

*Agbibo, D.E. (2022) Mobility, mobilization, and counter/insurgency: the routes of terror in an African context.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Author: [Ezenwa Olumba](#) 

**Ezenwa Olumba** is a scholar who researches and writes about how violence and culture influence people's emotions, (im)mobility aspirations and collective behaviour. He is nearing the end of his PhD studies at Royal Holloway, University of London. His research articles have appeared in *Culture & Psychology*, *Third World Quarterly*, *Small Wars & Insurgencies* and *Terrorism & Political Violence*. His seminal work on cognitive immobility, published by *Culture & Psychology*, is a cutting-edge knowledge contribution to the disciplines of psychology, migration, and social policy.

---

**Keywords:** [\(Im\)mobility](#); [Counterinsurgency](#); [Boko Haram](#); [Nigeria](#); [Violent conflict](#)

---

Published on **April 2023** | Peer Reviewed | CC BY 3.0

**The Author(s) retain Copyright of this article.**

---

Acquiring data at the checkpoints established by a coalition of soldiers and local militias in their fight against Boko Haram is not just perilous but requires great bravery; this was one of the approaches used to gather the data that serves as the foundation of the book.

The primary purpose of this book, as Agbibo explains, is 'to reclaim the logic of mobility in matrices of armed conflicts' (p. 6). Through an informative and comprehensive study of Boko Haram's insurgency and the Nigerian state's counterinsurgency efforts, the author demonstrates the impact of mobility both on influencing the violent activities of actors in terms of identity formation and on shaping the daily lives of ordinary people. It posits that the transformation of Boko Haram from a religious movement to an 'anti-state insurgency' and eventually into full-blown terrorism was facilitated by the Nigerian state's policies that reinforced the spatial and economic immobility of the people in affected regions, which Boko Haram then exploited.

In opposition to many studies on migration that take a Western-centric approach and concentrate on individuals (Salazar, 2021, p. 16), Agbibo's research focuses on the migration experiences of communities and groups in the context of violence. The book is a result of

extensive field research conducted in a conflict-ridden region, where the author put himself in harm's way to gain first-hand knowledge about the influence of mobile infrastructures on power dynamics and their impact on civilians and all parties involved (p. 26).

The opening chapter presents a comprehensive synthesis of the existing literature on mobility, the fundamental characteristics of infrastructures, and their interrelation with violence. The rest of the book consists of five chapters.

The first chapter narrates the rise of motorcycle taxis, known as *achaba* or *okada* in Nigeria, and the drivers' challenges in negotiating discriminatory and oppressive mobile infrastructures, which have led to their recruitment into Jihadist groups.

The second chapter discusses the roots of insurgent groups in northern Nigeria, primarily Boko Haram, with an informative analysis of the ushering of young people from Koranic schools (*almajiris*) into new roles, identities, ideologies and goals, thus, providing mobility in several realms to a previously immobilised group of youths.

The third chapter details the collusion of religious extremism, corruption and predatory politics, which led to discontent between Boko Haram leaders and Bornu State elites, resulting in state policies aimed at undermining the mobility of the *achaba* drivers, many of whom were members of Boko Haram, their resistance to these policies, and the extrajudicial killing of the Boko Haram leader.

The fourth chapter examines Boko Haram's re-emergence, including the group's use of mobile infrastructures in its fight against the state, the initial counterinsurgency measures that were detrimental to the civilian population, and the absorption of civilians into the counterinsurgency, which changed Boko Haram's purpose from 'anti-state insurgency' into full-blown terrorism.

The fifth chapter provides an account of the Nigerian government's counterinsurgency operations, which included immobility governance measures such as road and border closures, motorcycle bans, curfews and telecommunications shutdowns. These were meant to constrain the Boko Haram insurgency but caused resentment among the ordinary people, which Boko Haram leveraged for its recruitment drive.

The book's key strength lies in its presentation of a new and insightful analysis of the nexus between mobility, insurgency and counterinsurgency, and their impact on the daily existence of individuals in the northeast of Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin region. Another salient characteristic of the book is its methodological approach, which is fitting for the study and notable for its meticulous and lucid exposition of the data collection techniques employed.

Although the book adopts the ‘new mobilities paradigm’, it mainly focuses on spatial mobility and economic immobility (Solomon, 2017). A deeper examination of the impact of both the insurgency and counterinsurgency efforts on the involuntary or acquiesced immobility of people within the region would have provided valuable insights.

This book constitutes a significant addition to the scholarly literature on (im)mobility and counterinsurgency, as it provides a thought-provoking and insightful perspective on these two themes. It comes highly recommended to scholars seeking to enhance their knowledge and comprehension of the interconnection between (im)mobility and violent conflicts in Africa.

---

## Bibliography

Salazar, N.B. (2021) ‘The relational and experiential qualities of an ambiguous concept’, *Transfers*, 11 (3), pp. 3–21.

Solomon, L.D. (2017) ‘Economic immobility and income and wealth inequalities: realities and causal factors’, in Solomon, L.D. (ed.) *Building an opportunity society: a realistic alternative to an entitlement state*. London: Routledge, pp. 17–33.