exposed to the otherizing gaze of the dominant culture, "feeling like a problem is about feeling apart, feeling separate," just as it is also "a mode of minoritarian recognition" (441). Since minoritarian subjects cannot wish away the label of "problem," Muñoz suggests for them a "reparative move," which includes "holding on to the problematic, fractured, and negated status of self within the social

and working through such a position, striving to find new ways of living in the world that are pleasurable, ethical, and indeed ‘tolerable’” (446). For IDPs, one of these “new ways of living in the world” constitutes an imagination of a better life for themselves far away from the encumbrances of encampment. Although futuristic in orientation, this new self which they have imagined for themselves feels near, and energizes them to do all within their power to remain alive, one day at a time, in complete disregard for prevailing circumstances in the country which do not suggest a foreseeable end to their displacement.

In their eyes, I see hope embodied. Beyond this dissertation, I intend to interrogate ‘hope’ through an exploration of prevailing perspectives in philosophy and psychology and, in the end, sketch a perspective that typifies how IDPs embody hope. Particularly, I am interested in how hope, for IDPs, denotes a present orientation. While not discounting the future orientation of hope, the orientation of hope towards the present gives us a unique window into understanding how IDPs survive the vicissitudes of the present while still looking forward to a better tomorrow.

In addition to the exploration of hope, I intend to write two more plays from the findings of my fieldwork. The first will focus on two crucial accounts of IDPs sparsely captured in *Displaced*: (a) the horrors they experienced during the Boko Haram assaults that led to their displacement, and (b) the bravery they demonstrated in their meandering journey to safety after the assaults. The second play will explore the lives of security agents who are fighting the insurgents, and how they too, as flesh and blood, have trials and tribulations, friends and foes, families and dependents, flaws

and successes, and are both villains and victims in the ongoing offensive against the terrorist group.

There is no gainsaying that performance reveals issues in the world about which all of us can do something to bring about meaningful social change. It also presents IDPs as vulnerable but valuable members of society who possess a warehouse of experiences that could be accessed to arrive at a better understanding of their reality of displacement and the administration of aid in IDP camps. If we pause to listen to IDPs and their stories of camp life, we will come to a deeper understanding of aid administration in IDP camps, including the fact that good people are capable of evil. Humanitarian actors, more specifically, are notoriously good, but they too, as people who do good things, can also do evil.

I equally plan to explore, document, and examine multiple performances of *Displaced*, illuminating connections and variances across geographic, cultural, racial, religious, and ethno-political contexts, with a view to accentuating internal displacement as a defining reality of our time and of humanity as a whole. Similarly, I intend to deepen and share my research on the multiplex subject of conflict-induced internal displacement in the global south, particularly the vexed relations between humanitarian actors and IDPs. While decentering internal displacement and decolonizing humanitarianism through self-reflexive dialectics and critical analysis, the project will revisit pedagogies of embodiment, representation, and interpretation, and accentuate my overarching conviction that, until displaced populations become the narrators of their own experiences, no matter how bleak or beautiful these might be, the dominant narratives that project their reality to the outside world will not only be

partial and exclusionary, but will also privilege the norms, perspectives, and prejudices of the external storyteller, no matter how well-intentioned that person might be. And, until the unique views, needs and context of displaced persons get mainstreamed into humanitarian interventions, the goal of ensuring the wellbeing and security of displaced persons as well as their eventual return home will remain elusive.

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