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Migration, Displacement, and the Making of Identity in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

Migration and displacement shape social relationships, cultural identities, and experiences of belonging in Northern Nigeria. Beyond their economic, political, and humanitarian consequences, these processes influence how individuals understand themselves and negotiate membership in new communities. This paper examines how migration and displacement shape identity formation and reconstruction in the region. Using a qualitative conceptual and interpretive approach, it critically engages published scholarship on migration, displacement, ethnicity, and belonging. The analysis draws on Social Identity Theory and Identity Process Theory to explain how group membership, social categorisation, and changes in personal circumstances influence identity negotiation. It argues that movement does not necessarily erase existing identities but creates new conditions in which cultural affiliations, social recognition, and belonging are negotiated. In Northern Nigeria, these processes intersect with ethnic, religious, linguistic, and indigene-settler identities. The paper proposes a contextual framework linking movement, social location, recognition, cultural interaction, and belonging. By bringing these dimensions together, it contributes a conceptual perspective for understanding identity formation under conditions of migration and displacement. The framework also provides a basis for future empirical research into the experiences of migrants, displaced populations, and host communities.

Keywords: Migration; Forced Displacement; Identity Formation; Belonging; Northern Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Migration and forced displacement continue to shape social and cultural life in Northern Nigeria. Historically, people have moved across the region for trade, pastoral activities, education, employment, religious activities, and settlement. However, insecurity and communal violence have forced many people to leave their homes and seek safety elsewhere. These movements affect more than where people live; they also influence their relationships, cultural practices, and sense of belonging. Understanding migration and displacement therefore requires attention to how people maintain and negotiate their identities in changing social environments.

Migration involves more than movement from one place to another. It can create new relationships, reshape community membership, and influence how people understand themselves and others [1,2]. Barth and Jenkins show that identity develops through social interaction and the boundaries people establish between themselves and others [3,4]. Migrants may maintain their ethnic, religious, and cultural affiliations while adapting to new environments. Their identities are therefore shaped by both existing attachments and new social experiences.

Forced displacement presents additional challenges because it can separate individuals and families from their homes, livelihoods, social networks, and familiar institutions. These disruptions may weaken established relationships and create uncertainty about belonging. Nevertheless, displacement does not necessarily erase previous identities. Malkki, in her study of Hutu refugees in Tanzania, demonstrates how displaced populations draw on memory, historical narratives, and social relationships to reconstruct collective identities [5]. This perspective is relevant to Northern Nigeria, where ethnic, religious, linguistic, and family connections may help displaced people maintain a sense of continuity while adjusting to new circumstances.

Historical migration also provides useful insights into the relationship between identity and belonging. Olaniyi examines how Yoruba migrants in Kano maintained connections with southwestern Nigeria while participating in the social and economic life of their destination [6]. His study illustrates how people can establish new relationships without abandoning earlier affiliations. However, historical migration and contemporary forced displacement are different experiences. The Kano case offers a historical comparison rather than direct evidence of the experiences of people displaced by contemporary violence. Recognising this distinction helps clarify the limits of the existing literature.

Although previous studies have examined migration, ethnicity, displacement, and belonging, further conceptual work is needed to explain how these processes interact in Northern Nigeria. In particular, greater attention is needed to the relationship between movement, social recognition, cultural interaction, and identity formation. Migrants and displaced people may encounter new social boundaries and expectations while trying to maintain established affiliations. Their experiences of belonging are consequently influenced by their relationships with host communities and the wider social and political conditions in which they settle. This paper brings these issues together to examine how identity is negotiated under changing conditions of mobility and displacement.

The paper adopts a qualitative conceptual and interpretive approach based on published scholarship. It does not present original fieldwork or interview findings but develops an analytical perspective through engagement with existing literature. The discussion draws on Social Identity Theory [7], which explains the relationship between group membership and identity, and Identity Process Theory [8], which examines how people maintain and adapt their identities when circumstances change. Bringing these perspectives together, the paper proposes a framework linking movement, social location, recognition, cultural interaction, and belonging. It argues that migration and displacement do not simply preserve or replace existing identities; they create circumstances in which people continually negotiate who they are and where they belong.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND IDENTITY PROCESS THEORY

This paper draws on Social Identity Theory and Identity Process Theory to explain how migration and displacement influence identity formation and belonging in Northern Nigeria. The two theories provide complementary perspectives. Social Identity Theory focuses on how group membership shapes people's understanding of themselves and others, while Identity Process Theory explains how individuals maintain and adapt their identities when their circumstances change. Together, they help explain the relationship between group boundaries, personal identity, social recognition, and belonging.

2.1. Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner, explains how individuals understand themselves partly through their membership in social groups [7]. Such memberships may include ethnic, religious, linguistic, and national communities. People may develop a sense of belonging through these affiliations, while distinctions between groups can influence how they perceive and relate to others. The theory therefore provides a useful basis for examining how social categorisation shapes relationships between migrants, displaced populations, and host communities.

In Northern Nigeria, group membership may influence how migrants and displaced people are received in their new environments. Individuals who identify strongly with their communities of origin may encounter social boundaries that distinguish established residents from newcomers. These distinctions can affect recognition, participation, and access to community networks. However, group boundaries are not necessarily permanent, and membership in one community does not prevent individuals from developing attachments to another. Social Identity Theory thus helps explain how migration and displacement can reinforce existing affiliations while creating opportunities for new forms of belonging.

2.2. Identity Process Theory

Identity Process Theory, associated with Breakwell, examines how individuals maintain and adapt their identities in response to changing social circumstances [8]. The theory identifies four important identity principles: continuity, distinctiveness, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Continuity concerns the connection between past and present identities; distinctiveness relates to a sense of individuality; self-esteem concerns the value people attach to themselves; and self-efficacy involves their perceived ability to act and influence their circumstances.

Forced displacement can challenge these principles by separating people from familiar places, relationships, livelihoods, and institutions. The loss of a home or established community may disrupt continuity, while exclusion or discrimination can affect self-esteem and people's ability to participate in their new environments. Nevertheless, displaced people may draw on family relationships, religious communities, language, cultural practices, and collective memory to maintain aspects of their identities. These resources can support adaptation and help individuals establish new relationships without completely abandoning their previous affiliations.

2.3. Applying the Theories to Northern Nigeria

Social Identity Theory and Identity Process Theory offer complementary explanations of identity formation under conditions of migration and displacement. The former draws attention to group membership, social categorisation, and boundaries between insiders and outsiders. The latter focuses on how individuals respond when changes in their circumstances threaten important aspects of their identities. Their combined application allows the analysis to consider both the social conditions that shape belonging and the ways individuals maintain or reconstruct their identities.

These perspectives also complement Jenkins's relational understanding of identity and Anthias's concept of translocational positionality, which highlights how identity and belonging are shaped by people's multiple social locations [4,9]. In Northern Nigeria, an individual's experience may be influenced simultaneously by ethnic affiliation, religious identity, place of origin, social relationships, and institutional classifications. Migration and displacement can alter the significance of these positions without necessarily removing earlier attachments.

The paper therefore understands identity formation as a continuing process involving social categorisation, personal continuity, cultural interaction, and the negotiation of belonging. This theoretical position informs the contextual framework developed in Section 8, which connects movement, social location, recognition, cultural interaction, and belonging. Because the paper is conceptual, the framework provides an interpretive approach for examining existing scholarship rather than claiming to establish the experiences of all migrants and displaced people in Northern Nigeria.

3. MIGRATION, SETTLEMENT, AND IDENTITY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Migration has long shaped social relationships and cultural life in Northern Nigeria. People have moved across the region for trade, pastoral activities, education, employment, religious activities, and settlement. These movements have brought different communities into contact, creating opportunities for cooperation, cultural exchange, and the development of new social relationships. Migration has also raised questions about

community membership and belonging, particularly when newcomers settle in places where established populations have their own understandings of identity and social affiliation. Understanding these historical patterns provides a foundation for examining how migration influences identity formation in the region.

African migration scholarship shows that movement can create new communities without necessarily severing people's connections with their places of origin [1]. Migrants may establish businesses, build families, join religious communities, and participate in local institutions while maintaining relationships with relatives and communities elsewhere. Olaniyi's study of Yoruba migrants in Kano illustrates this relationship between settlement and continuing attachment to places of origin [6]. His analysis demonstrates how migrants participated in their destination community while negotiating questions of citizenship, recognition, and belonging. This historical example highlights the complexity of settlement, although it does not directly explain the experiences of people displaced by contemporary insecurity.

The relationship between migration and identity becomes clearer when considered through the social boundaries that distinguish communities. Barth argues that ethnic identity is maintained through boundaries established in social interaction rather than through cultural differences alone [3]. Jenkins similarly explains that identity develops through the relationship between self-identification and the ways others identify individuals [4]. These perspectives suggest that migrants may understand themselves through established ethnic or cultural affiliations while being classified by others according to their origin or settlement history. Such classifications can influence their relationships with host communities and their opportunities for participation.

Settlement, therefore, does not automatically produce full social acceptance. People may live in a community for many years, contribute to its economy, and establish lasting relationships while still encountering distinctions between established residents and newcomers. Geschiere examines how claims of belonging and local origin can become grounds for inclusion and exclusion, while Lentz demonstrates how historical claims to locality can influence access to land, resources, and community membership in West Africa [10,11]. These studies offer useful comparative insights for Northern Nigeria, where questions of indigeneity, settlement, and citizenship can shape relationships between communities. They also demonstrate that belonging is influenced by social and political arrangements, not simply by length of residence.

Migration can also produce cultural continuity alongside adaptation. People may preserve their languages, religious practices, family relationships, and cultural traditions while adjusting to new social environments. Hall and du Gay present identity as a continuing process shaped by cultural identification and social change [12]. Vertovec similarly explains how migrants maintain relationships across geographical boundaries [13]. These perspectives help explain why migration does not necessarily require people to abandon their previous affiliations. Instead, individuals may develop multiple attachments, identifying with their communities of origin while building meaningful relationships in their destinations.

Forced displacement shares some of these processes but involves additional disruption. Unlike many forms of voluntary migration, displacement may occur under circumstances that leave individuals with little choice about when or where to move. The loss of homes, livelihoods, and established social networks can make the negotiation of identity and belonging more difficult. Malkki demonstrates that displaced populations can reconstruct collective identities through memory, shared histories, and social relationships [5]. However, the experiences of displaced people vary according to their circumstances and the environments in which they settle. Historical migration can therefore provide a useful comparison, but it cannot substitute for evidence about contemporary displacement.

Migration and settlement in Northern Nigeria should consequently be understood as social processes through which identities and relationships are maintained, challenged, and renegotiated. Movement places people in new social locations, while cultural interaction and recognition influence their experiences of belonging. Existing affiliations may continue alongside new attachments, although social boundaries and institutional arrangements can limit acceptance. This perspective provides a basis for examining forced displacement as a related but distinct process in which the disruption of established relationships may intensify the challenges of identity reconstruction.

4. MIGRATION, ETHNIC BOUNDARIES, AND THE NEGOTIATION OF BELONGING

Migration places people in social environments where ideas about ethnicity, origin, citizenship, and community membership are already established. As individuals settle in new locations, they must negotiate relationships with people whose cultural identities and understandings of belonging may differ from their own. These encounters can strengthen existing affiliations, encourage cultural adaptation, or create tensions between newcomers and established residents. Identity is therefore shaped not only by where people live but also by how they are recognised and accepted within their new communities.

Barth explains that ethnic boundaries are maintained through social interaction, while Jenkins emphasises the relationship between self-identification and the ways others categorise individuals [3,4]. These perspectives help explain why migrants may continue to identify strongly with their communities of origin while being regarded as outsiders in their destinations. Brubaker further cautions against treating ethnic groups as fixed and uniform entities [14]. Instead, ethnic categories become significant through particular social and political circumstances. Migration can therefore change how people experience and express their identities without necessarily removing established distinctions between groups.

Belonging is also influenced by claims about who qualifies as a legitimate member of a community. Geschiere examines how ideas of local origin and autochthony can be used to distinguish insiders from outsiders, while Lentz explores the relationship between mobility, land, and belonging in West Africa [10,11]. Their studies demonstrate that long-term residence does not always guarantee acceptance or equal access to resources. These insights are relevant to Northern Nigeria, where distinctions involving indigeneity, settlement, and citizenship may shape social relationships and opportunities for participation. Belonging must therefore be understood as both a personal attachment and a social process influenced by recognition and power.

At the same time, migration can produce multiple forms of belonging. Migrants may maintain relationships with their places of origin while developing new attachments through family life, religious participation, employment, and community involvement. Vertovec shows how social relationships can extend across geographical boundaries, allowing people to sustain connections with different places [13]. Hall and du Gay similarly understand identity as an ongoing process rather than a fixed cultural condition [12]. These perspectives suggest that cultural adaptation does not necessarily require the abandonment of previous affiliations. Instead, people may negotiate a sense of belonging that combines continuity with new social experiences.

The relationship between belonging and identity becomes more complicated under forced displacement. Displaced people may enter communities where ideas about origin, membership, and social entitlement are already contested. They may need to rebuild relationships while coping with the loss of familiar surroundings and established networks. Although their ethnic, religious, and linguistic affiliations can provide resources for maintaining continuity, acceptance by host communities is not automatic. Their experiences depend partly on the relationships, institutions, and social conditions encountered after displacement.

Migration, ethnic boundaries, and belonging are therefore closely connected processes. Movement changes people's social locations, while recognition and institutional arrangements influence how they are received. Individuals may maintain earlier affiliations, develop new relationships, and negotiate competing expectations about membership. Understanding these dynamics provides an important basis for examining identity reconstruction among displaced populations in Northern Nigeria, while recognising that forced displacement involves disruptions that cannot be reduced to the experiences of settled migrant communities.

5. DISPLACEMENT, IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION, AND BELONGING

Forced displacement can disrupt the social relationships, cultural practices, and familiar environments through which people understand their identities. Leaving home may separate individuals from family networks, livelihoods, religious institutions, and established communities. These changes can create

uncertainty about belonging and make it difficult to maintain a sense of continuity. Displacement should therefore be understood not only as a humanitarian concern but also as a social process that affects how people understand themselves and their relationships with others.

However, displacement does not necessarily erase established identities. Malkki, in her study of Hutu refugees in Tanzania, demonstrates how displaced people reconstruct collective identities through memory, historical narratives, and social relationships [5]. Her work highlights the importance of the social environment in shaping these experiences. For displaced populations in Northern Nigeria, ethnic affiliations, religious practices, language, and family relationships may help preserve connections with their communities of origin. These resources can provide continuity while individuals adjust to unfamiliar circumstances.

The process of identity reconstruction also depends on the conditions people encounter after displacement. Access to housing, employment, education, religious communities, and social networks can influence their ability to establish new relationships. Some displaced people may find support among relatives or members of their ethnic and religious communities, while others may encounter exclusion or difficulty participating in their host communities. These differences suggest that displacement does not produce a single identity outcome. Rather, identity reconstruction is shaped by personal circumstances, available resources, and relationships with the surrounding society.

Host communities are particularly important in this process. Displaced people enter social environments where ideas about ethnicity, origin, and community membership may already influence relationships. Interaction can encourage cooperation and cultural exchange, but it can also reinforce distinctions between established residents and newcomers. Jenkins helps explain this process by showing how identity involves both self-identification and the ways others categorise individuals [4]. Consequently, displaced people may continue to understand themselves through established affiliations while negotiating how they are recognised in their new environments.

Historical migration provides a useful comparison, although the circumstances differ. Olaniyi shows that Yoruba migrants in Kano maintained connections with southwestern Nigeria while participating in their destination community [6]. This example illustrates how previous affiliations can coexist with new relationships. Forced displacement, however, often involves greater disruption because people may have little choice about leaving their homes and may face significant losses before beginning to rebuild their lives. The comparison therefore helps clarify the relationship between continuity and change without treating historical migration as direct evidence of contemporary displacement experiences.

Identity reconstruction among displaced populations in Northern Nigeria can thus be understood as a continuing negotiation between disruption, continuity, and adaptation. People may preserve important cultural and social affiliations while developing new relationships in their host communities. Their experiences of belonging are influenced by personal agency, social recognition, and the conditions in which they settle. This perspective reinforces the central argument of the paper: movement does not automatically erase identity, but it changes the social circumstances in which identity is maintained, expressed, and reconstructed.

6. MIGRATION, DISPLACEMENT, AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

Migration and displacement bring people into new social and cultural environments where established practices may be maintained, adapted, or challenged. Language, religion, family relationships, and community traditions often remain important sources of identity after movement. At the same time, interaction with new communities can introduce different cultural practices and ways of understanding belonging. Cultural transformation therefore involves both continuity and change, as people negotiate their existing affiliations within new social circumstances.

Hall understands cultural identity as a continuing process shaped by history and changing relationships, rather than as something permanently fixed [15]. Similarly, Vertovec explains how migrants maintain connections across geographical boundaries while participating in new social environments [13]. These

perspectives help explain why migration does not necessarily require people to abandon their cultural backgrounds. Individuals may preserve their language, religious practices, and family ties while adapting other aspects of their lives to their destinations.

In Northern Nigeria, ethnic, religious, and linguistic affiliations can provide important resources for maintaining cultural continuity. Migrants and displaced people may rely on family networks, religious institutions, and community associations to preserve relationships and establish support systems. However, the extent to which these connections remain accessible varies according to individual circumstances. Some people may maintain close relationships with their communities of origin, while others may experience considerable disruption. Cultural continuity should therefore not be assumed to occur in the same way for every migrant or displaced person.

Cultural transformation also occurs through interaction between newcomers and host communities. Contact may encourage cooperation, the exchange of ideas, and the development of shared practices. However, it can also reinforce existing distinctions when communities perceive differences in language, religion, ethnicity, or social customs as grounds for separation. Barth's analysis of ethnic boundaries is useful here because it demonstrates that cultural interaction does not automatically eliminate group distinctions [3]. People may participate in shared social and economic activities while maintaining a distinct sense of group identity.

Forced displacement can intensify these processes because people may be compelled to leave behind familiar cultural environments and rebuild their lives under difficult conditions. Nevertheless, displaced people are not simply passive recipients of cultural change. They may preserve important traditions, adapt practices to their new circumstances, and establish relationships that support their sense of identity. Malkki's study of refugees illustrates how collective memory and social relationships can contribute to the reconstruction of identity after displacement [5]. Such insights provide a basis for examining cultural continuity and adaptation without assuming that all displaced populations experience these processes identically.

Migration and displacement therefore contribute to cultural transformation through the interaction of existing affiliations, new relationships, and changing social conditions. People may maintain some cultural practices while adapting others, creating forms of identity that reflect both continuity and change. In Northern Nigeria, understanding these processes requires attention to the relationships between cultural interaction, social recognition, and belonging. Cultural transformation is not simply the disappearance of previous identities; it is an ongoing process through which individuals and communities negotiate their place within changing social environments.

7. BELONGING, RECOGNITION, AND THE MAKING OF IDENTITY

Belonging is an important dimension of identity formation because living in a community does not necessarily mean being accepted as one of its members. Migrants and displaced people may establish homes, build relationships, and contribute to local activities while still facing questions about their origins or claims to membership. Their experiences are shaped not only by how they understand themselves but also by how other people and institutions recognise them. Belonging should therefore be understood as a social process influenced by relationships, cultural expectations, and wider structures of power.

Jenkins explains that identity develops through the relationship between self-identification and external categorisation [4]. This perspective helps explain why individuals may maintain a strong sense of attachment to a community while being treated as outsiders in another. In Northern Nigeria, ethnic affiliation, place of origin, and indigene-settler classifications may influence how people are recognised within their destinations. These categories can affect social relationships and opportunities for participation, demonstrating that identity is shaped by both personal attachment and external recognition.

Institutional arrangements can further influence experiences of belonging. Ehrhardt examines how bureaucratic practices and indigeneship certification shape understandings of local membership in Northern

Nigeria [16]. Similarly, Geschiere demonstrates how claims of local origin can become grounds for inclusion and exclusion in different African contexts [10]. Such studies show that belonging is not determined solely by residence or cultural participation. Administrative classifications and political arrangements may also influence how individuals are positioned within their communities.

Migration and displacement can consequently produce experiences of both inclusion and exclusion. People may establish friendships, participate in religious activities, and develop economic relationships while continuing to encounter social boundaries. For displaced populations, these challenges may be compounded by the loss of established networks and the need to rebuild relationships in unfamiliar environments. Access to supportive institutions and acceptance by host communities can therefore influence how individuals develop new attachments while maintaining connections with their places of origin.

Nevertheless, belonging is not necessarily tied to a single place or community. Migrants and displaced people may sustain family, religious, cultural, and social relationships across geographical boundaries while developing new attachments in their destinations. Anthias's concept of translocational positionality is useful for understanding how identity and belonging are shaped by people's multiple social positions and relationships [9]. This perspective recognises that individuals may experience belonging differently depending on their social circumstances, affiliations, and encounters with institutions.

Belonging in Northern Nigeria is therefore best understood as negotiated rather than automatic. Migration and displacement can create opportunities for new relationships while exposing people to social classifications and institutional barriers. Identity develops through the interaction between personal identification, cultural continuity, social recognition, and access to community life. This understanding provides a foundation for the contextual framework presented in the next section, which brings these processes together to explain identity formation under conditions of migration and displacement.

8. A CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR IDENTITY FORMATION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Migration and displacement shape identity through changes in social location, relationships, cultural interaction, and experiences of belonging. When people move, they enter social environments where existing ideas about ethnicity, origin, and community membership may influence how they are received. These encounters can reinforce previous affiliations, create new relationships, or challenge established understandings of identity. Identity formation should therefore be understood as an ongoing process shaped by both personal experiences and wider social conditions.

The proposed framework brings together five interconnected elements: movement, social location, recognition, cultural interaction, and belonging. Movement refers to migration or displacement from an established environment. Social location concerns the positions people occupy within their new communities, including their relationships with host populations and local institutions. Recognition describes how individuals are identified and accepted by others, while cultural interaction involves the maintenance, exchange, and adaptation of cultural practices. Belonging refers to people's sense of attachment and their opportunities to participate in community life. Together, these elements provide a way to examine how identities are maintained and reconstructed under changing conditions.

These elements are connected rather than strictly sequential. Movement changes people's social locations, while their reception in a new environment influences opportunities for recognition and participation. Cultural interaction may encourage adaptation and new attachments, but it can also reinforce existing distinctions. Experiences of belonging are consequently shaped by the relationship between personal identification, social recognition, and the wider conditions of settlement. This interpretation draws on Barth's analysis of ethnic boundaries, Jenkins's relational approach to identity, and Anthias's concept of translocational positionality [3,4,9].

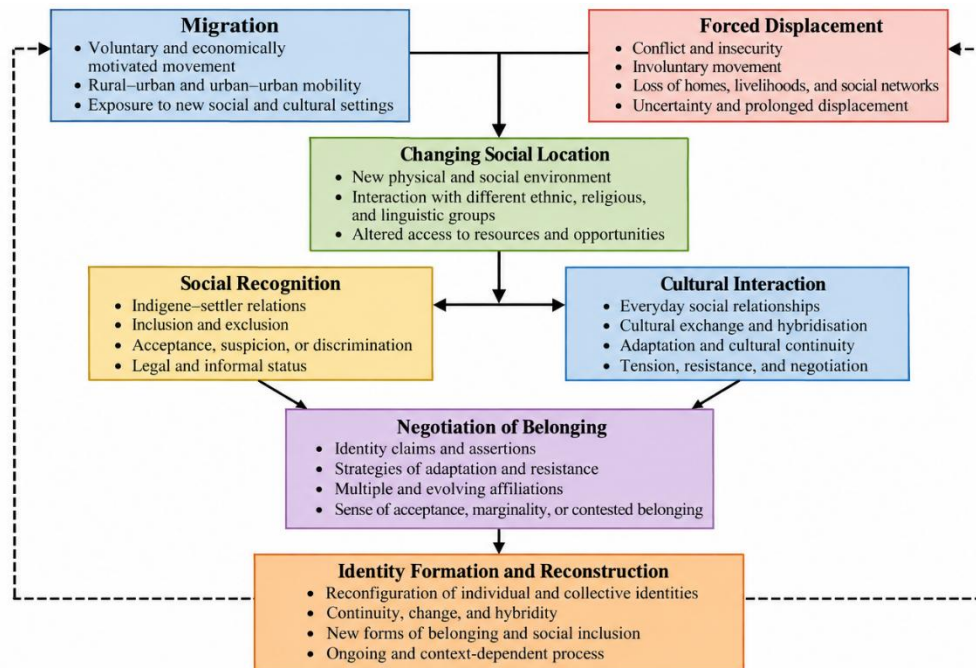


Figure 1. Contextual framework for identity formation under migration and displacement

The framework also recognises that migrants and displaced people are active participants in identity formation. They may preserve established cultural and religious affiliations, adapt particular practices, and develop new relationships in their destinations. However, their ability to establish belonging is influenced by social recognition, institutional arrangements, and access to community networks. Identity reconstruction therefore involves both individual agency and the social conditions within which people negotiate their positions.

The framework distinguishes migration from forced displacement without treating their consequences as entirely separate. Both can change social relationships and create new conditions for identity negotiation, but forced displacement may involve more abrupt disruption and loss of established support systems. The framework is intended as a conceptual tool for interpreting scholarship on Northern Nigeria and guiding future empirical research. It does not assume that all migrants or displaced people experience identity change in the same way.

9. DISCUSSION

The analysis demonstrates that migration and displacement in Northern Nigeria are not simply forms of geographical movement; they are processes through which identity and belonging are continually negotiated. Movement places individuals in new social environments where existing affiliations interact with new relationships, cultural expectations, and institutional arrangements. As the preceding sections show, people may maintain connections with their communities of origin while developing new attachments in their destinations. Identity is therefore shaped by both continuity and change.

Social Identity Theory helps explain how group membership and social categorisation influence these experiences. Ethnic, religious, and linguistic affiliations can provide a sense of belonging, but distinctions between established residents and newcomers may also contribute to exclusion. Barth and Jenkins demonstrate that group boundaries and social recognition are important to understanding how identities develop through interaction [3,4]. In Northern Nigeria, these perspectives help explain why participation in a community does not always result in full acceptance or recognition.

Identity Process Theory adds another dimension by explaining how people respond when changes in their circumstances challenge their sense of identity. Breakwell's principles of continuity, distinctiveness, self-esteem, and self-efficacy are particularly relevant to displacement [8]. Separation from familiar places and relationships may threaten continuity, while discrimination or limited opportunities for participation may affect self-esteem and perceived control. Nevertheless, cultural practices, family relationships, religious communities, and collective memory can help people maintain important aspects of their identities while adapting to new environments. These processes, however, require further empirical investigation in the specific circumstances of Northern Nigeria.

The distinction between migration and forced displacement remains important. Historical migration, such as the Yoruba settlement in Kano examined by Olaniyi, illustrates how people can maintain connections with their places of origin while participating in destination communities [6]. Forced displacement may involve more abrupt disruption because people are compelled to leave their homes and may lose access to established support systems. The historical case therefore provides a comparative perspective rather than direct evidence of contemporary displacement experiences. This distinction strengthens the analysis by recognising both the shared processes of identity negotiation and the different conditions under which they occur.

The proposed contextual framework brings these insights together by linking movement, social location, recognition, cultural interaction, and belonging. Its contribution lies in showing how these elements interact rather than treating identity as the automatic outcome of relocation. Social recognition can influence participation, cultural interaction can support adaptation, and experiences of belonging can affect how individuals understand their positions within new communities. These relationships also work in the opposite direction: people's existing identities and affiliations can shape how they approach new relationships and respond to social boundaries.

The framework contributes a conceptual perspective for examining migration and displacement in Northern Nigeria, where ethnic affiliation, religious identity, and indigene-settler classifications may intersect with changing social circumstances. However, because the study relies on published literature rather than original fieldwork, the framework should be understood as an analytical proposition, not an empirically validated model. Future research involving migrants, displaced people, and host communities could examine how these relationships operate across different locations and circumstances. Such research would help establish how far the proposed framework explains variations in identity formation and belonging.

10. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined migration and forced displacement as processes that reshape identity and belonging in Northern Nigeria. The discussion shows that movement changes people's social locations, but it does not produce one uniform identity outcome. Existing ethnic, religious, linguistic, and family affiliations may provide continuity, while social recognition, cultural interaction, and institutional classifications shape the possibilities for new forms of belonging. Social Identity Theory helps explain the role of group membership and boundaries, while Identity Process Theory draws attention to the ways people respond when change threatens continuity, self-esteem, distinctiveness, or their sense of agency.

The proposed framework brings these relationships together as a conceptual tool for interpreting migration and displacement scholarship. Since the paper is based on published literature rather than original fieldwork, the framework should be treated as a proposition for further investigation, not as an empirically validated model. Future studies can test its usefulness through comparative research with migrants, displaced people, and host communities in different parts of Northern Nigeria. Such work should attend to differences in people's circumstances and avoid treating either migrants or displaced populations as homogeneous groups. A clearer understanding of how belonging is negotiated can also inform efforts to reduce exclusion and strengthen participation in host communities.

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