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Choosing to stay: The Resilience-Accessibility Framework as a new perspective on immobility amidst adversity

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Abstract

Current migration studies often prioritize Western-centric and individualistic perspectives, focusing on persons fleeing adversity. As a result, the staying behaviours of communities, particularly those who choose immobility in areas affected by violent conflict and other adversities, are often overlooked. In addition, existing theoretical frameworks fail to capture the distinctive migratory processes and experiences of communities committed to remaining on their ancestral lands. This article introduces the resilience–accessibility framework, a novel analytical framework developed by integrating theoretical insights from the aspirations–capabilities framework with qualitative data from focus group discussions involving 106 respondents in conflict-affected communities in the Middle Belt region in Nigeria. While the framework primarily addresses immobility in conflict-affected areas, it also applies to collectives, such as Indigenous communities, facing challenges like climatic stress, natural disasters, environmental degradation, and governance instability. By broadening the scope of (im)mobility categories, this article offers a framework that foregrounds often-excluded experiences of immobility. It provides analytical tools to examine how resilience, resource accessibility, and structural conditions shape collective decisions to stay put, particularly in communities in the Global South. In doing so, it addresses a persistent research opportunity in migration studies, where immobility remains under-theorized, especially in conditions of adversity.

Keywords: (im)mobility; resilience–accessibility framework; conflict; adversity; migration.

1. Introduction

Nigeria's Middle Belt is widely known as the country's region most affected by eco-violence. Eco-violence is the violent conflict between sedentary farmers and nomadic Fulani herders over access to and control of land, water, and other agricultural resources (Olumba et al. 2022). It has left millions displaced, thousands dead, and entire communities destroyed (Nwankwo 2023; Olumba 2024a). These violent conflicts are particularly pronounced in the Middle Belt (Olumba 2024a; Nwankwo 2024; Nwosu et al. 2025), where the sedentary farmers from the Idoma and Tiv ethnic groups, amongst others, assert their indigeneity in these communities (Olumba 2023). Whereas the nomadic Fulani

herders, part of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, claim rights to agricultural resources there, such as grazing pastures for their cattle, based on perceived ancestral connections to the Sokoto Caliphate, which they argue once ruled parts of the Middle Belt (Ochonu 2014; Maiangwa 2017: 286, 2020).

It is well known that Nigeria's security agencies do provide little or no security in rural communities. Even when these communities are attacked, and the police or army are informed (sometimes during prolonged attacks lasting days), these security agencies always fail to intervene to protect lives and property (Oyewole 2016; Okoye et al. 2024). Thus, violent disputes between these groups often lead to mass killings, destruction of farmland, cattle, seed barns, houses, and mass displacement of people from their (Olumba 2024b). A recent study conducted in the Middle Belt identifies displacement from ancestral homes as the most severe loss reported by victims (Tade 2022: 174), though not everyone flees despite the violence. As Fröhlich and Müller-Funk (2023: 211) observe, most displacement occurs within conflict-affected countries in the Global South, where violence influences migratory choices.

There is a prevailing perception of migration as a normative aspect of human life, which hinders the understanding of immobility (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Stockdale and Haartsen 2018; Schewel 2020). This 'mobility bias' (Schewel 2020: 329) '… leads scholars to focus on migration's "drivers" and to overlook the countervailing forces that restrict or resist them'. This emphasis on movement over stasis also shapes how immobility is studied. As Olumba (2024c: 484) notes, "… the 'mobility bias' (Schewel, 2020: 332) that highlights migration issues over immobility issues is mirrored in immobility studies by a bias favoring "immobility experiences abroad" over those within Nigeria". Immobility is the act of continuously residing in a specific location at a particular time, whether for short or long durations, within a country or across international borders (Schewel 2020: 329). The concept of (im)mobility is used here to represent both mobility and immobility (Gruber 2021: 277). It is widely believed that individuals inevitably relocate during crises. However, Biehler (2023) argues that more people remain in conflict zones than is often acknowledged. Similarly, '… it is important to recognise that *most people, even in the face of conflict in fact do not leave …*' (Erdal, Mjelva, and Tollefsen 2023: 5 italics in original).

Despite the 'compelling call to investigate immobility' (Bogdan 2024: 2), the decision-making processes that guide individuals to stay put have received scant scholarly attention. In addition, Salazar (2021a: 16) criticizes the 'Western-centric' focus of scholarship on immobility and argues for including non-Western perspectives to enrich our comprehension of the lived and physical aspects of immobility. He further noted that there is an overwhelming focus on individuals. In line with this, Stockdale and Haartsen (2018: 6) call for future research to explore collective migratory experiences, such as 'family life strategies, who stays (or moves, or returns) and when, [and] the roles played by different family members, peers, or the home community in the decision to stay'. Thus, investigating immobility at the collective level among Indigenous communities, particularly in regions affected by violent conflicts, adverse climatic conditions, or natural disasters, provides opportunities for further studies. A more pressing challenge identified in the literature is the absence of a robust theoretical framework or model for conducting such studies (Stockdale and Haartsen 2018; Mallick, Priovashini, and Schanze 2023), especially for analyzing people's staying behaviour in adverse conditions. Mallick, Priovashini, and Schanze (2023: 1) state, 'So far, there exists hardly any conceptual and methodical guidelines to study environmental non-migration'. This lack of frameworks becomes even more pronounced in conflict-affected settings (Biehler 2023), where the study of immobility, particularly among Indigenous communities in the Global South, remains under theorized and inadequately addressed (Olumba 2024c). In response, this article introduces the *resilience–accessibility framework*. The resilience–accessibility framework integrates insights from existing frameworks and concepts with the empirical findings from a qualitative study with 106 participants across

different rural communities in the Nigerian Middle Belt. Among the worst affected areas in the Middle Belt is the Agatu Local Government Area, home to the Idoma-speaking Indigenous Odi[1], Abu, and Utu communities of agrarian farmers. Some Idoma-speaking communities are believed to have been in the region for almost 700 years (Armstrong 2017: 91). This study sought to interview these sedentary farmers to capture their migratory experiences of displacement, return and active immobility, even in conditions of severe eco-violence.[2] Initially, the study conducted in the Middle Belt was guided by the *aspirations–capability framework* (Schewel 2020; de Haas 2021), a seminal framework that integrates structure and agency in analyzing immobility, making it useful for exploring *why people stay*. However, using this framework to analyze conflict-affected communities in the study locations revealed some limitations. According to Schewel (2020: 346) '… one limitation to the aspiration–capability framework … is that it presents (im)mobility categories in relation to the capability to migrate'.

To address this limitation, additional analytical tools were needed to account for the conditions shaping (im)mobility from the perspective of remaining (*how people stay*); this would involve drawing on spiritual and cultural beliefs and acts of violent resistance to better understand the decision to stay, practices that were prominent in the communities under study. Using a combined deductive-inductive approach (Park, Bahrudin, and Han 2020), the resilience–accessibility framework is developed as a tool for analysing (im)mobility in adversity, especially among Indigenous people living on ancestral land.

The resilience–accessibility framework contributes to migration studies by offering novel analytical tools to capture overlooked factors that drive and sustain people's staying behaviour; it adopts the 'immobility perspectives'[3] (Stockdale and Haartsen 2018: 2). In addition, the framework broadens the (im)mobility categories to capture a wider spectrum of migratory experiences not accounted for by existing frameworks. The framework's core premise is that understanding people's decisions to stay put or not in adverse circumstances involves considering multiple factors, including their resilience capacity, agency, and access to specific resources, as well as how structures and adversities shape their decisions.

The connection between violent conflict and migration is complex and shaped by multiple factors (Adamson 2021: 251). This complexity is also evident in attempts to understand why and how some groups stay put in their communities despite adversity. The aim of this framework is to '… explains primarily *how* and *why* some phenomena occur' (Gregor 2006: 624, italics in original). This study contributes to migration research by providing tools to examine the mechanisms that drive and sustain immobility in the face of adversity, particularly among Indigenous communities in the Global South.

This article proceeds by outlining existing migration theories and evaluating their relevance for understanding immobility processes in conflict settings. Thereafter, I discuss the methodological approach used in the empirical study conducted in the Nigerian Middle Belt, which informed the development of the resilience–accessibility framework. This is followed by a conceptualization of the framework's components. The framework is introduced and applied to illustrate its key elements. Inclusive (im)mobility categories are also presented and followed by a discussion and conclusion.

2. Understanding immobility: migration theories in conflict settings

Several studies have explored the factors that drive and sustain (im)mobility in adversity-affected areas (Adhikari 2003; Krakowski 2017; McMichael et al. 2021; Mallick, Priovashini, and Schanze 2023; Wiegel et al. 2021; Olumba 2024c). The focus of this section is to outline migration theories and assess their relevance in capturing migratory processes, primarily immobility, in contexts of adversity such as conflict settings. Therefore, it does not constitute a literature review of immobility or non-migration.

Despite the plethora of theoretical frameworks that explain why some individuals migrate and others do not, a lack of unified understanding persists (Castles 2010: 1566). This research opportunity becomes critical when it relates to the migratory experiences of those who stay put in adverse environments (see, Marston 2020; Santos and Mourato 2022; Biehler 2023; Erdal and Hagen-Zanker 2023; Erdal, Mjelva, and Tollefsen 2023; Bogdan 2024; Hagen-zanker, Rubio, and Erdal 2024). Adversity[4] refers to hardships or challenging situations often associated with difficult life events (Luthar and Cicchetti 2000; Lawrence-Bourne et al. 2020: 5). It can manifest as individual experiences, such as loss of employment or bereavement, which then affect families and communities, or as macro-level challenges, like the COVID-19 pandemic or economic crises, which can create ripple effects from the macro level to the community to the individual (Lawrence-Bourne et al. 2020). Adversity is understood here as 'rural adversity' (Lawrence-Bourne et al. 2020: 5), which may manifest as violent conflicts, droughts, fires, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, or rising sea levels, among other challenges. Community violence is an example of adversity (Luthar and Cicchetti 2000: 858).

Functionalist theories of migration, such as the push-pull model and neoclassical migration theories, posit that migration is motivated by the desire to maximize income and overcome economic opportunity deficits (de Haas 2014; De Haas, Miller, and Castles, 2020). These theories depict individuals as 'passive actors' who respond primarily to economic factors. This perspective limits their agency (Richmond 1993; de Haas 2014: 17) and overlooks the influence of non-economic factors on migratory decisions and experiences (de Haas 2010b, 2014; Schewel 2015, 2020).

Historical-structural approaches to the study of migration, such as the dependency and world system theories (Arango 2000; de Haas 2014), assert that international migration is influenced by global hegemonic and economic structures and processes that create the conditions for the flow of people between the South and North (Massey et al. 1993). The new economics of labour migration (NELM) suggests that households, not individuals, make migration decisions as a risk-sharing strategy to diversify income and reduce risks (Arango 2000; De Haas, Miller, and Castles 2020). Although NELM explains why some family members migrate while others stay behind, it does not account for the desire to stay amidst adversity.

Until recently, it was impossible to combine the concepts of structure and agency in migration theories to analyse the migratory process (Bakewell 2010; de Haas 2014: 22). However, the aspirations–capabilities framework (de Haas 2021; Schewel 2020) offers a conceptual approach to bridging this divide (de Haas 2010b: 16; Carling and Schewel 2018; Mata-Codesal 2018). The framework posits that immobility entails, '… (1) that a person lacks the capability to move or (2) that staying is a voluntary (or acquiescent) preference' (Schewel 2020: 338). The aspiration-capability framework is used extensively to study the migratory experiences of individuals who have moved or stayed (see, Borselli and van Meijl 2021; Obi et al. 2023; Siviş et al. 2024).

Because the framework offers useful analytical tools and enables the analysis of migratory experiences, it was adopted as the theoretical foundation for the study conducted in the Middle Belt. The framework was used to guide the methodological strategy of the study, with the expectation that it would help analyse both the empirical data and the contextual realities. While it offered a valuable foundation for identifying factors influencing immobility among community members, it lacked the analytical capacity to account for specific conditions shaping active immobility, such as everyday acts of violent resistance observed in the study locations, as well as the spiritual and cultural beliefs that inform the collective actions of community members. This limitation reflects a broader critique of the framework's focus. This is consistent with Schewel's (2020: 346) observation that

one limitation to the aspiration-capability framework described here is that it presents (im)mobility categories in relation to the capability to migrate. To fully exploit the potential of the concept 'capability' as Sen (1999) originally used it, an aspiration-capability approach should also interrogate the conditions that enable the realization of one's aspirations at home.

To address the research question of the study in the Middle Belt, it became necessary to move beyond the boundaries of the aspiration–capability framework. In response to this gap, I adopted an inductive approach to examine specific cases of the studied community members, allowing me to identify and unpack patterns related to their lived experiences and migratory decisions, an approach aligned with Yin's (2014) stance. This approach helped establish that additional analytical tools are required to fully capture the complex migratory experiences and social realities observed. It also became evident that existing immobility categories do not adequately reflect the specific experiences present in these contexts. Together, the insights from the aspirations–capabilities framework, other theories, and the analysed data led to the development of a new framework for explaining people's staying behaviour, particularly under conditions of adversity.

3. Methodology

This article draws on focus group discussions conducted as part of a doctoral study with agrarian farmers in conflict-affected communities in Benue and Nasarawa States, Nigeria, in May 2022 and January 2024. The study was influenced by prior calls to examine the mechanisms that shape and sustain immobility in conflict settings (see, Biehler 2023; Erdal, Mjelva, and Tollefsen 2023; Erdal and Hagen-Zanker 2023; Bogdan 2024; Hagen-zanker, Rubio, and Erdal 2024; Olumba 2024d).

A purposive sampling method (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim 2016) was adopted to identify communities where members experienced severe eco-violence yet stay put, while others fled. The farmers were selected for their sedentary status on ancestral land. A multisite approach was used to collect data on three distinct migratory experiences: displacement, return, and immobility. Respondents included members of the Odi, Abu, and Utu communities who sustained their immobility; displaced persons who had sought refuge in Odi; and former IDPs who had returned to the IG community. The study, conducted in 2022, involved seven focus groups with a total of fifty-four respondents from two conflict-affected communities: the O community in Agatu Local Government Area (LGA) of Benue State, and the IG community in Nasarawa-Eggon LGA of Nasarawa State. The one conducted in January 2024, comprised five focus groups with fifty respondents across three communities (Odi, Abu, and Utu) all in the Agatu LGA in Benue State. Therefore, data were collected from four communities across both phases.

The focus group sessions typically involved nine to eleven adult respondents and lasted about one hour; the mini-focus groups, with only a few respondents, lasted under 30 min. The discussions explored their migratory experiences, including how they remain and the measures they adopt. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. For ethical reasons, the names of the communities and respondents were anonymized, and participants were assigned identification numbers. Pidgin was the primary medium for discussion. The data were transcribed from Pidgin into English. The Ethics Committee of Royal Holloway, University of London, approved the studies.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). It began deductively with the aspiration–capability framework as the theoretical foundation. This framework was applied to explore the factors that drive and sustain staying behaviour in conflict settings and guided the study's methodological approach. The limitations of the aspiration–capability framework, earlier stated, necessitated the adoption of an inductive

approach to examine the specific cases of the studied communities and identify and unpack patterns related to their lived experiences and migratory decisions. The study's application of both inductive and deductive reasoning is consistent with arguments put forward by several scholars (see, Blaikie 1995; Blaikie and Priest 2017; Park, Bahrudin, and Han 2020). This approach led to the development of the resilience–accessibility framework. The name of the framework highlights the importance of resource accessibility and resilience as critical factors shaping migratory decision-making and collective actions in conflict-affected settings. This article operationalizes the resilience–accessibility framework, using key findings from the study.

Because the nature of the study locations posed significant security risks, data collection was a challenge, necessitating anonymization of the study locations and limiting the data. Even so, the study yielded valuable findings about immobility in conflict, echoing Müller-Funk's (2023: 213) argument that, despite its limitations, qualitative research in conflict-affected areas where large-scale quantitative data is not viable offers unique insights into migratory experiences.

4. The resilience–accessibility framework: conceptualization

Understanding why people choose to stay put involves recognizing the conditions that attract them to their current location ('retain factors'), the deterrents to relocating elsewhere ('repel factors'), and psychological influences, such as gendered norms, which act as 'internal constraints' that inhibit migration (Schewel 2020: 339). However, to adequately examine the migratory experiences of the communities in the study locations in the Middle Belt, additional tools were required, such as analytical tools capable of capturing psychological influences that support immobility, protective elements that sustain violent resistance, and cultural factors that promote staying put. Insights from the fieldwork, resilience concept (Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000; Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker 2000), and the concept of the duality of structure (Giddens 1984) informed the development of these tools.

4.1 Resilience

There is a lack of clarity about the precise definition of resilience (Cutter 2020: 205), but in essence community resilience refers to a community's capacity to use its resources to survive and thrive in adversity (Magis 2010). Resilience is a process of adjusting to internal or external shocks. It is a two-dimensional construct, comprising *adversity,* difficult life circumstances, like violence, and *positive adaptation* (competence in rebounding) (Luthar and Cicchetti 2000: 858). Its position on the continuum varies according to context and societal interpretations (Chandler 2012; Bourbeau 2015: 377). Drawing from Spiegel et al. (2021), resilience can be referred to as the qualities that help individuals adapt to challenges. In this context, resilience encompasses internal factors, or personal attributes (Spiegel et al. 2021), including capacities that individuals can use collectively to navigate communal challenges (Magis 2010).

There are calls to move beyond Eurocentric understandings of resilience, where relations and autonomy are not prioritized. In his effort to decolonize IR approaches, Chandler (2022: 25) challenges dominant policy framings of resilience, which affirm that '… the status quo is the norm, which should be maintained or "bounced back" to in the face of potential or actual disruption …'. Chandler (2022) notes that other scholars (see, Taleb 2013; Simondon 2017) have also argued for a shift away from the focus on maintaining order and certainty, central to Eurocentric conceptions of resilience. According to Chandler (2022: 30, italics added), within Western policy framings, '… maintaining stability is key, whereas for other community understandings, *autonomy* and *freedom* are highlighted through opacity'. This reframing of resilience by Chandler (2022) and others aligns with the emphasis on autonomy and freedom expressed by respondents in the study

communities, which shaped how they navigated uncertainties and adversity in conflict-affected settings. It also underpinned their desire for immobility and their perseverance in their strategies to sustain it. Moving beyond the modernist framings of resilience will offer a relational instead of a rationalist ontology that goes beyond the conceptualization of resilience as an adaptation to the status quo or is aimed to 'bounce back' (Chandler 2022: 28).

A resilience study should explore the vulnerability and protective variables that may influence life situations and then determine the processes that underpin the discovered connections (Luthar and Cicchetti 2000: 858). Vulnerability factors and protective factors explain the circumstances in which people find themselves and how these affect their decision-making (Luthar and Cicchetti 2000: 858). The first exacerbates adverse conditions; the second mitigates the impacts of adversity (Luthar and Cicchetti 2000: 858–9). Vulnerability is the pre-event, arising from inherent characteristics or qualities of social systems that create the potential for harm (Cutter et al. 2008: 559). It has been argued that vulnerability and resilience are inversely related: greater resilience reduces vulnerability (Handmer and Dovers 1996: 487); both are conceptually related and not diametrically opposed (Cutter 2016: 111).

In this context, vulnerability factors include but are not limited to violent conflict, displacement, adverse climatic conditions, and socioeconomic hardship, whereas 'protective' factors are social networks, social cohesion, and external assistance and material resources that support people and their communities to withstand adversity. Therefore, analysing staying behaviour in adversity would require integrating both sets of factors, particularly for communities in violent conflict settings. Thus, resilience serves as a useful explanatory tool for exploring the interaction between vulnerability and protective factors and how they may influence collective actions that support immobility decisions in challenging environments. This approach resonates with Chandler's (2022) call to decolonize resilience by recognizing locally rooted strategies and collective actions grounded in autonomy and social relations, which sustain expressions of agency in the face of uncertainty. Such expressions of agency are often reinforced by psychological factors, which I refer to as *internal boosts*.

Internal boosts refer to psychological elements, such as cultural traditions, norms and beliefs like honour code and voodoo, that strengthen the desire to stay put. These elements promote immobility as a preference. The Idoma people, who inhabit the Agatu communities where I conducted fieldwork, have been described as belonging to an honour-based society (Ochonu 2018). The honour code demands that young men do whatever it takes to protect their women and children (Ochonu 2018: 231), reinforcing their commitment to remain within the community. In this way, the honour code functions as an internal boost supporting immobility within their ancestral home. Any perceived threat to the Idoma sense of honour could trigger acts of resistance or, in extreme cases, lead some men to suicide as a means of escaping shame and humiliation (Ochonu 2018; Olumba 2025). Internal boosts can also be framed as 'cultural tools'. 'People draw on cultural tools to construct their goals and anticipate the outcome of behaviours in working toward those ends' (Zilberstein, Lamont, and Sanchez 2023: 349). In this context, internal boosts may include narratives or frames of collective and materialized memories, and social constructs such as cultural norms and beliefs (Wertsch 2000; Zilberstein, Lamont, and Sanchez 2023).

4.2 Accessibility

In areas affected by violent conflict, such as the Middle Belt, access to resources is critical to decision-making and collective action. Understanding why and how people decide to stay put in areas affected by violent conflict requires, among other things, examining how their access to resources, or lack thereof, shapes their choices. This could relate to concepts such as Sen's (1999: 75) notion of 'capability', which he defines as 'a kind of freedom: the

substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations (or, less formally put, the freedom to achieve various lifestyles)'. Capability refers to the freedom individuals or groups have to pursue and attain meaningful functioning (Alkire 2005: 121). 'It [capability] represents the various combinations of functionings (beings and doings) that the person can achieve. Capability is, thus, a set of vectors of functionings, reflecting the person's freedom to lead one type of life or another' (Sen 1992: 40).

A key strength of the capability approach is its clear objective of expanding the freedoms of deprived individuals to achieve valuable ways of being and doing, forming the basis for justice and poverty reduction (Alkire 2005). Although, Sen argues that public well-being should be measured by people's capabilities, not just their access to resources (Jamil 2024: 76). According to Alkire (2005: 117), individuals need '… access to the necessary positive resources, and they should be able to make choices that matter to them' (Alkire 2005: 117). As such, 'Accessible resources must be effectively translated into meaningful outcomes to significantly enhance people's quality of life' (Jamil 2024: 79).

In the communities I studied, the issue is not the 'freedom' to achieve a desired lifestyle but the lack of access to the resources necessary to realize it. These communities face severe deprivation of basic amenities, compounded by the absence of protection from the government and persistent eco-violence. An excerpt from a focus group discussion in Odi community highlights the importance of resource accessibility. The question posed was: Who is responsible for protecting the community and how do they do so?

> #1-OIU-M: 'Youths'.[5] The community will organize the young men who are agile enough to be ready for the fight. Every household in the community will be taxed to get the equipment necessary to defend our communities. After the collection is completed, those in charge will purchase cartridges (bullets) for our guns and distribute them to the youths who will use them in battle. This is a collective effort.
> Moderator: What sort of ammunition?[6]
> #3-OIU-M: They used to attack us with AK47 rifles,[7] but no RPGs [rocket propelled grenades] were used.
> #1-OIU-M: We used two methods to counter them: charms [voodoo] prepared by native doctors that prevented bullets from penetrating our bodies, and our own ammunition, primarily pump-action shotguns; in the process, we would overpower them and collect their rifles. That was mainly how we were able to fight them and secure the sort of weapons they were using against us, the AK47 rifles.

The excerpt above highlights human, material, and non-material resources as key factors that support these communities in their quest for immobility. In the social and contextual reality of the study locations, *accessibility* refers to the ease of accessing resources, including cultural beliefs, spiritual practices, and human and material resources for personal or collective benefit.

Access to these resources is essential for those who prefer to remain despite no state support; the absence of these resources can result in hardship and displacement. Without state support, communities struggle to maintain livelihoods, preserve their identities, and protect their well-being in adversity (Gini et al. 2024). Respondents in these communities indicated that sustaining their preferred immobility depends on their access to resources and the ability to utilize personal attributes collectively to address communal challenges. Overcoming these challenges also requires resilience, which refers to (internal) capabilities and encompasses psychological capacities that help people cope (Spiegel et al. 2021). Resource accessibility can directly shape collective action, which in turn can impact community resilience and adaptability in adversity. Resilience and resource accessibility are, therefore, essential in understanding staying behaviour of communities in areas affected by adversity.

Human and material resources such as social networks, community-led governance structures, and community members skilled in handling firearms, including arms and ammunition, can be categorized as 'protective factors'. Access to economic opportunities, lifescapes such as community solidarity and affective connections to ancestral land are better captured and explained as retain factors (Schewel 2020; Olumba 2025). The 'lifescape' is a way of life rooted in affective connections to land and community that requires people to maintain relationships with living and non-living elements that are essential for their wellbeing and survival (Convery et al. 2005; Lubkemann 2008; Lewis and Winkelman 2017; Olumba 2024c: 488).

Whereas internal constraints refer to psychological factors that limit aspirations for mobility, like gendered norms and risk aversion (Schewel 2020: 339); they 'impede the development of the aspiration to migrate' (Schewel 2020: 342). Internal constraints view the reasons for staying from a *mobility-centred perspective*, while internal boosts, explained earlier, interpret staying through an '*immobility perspective*' rooted in psychological factors such as spiritual and cultural attachments to space and place. In other words, while internal constraints refer to psychological factors that inhibit mobility (Schewel 2020), 'internal boosts' denote psychological factors, such as cultural beliefs and norms, that support immobility. In contrast, 'retain factors' are external conditions, such as economic opportunities, that make staying practically feasible (Schewel 2020).

4.3 Agency and structure

Comprehending the dynamics between agency and structure has been a longstanding issue in social sciences (Bakewell 2010: 1689). Engaging with this debate is beyond the scope of this article; instead, its focus is on explaining how both concepts are applied in this study.

According to de Haas (2019: 26), to exercise their migratory agency, people need access to 'social (other people), economic (material), and cultural or "human" (ideas, knowledge, and skills) resources'. He further asserts that agency is '… the limited but real capacity of individuals to overcome constraints and potentially reshape structure' (de Haas 2010a: 241). Giddens (1984: 9) posits that 'Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place …'. Thus, possessing agency becomes critical when one is facing any form of adversity.

The following excerpts demonstrate the agency of some men in the Utu community and their resolve to remain on their ancestral land despite the risks, which reaffirms their affective ties to the land and their commitment to sustaining their lifescape.

> #10-Utu-M: You see, we have no area to relocate to. This place is our ancestral home. Come what may, we will die because of attack. That is why we are still living here.

> #5-Utu-M: What number 10 said is true because we do not have any other place to go to. This community is where we belong, and this is where we know we can live. So, we cannot just allow some group of people to chase us away from what belongs to us. So, we do not have any other place to go, so we stay. We do not even have a choice but to stay here.

According to Crawford (2015: 28), '… genuine agency arises not in the context of mere choices freely made (as in shopping) but rather, somewhat paradoxically, in the context of submission to things that have their own intractable ways …'. This includes engaging with situations in ways that are risky. However, Erdal and Oeppen (2017: 45) argue that agency exists along a continuum, influenced by actual or potential pressure from the state and other actors. These perspectives on agency could suggest that internal dynamics and environmental conditions shape decisions and (collective) actions. This aligns with the idea that human agency and social structure are mutually constitutive and exist as a '*duality of structure*' (Giddens 1984). Structure is the 'medium and the outcome of the social practices they recursively organize' (Giddens 1984: 25). In essence, structure refers to the broad political,

institutional, socioeconomic, and cultural context in which migration occurs, which can be restrictive or enabling (de Haas 2010a: 241).

Thus, accessibility to resources and resilience (as previously discussed) are vital to human agency in adversity. However, possessing *genuine agency* can enable people to use accessibility and resilience to achieve collective goals in environment exposed to adversities. Likewise, accessibility to resources and resilience can strengthen genuine agency and increase the likelihood of overcoming external pressures. The theory of structuration (Giddens 1984), with which this article aligns, has been extensively criticized by scholars such as Margaret Archer (see Archer 1982). Nonetheless, it has been applied in other migration studies (Wright 1995; Morawska 2001). Moreover, the dualism inherent in this conceptualization of structure and agency is particularly well suited for analysing the contextual realities in the communities in the study locations.

5. The resilience–accessibility framework

The core tenets of the resilience–accessibility framework are that people's staying behaviour, in times of adversity, is influenced by (1) their *agency/(in)actions*, (2) *resilience*, (3) *accessibility* to specific resources, and (4) the *structures* and adversities in their surroundings. Furthermore, (5) people's decisions/(in)actions impact those structures, and the perceptions attributed to them[8]. These tenets aid the analysis of people's immobility experiences, including the difficulties they encounter and their perceptions of and interactions with the state, as well as the state's response or lack thereof.

This framework adopts the interpretivist tradition, with the community as the unit of analysis. The community is the unit of analysis, reflecting the collective nature of decision-making in contexts where immobility is shaped by, among other things, shared adversity, cultural cohesion, and deep ancestral attachment to land. While individual agency remains relevant in the study locations, it is exercised within family and clan structures that form the foundation of communal life and resistance. In rural communities like those in the study locations, violent conflict tends to affect entire populations rather than isolated individuals, and attacks are typically experienced collectively (Olumba 2024d: 1878). As such, an individual-level analysis risks producing a fragmented or distorted understanding of the phenomenon, making it challenging to capture the communal experiences of eco-violence and the shared strategies of resistance and immobility.

The interpretivist tradition prioritizes understanding people's lived experiences from their perspective, emphasizing meaning-making over rigid, testable criteria while still allowing for credible evaluation (Gregor 2006: 615). The following factors are key explanatory tools that can be used to understanding staying behaviour in situations of adversity:

1) retain factors
2) repel factors
3) protective factors
4) vulnerability factors
5) internal constraints
6) internal boosts

As analytical tools[9] they support the exploration of what drives and sustains the preference for immobility or why these preferences may not be actualized.

The core tenets of the framework encompass four broad areas relevant to understanding people's staying behaviour in adversity, human influence, resource accessibility, environmental conditions, and the duality of structure, all of which are analytically interpreted through the six tools outlined above. It thus emphasizes the cyclical nature of human–environment interactions, where human actions and structural influences mutually shape each

other[10]. It recognizes that people's (in)actions in adversity are responses to environmental challenges and influence how structural conditions are perceived and reacted to.

6. Inclusive (im)mobility categories

The limitations of existing (im)mobility categories mean that new classifications are needed that better reflect the diverse migratory experiences observed in the study locations. Extant categories fail to account for displaced persons who avoid fleeing to formal IDP camps and instead seek temporary habitation in host communities to sustain ties to their ancestral land and social networks, often with the intent to return. Similarly, existing categories may not fully capture the experiences of communities who choose to remain in conflict-affected areas, often adopting protective measures or armed resistance to stay put.

The inclusive (im)mobility categories presented in Fig. 1, developed through the resilience–accessibility framework, classify (im)mobility into four types: stable-acquiescent immobility, vulnerable-acquiescent immobility, involuntary mobility, and active immobility. The major differences among these categories lie in variations in resilience and the degree of access to resources, which shape decision-making and patterns of action or inaction in how communities navigate adversity and structural pressure. These categories are distinguished by the presence or absence of six analytical tools that capture human agency, resource accessibility, environmental conditions, and structural influences on why and how people remain in place. The distribution of the analytical tools across the categories highlights the differing capacities of those within them either to sustain immobility (often a preferred choice) or to fail to do so and move, primarily due to violence, adverse climatic conditions or structural neglect. As Schewel (2020: 336) notes of existing (im)mobility categories, these (im)mobility categories presented here should be understood as ideal types, not fixed or rigid classifications.

Figure 1 illustrates that the category of active immobility includes all six analytical tools, whereas the other categories contain some but not all. Protective factors are most prominent in active immobility, though these factors could be found in varying small degrees

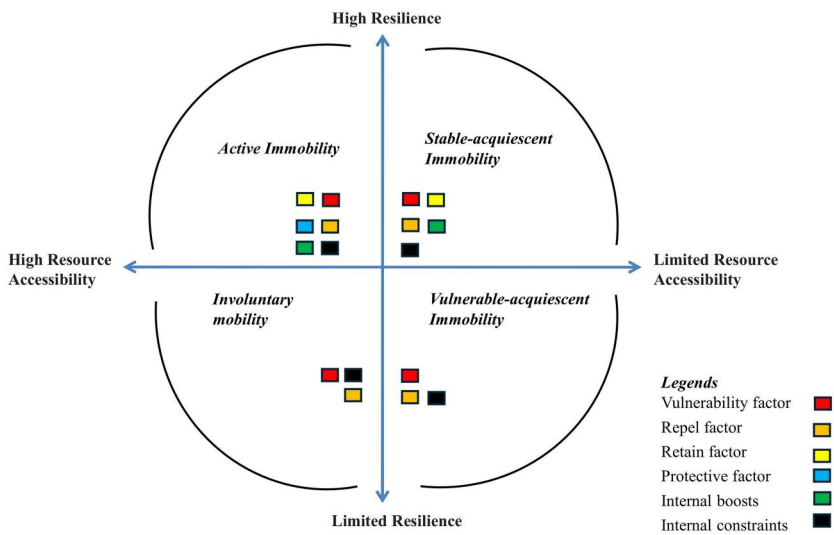

Figure 1. The inclusive (im)mobility categories.

Source: Adapted from Burrell and Morgan (1979), de Haas (2021), and Schewel (2020). Concepts also informed by Luthar et al. (2000) and Luthar and Cicchetti (2000).

elsewhere. Protective factors enable individuals in this category to better withstand vulnerabilities and sustain their commitment to remaining. Vulnerability factors (those that exacerbate adverse conditions), internal constraints (psychological factors that inhibit mobility) and repel factors (external conditions that discourage migration) are also present across all categories. These elements serve as constants in the model. In contrast, retain factors (conditions at home that support immobility) and internal boosts (psychological elements that promote immobility) appear only in the active immobility and stable-acquiescent immobility categories. This reflects the presence of resilience or enabling conditions that make remaining either fully or partially feasible.

By comparison, the categories of involuntary mobility and vulnerable-acquiescent immobility lack retain factors, protective factors, and internal boosts. As a result, individuals in the involuntary mobility category are unable to sustain immobility and are eventually displaced. Those in the vulnerable-acquiescent immobility category remain because they acquiesced due to their limitations and to stay under constrained conditions and not on their terms.

6.1 Stable-acquiescent (im)mobility

The term *stable-acquiescent (im)mobility* builds on acquiescent immobility (Schewel 2020), which categorizes people who neither wish to migrate nor can do so (Schewel 2020: 335). However, this category incorporates constrained mobility and conditional immobility, capturing situations where the preference to remain cannot be sustained. In such cases, mobility becomes necessary for safety, with the possibility of return to the ancestral home when conditions allow. Thus, both mobility and immobility can coexist within the experiences of people in this category. 'To illustrate, "vulnerable-*stable*" could describe findings where the general disadvantages of individuals or groups with the attribute remained stable despite changing levels of stress' (Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker 2000: 548, italics in original). The term 'acquiescent' reflects their reluctant adjustment to these conditions, not because they choose to move but because they are compelled to do so.

Thus, 'Vulnerable-*stable*' or Stable-acquiescent (im)mobility refers to a migratory phenomenon in which community members, despite their resilience and preference for immobility, still lack adequate resource accessibility to withstand adversities to remain, compelling them to move from their communities to host communities near their ancestral lands. Their strong preference to remain on their ancestral land and high resilience enable them to maintain stability and endure even when nearby communities offer refuge amid adversity. As such, even in host communities, they continue to experience both limited mobility and immobility. Movement between host communities and their ancestral home remains infrequent and is conditioned by their preference to remain in their ancestral land, vulnerability, and exposure to adversity there. Without sufficient resource accessibility to enable collective actions aimed at facilitating return and sustaining their preferred immobility, they remain in a state of limbo, caught between mobility and immobility. This condition keeps them navigating this tension as they weigh the possibilities of return (see Fig. 1). This category includes community members who periodically flee to and return from host communities where they seek refuge. Despite ongoing constraints and heightened vulnerability, they remain committed to adapting and returning to their ancestral home to remain.

A similar pattern was observed during the civil war in Sri Lanka, where households fled to the jungle or sought refuge with relatives in safer areas when their communities were attacked and returned once conditions allowed (Korf 2004: 286).

A comparable pattern was evident in the North-Central (Middle Belt) and North-West regions of Nigeria in 2023, where most people displaced by eco-violence chose to reside in nearby host communities rather than in formal IDP camps despite the latter offering relatively better security (see Fig. 2). Similarly, large numbers of displaced persons were observed across the communities in the study locations during the fieldwork in 2022 and

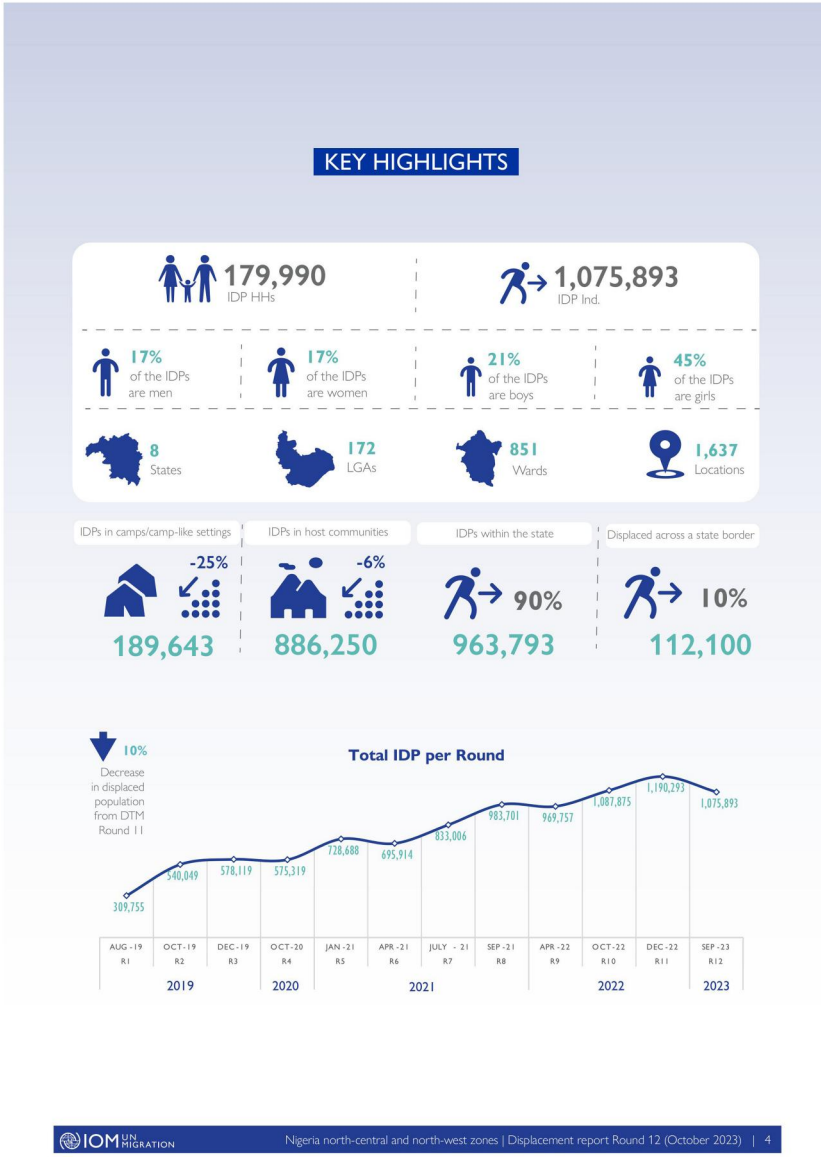

Figure 2. IOM Displacement report Round 12.
Source: Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2023: 4).

2024. The report by the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2023) states that more than 1,075,893 IDPs live in the North West and North Central (Middle Belt) zones. Of this number, 886,250 reside in host communities rather than in IDP camps. In Benue State alone (in the Middle Belt), more than 394,567 IDPs were recorded, with approximately 120,640 living in camps or camp-like settings across 26 sites and about 273,927 residing in host communities across 185 sites (Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2023).

6.2 Vulnerable-acquiescent immobility

Acquiescent immobility refers to '… those who do not wish to migrate and are unable to do so' (Schewel 2020: 335). Building on this, *vulnerable-acquiescent immobility* characterizes those who prefer to remain yet lack the resources and resilience to withstand adversity or conflict in their ancestral communities on their own terms. As a result, such communities acquiesce to living amid adversities that are beyond their control. Even though they prefer to remain, sustaining immobility on their own terms is unfeasible. The adversities within their ancestral homes exacerbate their vulnerability, rendering them both vulnerable and acquiescent.

This migratory pattern can occur in communities affected by armed conflicts or adverse climatic conditions. In such cases, contextual factors, along with negative resilience and negative resource accessibility, weaken people's robust resistance to adversity. These limitations reinforce each other, causing people who remain in adversity-affected areas to experience heightened exposure to existential risks. They cannot flee or migrate from the challenging environment and struggle to cope with the vulnerabilities they face. With limited access to resources and resilience, they remain in crisis-affected areas, leaving them exposed to the impacts of such crises.

In Nigeria, communities in territories controlled by the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP), or Wilāyat Garb Ifrīqīyā, pay two types of taxes to continue living in their communities: 'Daraya' and 'na marayu' (Higazi 2022: 166). Many communities in Nigeria wish to remain in their ancestral areas but lack adequate resources and resilience to resist armed groups and remain on their own terms. To stay put, they negotiate and collectively contribute thousands of USD annually to terrorist groups (see, Buba 2023; SBM Intelligence 2024) to avoid attacks and sustain their immobility and lifescape on their land. This practice is common in conflict-ridden areas in Nigeria (Ojo, Aina, and Oyewole 2024). Similarly, during the Maoist revolution in Nepal, for example, development workers and teachers in certain villages had to pay a levy to the Maoist group in order to live there (Adhikari 2003: 377). These payments do not indicate that these communities have adequate resources; most often, they consist of poor people in rural communities who wish to remain but lack the social capital and means to move elsewhere.

6.3 Involuntary mobility

The '… term *forced* (or involuntary) *mobility* is used as an umbrella for characterizing human flows in which there is an element of coercion, including the threat to life, health, and freedom as a result of political persecution and conflicts or natural or anthropogenic disasters' (Tsapenko 2021: 526, italics in original). In the context of the Middle Belt, the involuntary mobility category comprises community members 'forced' to move owing to vulnerabilities, seeking sanctuary far from their home (see Fig. 1). *Involuntary mobility* results from low resilience to withstand adversity, combined with access to resources that enable relocation to safer environments, even when the preference is to remain.

In the Middle Belt, violent conflicts often trigger mobility, compelling communities to flee their ancestral lands in search of safety and opportunities far from their homes (see, Nwankwo 2021; Tade 2022). Also, the Enseada community in Brazil illustrates this migratory pattern. Their physical location was the source of both their traditional identity and their vulnerabilities (Gini, Cardoso, and Ramos 2020). Reluctant to relocate because of potential risks to their cultural identity and materialized memories, they were eventually compelled to undertake involuntary mobility to a new location in August 2018 (Gini, Cardoso, and Ramos 2020), when vulnerabilities caused by the sea exhausted their resilience. The inclusion of involuntary mobility within the inclusive (im)mobility categories proposed in this article reflects the relational nature of mobility and immobility (see, Mata-Codesal 2015; Salazar 2021b, 2021a; Kellerman 2022). It is also necessary, as the cases discussed

show a clear preference to remain, yet adversities and threats compel movement despite this preference.

6.4 Active immobility

Although the migratory experiences of the communities in the study locations partially align with voluntary immobility, the term does not fully capture the complexity of their experiences or contextual realities. Consequently, *active immobility* (Robins 2022a) was adopted as the most appropriate term. Active immobility is defined as immobility arising from a sense of 'loyalty' or 'duty'; and to describes 'those who may have the capability to migrate (and may even have the desire to), but actively refrain from doing so due to a sense of duty or loyalty'(Robins 2022a: 28).

In the context of active immobility (Robins 2022b, 2022a), it is essential to recognize that necessity, often associated with a sense of duty or loyalty, does not automatically exclude choice or agency for the involved actors but sometimes could limit conscious choice and agency. Insights from community members suggest that for active immobility to avoid becoming a coerced form of immobility, it should encompass genuine agency (Crawford 2015: 28), which exists on a continuum influenced by external pressures (Erdal and Oeppen 2017). Genuine agency involves a free-willed decision to stay put, even in the face of challenges or risks, and transcends obligations rooted in duty or loyalty. Incorporating freedom of choice and voluntariness is key to conceptualizing active immobility as 'active'. While voluntariness alone might make active immobility seem coerced, combining it with freedom of choice indicates that it results from free will and is active. Conscious decision-making is essential in removing coercion from the term 'active immobility'. Overlooking this distinction can lead to incorrect analyses of the phenomenon.

Drawing from Robins's (2022a, 2022b) concept of active immobility and insights from the communities in the study locations, active immobility refers to *a migratory phenomenon where community members, despite having the ability to migrate, access to ample resources, and resilience, choose to stay put to preserve their immobility and lifescape while confronting adversities in their communities*. Communities in this category have high resource accessibility and resilience (illustrated in Fig. 1).

6.5 Living in conflict: homeland or nothing

> #9-OIU-M: This land is where I was born, and this is my father's land. Wherever I run to, I will become a stranger and may become destitute. Until then, I have been a sustainable person. Why should I become a beggar with my family? I will rather stay if it means to die; let me die. If I die in my house for what belongs to me, let me die. This is why I did not flee. If they want to kill me, let them kill me (Olumba 2024c: 488).

This quote from a man in the Odi community during the focus group discussion reflects a view commonly shared by respondents across the communities. Such perspectives aligns with Toft's (2003: 1) argument that regardless of how barren a location may be, if it is considered a homeland, like Jerusalem or Kosovo, it holds enough value for people to be willing to die for it. Moving to a more peaceful location may seem logical, but for some people no place can replace their 'homeland'. That respondent, (#9-OIU-M), said, 'this is my father's land'. His identity as a farmer and his livelihood and legacy were tied to this property, which explains why he would defend it at all costs. The man further stated, 'Wherever I run to, I will become a stranger and may become destitute', suggesting that repel factors elsewhere influenced his decision not to flee from the violence. Not only was displacement from his 'father's land' perceived as a loss of identity and ancestral rights, but he could also be at risk of assuming an undesirable identity, like 'stranger' or 'beggar'. He was, therefore, compelled to risk his life by not fleeing. These factors may have influenced the community members to choose to stay put despite the vulnerabilities in their area.

Understanding why communities in the study locations prefer to remain and how they sustain their decision without state support requires examining the interplay between their agency, resilience, resource accessibility and the structural vulnerabilities in their environment as they pursue their collective goal of active immobility. The following analysis outlines these interactions.

The quote below highlights the influence of retain factors and heritage in shaping this preference.

> #10-Utu-M: You see, fishing is not just an occupation; it's a tradition passed down from our forefathers. Despite our education, we continue to fish to sustain our lives. So, even if we were relocated to a place with piped-borne water, our love for fishing would draw us back here.
> Moderator: So, if you were given access to fishing elsewhere and land to farm on, would you still miss this place?
> #10-Utu-M: We would miss it because there will come a time when they ask us to trace our history, and we will trace it back to this community. That is why we cannot leave it.
> #5-Utu-M: Because it is our place, no matter what.
> Moderator: How do you know that this place is your place?
> Respondent: Because our fathers lived here before they gave birth to us.

The excerpt highlights how their economic ties to their 'father's land' motivate them to stay put. It portrays farming as a tradition they are determined to preserve rather than just a profession. These viewpoints also point to their heritage as internal boosts that anchor them to their ancestral land. Displacement would disconnect them from their lifescape. Motivation and opportunity can influence civilians to migrate earlier during violent conflict (Schon 2019: 24). Similarly, community members in the study locations draw on *retain factors* and *internal boosts*, using available opportunities to access resources that support collective actions to sustain their preferred immobility. For these community members, their ancestral home is more than a physical space; it represents their past, group identity, and roots, offering continuity that sustains their quest for immobility.

According to respondents in the Abu community, one element that holds them together is their *Ugo*, a place of worship that lies at the centre of their spiritual life.

> #11-Abu-M: We go there to plead to the *Ugo* whenever we have a general problem by sacrificing a goat for the *Ugo* to intercede on our behalf.
> #12-Abu-M: Sometimes, in the past, when there was no rain, our elders prayed for rain at Ugo, and the rain would fall in three days.
> Moderator: Have they made the sacrifices, and it rained?
> Chorus: Yes.
> #1-Abu-M: It is believed that if the *Ugo* is not well pleased, there will not be any fish in the pond. It is also believed that we may not have rain in our community, even when it rains in neighbouring communities. We have *Icheka*, a communal rite that is celebrated every three years.
> Moderator: Is *Icheka* a ceremony?
> Chorus: Yes.
> #2-Abu-M: There are rites that we do every year in the *Ugo*, especially during the dry season. We call the ceremony *Ejehegugu*.
> #2-Abu-M: Yeah. Everyone, including the men, women, children, and elders, would go to the *Ugo*. After the incantation, there would be drum beatings, and we would dance and sing on our way back home. The market women would dance around the market, and a he-goat would be used for the sacrifice. Two men would carry the goat, one holding its legs and the other its head, and another would use a cutlass to slaughter it by cutting the

goat into two equal parts with a single cut. The sacrifice was not accepted if the goat was cut more than once.

These respondents view their spiritual beliefs, rituals, and traditions as heritage, passed down through generations, and integral to their existence and well-being. As Heux, Clifford, and Souchay (2023: 7) note, '… collective memory serves an identity function, nourishing a group's sense of identity and continuity'. This intangible heritage is materialized when the narratives are transformed into tangible objects (Buchli and Lucas 2001; Dyke 2019), such as their land, objects, drums, and rituals performed at the *Ugo* shrine. These collective and materialized memories, expressed through cultural practices, sacred spaces, and spiritual rituals, could serve as internal boosts that offer psychosocial and intrinsic support to their collective quest for active immobility, despite the ongoing violent conflicts and lack of state support.

Among Indigenous communities, their connection to the land, which serves as the 'cultural memoryscape' or sites of memory (Basu 2013) where collective memories can be materialized (Aasman, Fickers, and Wachelder 2018; Sesma 2022), is very strong (Blackstock 2003). Similarly, in communities in the Pacific regions, 'The land speaks' (Leweniqila and Roskruge 2023) and *vakavanua* or 'the way of the land' (Hermann and Kempf 2017) describe the interconnections between people, their lifescape, and the land.

In the Odi community, respondents described their traditional ceremonies and significance of these to their lifescape. They highlighted the importance of the *aje-alekwu* ceremonies, which is an important cultural tool to them. Inquiries about how displacement might affect these traditional rituals elicited the following perspective:

Moderator: If you were displaced, would you be able to do these ceremonies?
#1-Odi-F: The celebration would not be as we do in our community.
Moderator: Would those who are evacuated to this community celebrate their ceremonies?
#1-Odi-F: Internally displaced persons (IDP) do not have as much freedom as they would in their ancestral homes. Whenever they are here, they are considered commoners and do not have the liberty to do as they please. Their freedom is significantly restricted.

This perspective highlights the foreseen challenges of displacement, referred to earlier as repel factors, and the idea that active immobility offers 'freedom' to live as one chooses in one's ancestral home. In this context, repel factors include not only information about adverse conditions elsewhere (Schewel 2020) but also observations of the unfavourable circumstances of IDPs within the host community and of displaced persons losing touch with their social networks and ceremonies. Thus, their desire to preserve this cultural heritage could serve as a significant internal boost, driving immobility, while the fear of losing it acts as a repel factor. Within these communities, a local governance structure known as the *Ooja* Council operates, characterized by gerontocracy, patriarchy, and elements of village democracy. It comprises the *Gago* from each clan (or *ipoma*), the 'youths' (*ach'anyilo*), and their Adagole, or Oche. The *Ooja* Council organizes and mobilizes the 'youths' to conduct armed resistance to protect their community.

Moderator: Who is an *och'onyilo*?[11]
#4-Abu-M: Man.
#3-Abu-M: *Och'onyilo* is a person with a strong heart who is fearless men.
(unknown number): A well-prepared man, with a strong mind, who is ready to defend his people without fear.
#11-Abu-M: *Och'onyilo* is someone who possesses a charm that ensures that bullets will not penetrate his body if he is shot at.

Moderator: Can a woman be *och'onyilo* in a time of conflict?
#2-Abu-M: Yes.
Moderator: Explain.
#2-Abu-M: A woman who fearlessly goes to her farm during attacks and returns is considered a 'man'. It is not only men who use charms; women also possess them.

These perspectives highlight the perceived genuine agency and role of the *ach'anyilo* in defending their communities from attacks, including the use of charms or voodoo, which they believe renders them immune to live bullets. The use of voodoo in armed struggles is common in Africa.[12] In this context, voodoo serves as an internal boost, functioning as a 'cultural tool'. The *ach'anyilo* together with the firearms they use, and the social cohesion fostered by the *Ooja* Council can be interpreted as protective factors. These resources are critical in creating conditions that support the realization of active immobility in violent conflict settings. Communities that lack access to such resources may find it challenging to sustain their preference for active immobility. But when these factors are present, they foster a perception of safety within the community, acting as a retain factor that strengthens the resolve of the community members to remain in place.

The following excerpts provide perspectives on how social cohesion within a community, which is a protective factor, is fostered by various *Ooja* councils from different communities in the Agatu municipal area to enhance security, given the absence of state protection:

#11-Utu-M: In Agatu, we have a specific strategy for managing conflicts. Our area is divided into zones. If there is information about a possible attack in a particular area, all the villages within that zone collaborate. Each village selects individuals who will come together to protect and guard the area under threat.
Moderator: You mean zone?
#11-Utu-M: Yes.
Moderator: How many zones do you have in the Agatu Local Government Area?
#11-Utu-M: we have about five.
Moderator: What are the names of the zones?
#11-Utu-M: Zones A, B, C, D, E.
Moderator: To which zone do you belong?
#11-Utu-M: We belong to Zone E.
Moderator: Which one does Odi (…) belong to?
#11-Utu-M: B.
Moderator: What is the name of the other village? … Abu (…)?
#11-Utu-M: Abu (…) is in Zone E.

This viewpoint of a man from the Utu community, echoed by many in other communities, highlights the existence of a joint security protocol in Agatu. This protocol enables communities in the same 'zone' to offer mutual security support during attacks. Such external support is a protective factor that mitigates the vulnerabilities experienced in these communities. Sustaining it could not only strengthen the resilience of the communities but also enhance security in the local area, reducing the likelihood of a repeat of the 2016 Agatu massacre.

The following perspectives from some women in the Odi community provide further insight into the dynamics of their armed resistance:

Moderator: How do your people prepare to wait for them?
#7-OIU-F: Our 'youths' wait for them with arms and ammunition.
Moderator: How long do they go for when they go to fight?

General response (F-OIU): Three or four days.
#5-OIU-F: Three days.
Moderator: Within those three days, how will they survive? Like, what do they eat?
#1-OIU-F: When they go to the border, they go with *garri*, sugar, and *kuli-kuli*.[13] At times, they will go with bread and sachets of water. If where they will camp has a river or any source of water, then they will go with only bread. When there is a need for the youths to go to fight, some will first go, and when there is information that the conflict is not getting worse, those fighting will call for reinforcements, and that is when their bread or *garri* will be taken to where they are camped fighting.
Moderator: What happens when word of an impending attack spreads?
#1-OIU-F: The Fulani usually attack the first community on their way into these areas. So, when the information spreads, the vigilante, the livestock guards, and the youths will mobilise and go and meet them in that community, where they will be attacked first to pin them down and prevent further intrusion into other communities.

These statements corroborate earlier accounts of community armed groups protecting their communities and show how the 'youths' join forces at the 'border' to support other communities within their 'zone' under attack, enabling the communities to sustain their active immobility. They also underscore the state's failure to provide security services. Participants perceive the state as unresponsive to their plight. In some cases, this failure has driven communities in Nigeria to hire transnational armed groups from the Sahel for protection (see, Ojo and Olumba 2024; Rufa'i 2024).

Drawing on the analytical tools of the resilience–accessibility framework, the analysis examined the factors underlying their pursuit of active immobility and the strategies these communities employed to remain in their ancestral homes in a conflict-affected region of Nigeria. Their decision to remain is rooted in deep ties to ancestral land and the need to safeguard livelihoods, voodoo, cultural identity, and lifescape, which act as retain *factors* and *internal boosts*. These communities sustain their active immobility by relying on human resources, such as the '*youths*', *Ooja* Council, *ach'anyilo*, and 'zones' (which are *protective factors*), to organize collective actions. Material resources, including firearms, and non-material resources, such as voodoo and cultural practices, serve as *protective factors* and *internal boosts*, respectively. These resources are deployed by some community members to fend off armed aggressors (whose presence exacerbates *vulnerability factors*) and to support efforts to sustain their active immobility. Collective and materialized memories, serving as *internal boosts*, help shape their decision to remain on their ancestral land and reinforce their collective actions to sustain active immobility. The foreseen adverse conditions faced by IDPs in their community, along with the unforeseen challenges of displacement, act as *repel factors*.

This preference for immobility and their determination to sustain it independently reflects their agency and the level of their resilience and resource accessibility. In turn, this shapes perceptions of the state as weak and reinforces the communities' limited reliance on state structures for governance.

7. Discussion and conclusion

This article introduces the resilience–accessibility framework in response to the need for a comprehensive approach to studying immobility (Stockdale and Haartsen 2018), particularly in conflict settings among Indigenous communities. The framework equips researchers with additional analytical tools to explore communities' preference for immobility (the 'why') and their interactions with surrounding structures and adversities (the 'how') as they pursue immobility. These tools can support further studies to advance knowledge about Indigenous communities who prioritize immobility in challenging environments. In

addition, they can also promote the inclusion of non-Western perspectives in immobility research within communities exposed to adversities in the Global South.

The tenets of the resilience–accessibility framework emphasize that people's decisions to stay put during times of adversity are influenced by a combination of human agency, resilience, resource accessibility, and the interplay of structures and adversities within a certain location. Moreover, the decisions and actions, or lack thereof, of these communities influence these structures and the perceptions that people have of them. These factors are important for understanding the dynamics of staying put in challenging environments. By offering analytical tools to examine staying behaviour in communities facing adversity, this article contributes to the study of immobility in challenging settings. The resilience-accessibility framework was used to explore, in broad terms, why and how communities in the study locations choose to stay and resist belligerent actors. Addressing such research questions in similar contexts would also require analytical tools like those offered by the resilience-accessibility framework.

Although the resilience–accessibility framework draws from the tenets of the aspiration–capability framework (Schewel 2020; de Haas 2021), it broadens its theoretical base by incorporating elements from other conceptual models and empirical insights from studies conducted in the Middle Belt. Whereas the aspiration–capability framework explains immobility in relation to the capability to migrate through retain factors, repel factors, and internal constraints (Schewel 2020), the resilience–accessibility framework builds on this by incorporating protective factors, vulnerability factors, and internal boosts to account for the conditions shaping (im)mobility from the perspective of remaining. This adaptation enables a clearer understanding of the conditions that drive and sustain decisions to remain in environments affected by adversities, including violent conflicts, especially in the Global South.

The general understanding is that individuals are forced to move due to adversities. In addition, those who stay put are often grouped into the same categories as 'trapped', 'stuck' populations, or the 'left behind' (see Chatty and Marfleet 2013; Regasa and Lietaert 2022; Xiang 2022). The inclusive (im)mobility categories presented in this article capture the complex experiences of those who stay put during adversity and the mechanisms shaping their migratory trajectories. They offer a clearer understanding of migratory processes under adversity by reflecting the lived realities of those who prefer to remain rather than move (see Fig. 1). These additional (im)mobility categories enrich the literature by addressing gaps in existing classifications and respond to Stockdale and Haartsen's (2018: 6) call for future research to '… unravel the diversity of stayer types and staying processes'. This article further refines the concepts of active immobility and repels factors for better use in examining staying behaviour in areas affected by adversity.

These contributions could support efforts to deepen the understanding of migratory experiences among communities that choose to stay put despite precarious living conditions. Insights from studies using this framework can help policymakers design more targeted interventions by improving understanding of the motives behind people's decisions to remain and how they pursue their goals in adversity-affected communities. Such insights can also guide the creation of assistance programmes that foster social support, strengthen community ties, and enhance resilience in addressing shared challenges.

This article's contribution presents avenues for future research in disaster studies, conflict studies, and (im)mobility in conflict, which promise opportunities to advance our understanding of pressing global issues at the intersection of conflict, climate change, and (im)mobility. Previous studies (see, Stockdale and Haartsen 2018; Biehler 2023; Mallick, Priovashini, and Schanze 2023) have noted the lack of conceptual tools for examining staying behaviour, particularly among those who choose immobility despite adversity. The resilience–accessibility framework addresses this gap by providing analytical tools that can be adapted to analyse staying decisions across various contexts. It can, for example, be

applied to understand why and how people remain in disaster-prone regions such as Bangladesh and India, in drought- or conflict-affected communities in Africa, or on Pacific islands vulnerable to rising sea levels. In such settings, the framework enables a systematic examination of how human agency, resilience, access to resources, and structural conditions shape decisions to stay. Furthermore, the inclusive (im)mobility categories broaden the scope of analysis of migratory processes and facilitate the inclusion of a larger proportion of people in research, especially those from the Global South, resulting in a better understanding of previously neglected population and migration processes.

That said, the framework does have limitations. With its focus on analysing the immobility experiences of collectives, especially Indigenous communities, the resilience–accessibility framework may be less suited to exploring individual migratory experiences. In addition, Schewel (2020: 333–4), referencing Stockdale and Haartsen (2018), argues that frameworks that focus solely on immobility risk isolating immobility studies from migration studies. Some might argue that this framework risks reinforcing such isolation.

It is important that NGOs and state authorities understand why and how some communities remain in areas affected by adversity, despite limited external support and, at times, in defiance of official advice. Robust insights into the immobility experiences and processes of communities in the Global South are needed to inform policymaking and practical interventions aimed at sustainable solutions. A continued Western-centric and individualistic focus in migration studies risks perpetuating knowledge gaps about the experiences of communities, particularly Indigenous communities living in areas affected by adversities.

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Conflict of interest

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

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Data availability

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

Institutional review board statement

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

Notes

1. The locations have been anonymized for ethical considerations and requirements.
2. The study conducted in the Middle Belt focused on those who chose to remain despite the ongoing conflict and absence of state support. To understand why some people, stay, it is also helpful to explore why others do not and those who returned to their communities were included. However, they were not the central focus of the study.
3. Adopting an immobility perspective involves focusing on '… processes of staying (rather than on why they did not move)' (Stockdale and Haartsen, 2018: 2).
4. The term 'adversity' is used broadly to encompass various challenges, including violent conflict, while 'violent conflict' is used when referring to the study conducted in the Middle Belt.
5. Within these communities, their community members who carry firearms to defend the community are commonly referred to as 'youths'.
6. At this point, they looked at each other, paused, and then went on with the discussion.
7. The AK-47 (Avtomat Kalashnikova) is a Russian automatic rifle designed by Mikhail Kalashnikov in 1947.
8. The Enseada community in Brazil (Gini et al. 2020; Gini 2023) offers a contextual example of how multiple, intersecting factors shape the decision to remain: (1) collective (in)actions, (2) access to resources, (3) resilience, (4) structural conditions (e.g. the state, cultural traditions, environmental adversity, governance), and (5) shifting perceptions of the state, shaped by how these dynamics unfolded and how the community's capacities for adaptation were portrayed. Their unsuccessful efforts to sustain immobility, grounded in cultural commitments, were constrained and ultimately thwarted by ecological pressures and limited by the Brazilian state's response.
9. I acknowledge that the framework includes six analytical tools, which may seem extensive. However, the migratory experiences, contextual realities, and structural conditions within the study locations (and in other Indigenous communities) are often complex and fluid. Therefore, a broader set of tools is necessary to capture the varied directions these experiences may take.
10. This aspect of the framework draws on Giddens' (1984) notion of the duality of structure, recognizing that the decisions and (in)actions of communities both shape and are shaped by structural conditions.
11. The singular form is och'anyilo, while the plural form is ach'anyilo.
12. The following studies provide insights into voodoo practices believed to make individuals 'bullet-proof': Harnischfeger (2003: 29), Aborisade and Adedayo (2021), Oriola (2023), Anugwom (2014), Alie (2017).
13. *Garri* is granulated flour made from processed cassava root. It can be eaten as a snack when mixed with sugar and water. *Kuli-kuli* is a snack made from peanuts.

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