

The Impact of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine on Nigerians Residing in Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

The global impact of the break out of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has been very huge more especially on none Ukrainians living in Ukraine, including many Nigerians. The focus of this paper is on the displacement, socio-economic challenges, and psychological trauma encountered by Nigerians living in Ukraine who were predominantly students but also professionals. The research applies a qualitative methods approach using articles, reports, organisation, bulletin, journals, newspaper, etc., available in the public domain, focusing on the experiences of Nigerians moving in and out of the conflict zones, encountering racial and logistical problems during evacuations as well as eventual resettlement to neighboring countries or repatriation into Nigeria. In addition, the study highlights how geopolitical conflicts affect minority communities, international student flows, and racial disparities in certain dimensions of crisis management. Beyond this, the study highlights how geopolitical conflicts can affect minority communities and international student mobility as well as racial disparity in crisis management. It also focuses on international organizations and the Nigerian government to which aid was provided. This research paper is of potential significance in the wider discussions about the predicament of foreigners in war zones when considering research findings from these parts. It also underscores the imperative of effective longer-term strategies to help those in need and a far more inclusive approach to crafting our responses in conflict.

Keywords: Russia-Ukraine War, Nigerian Students, Displacement, Evacuation, Racial Discrimination, Foreign Nationals in Conflict Zone, African Diaspora, International Conflict, Education Disruption, Crisis Management, Humanitarian Response



INTRODUCTION

The actual strike initiated by Russia on Ukraine on the 24th February, February 2022 resulted in many casualties from the civilian population as well as encouraging a humanitarian crisis through the displacement of many individuals across the region. As much as the world has been somewhat more or less bothered with consequences of the conflict on the people of Ukraine, the war in some way, some way, touched the lives of foreigners resident in Ukraine, including Nigerians. Ukraine was one of the favourite study abroad destinations for many Nigerian students before the conflict, primarily, because of the cost of their education and the offers they had in the sciences including Medicine, Engineering, and other technical professions (Al Jazeera, 2022). From this, the acknowledgment that the approximate number of Nigerian citizens was 4,000 in 2021 out of which many were students studying in Universities in Ukraine (Vanguard, 2022).

The war very much affected the lives of these Nigerians, especially in their education as well as their means of income. During the conflict, most Nigerian students had to abandon their institutions, and students have been racially profiled upon attempting to cross borders in search of safe haven. Students' reports and human rights organizations provided examples of Africans, including Nigerians, being locked out of Uber, denied housing, and prioritized for evacuation less than Europeans (Human Rights Watch, 2022). This revelation sought to display the ethnic bias in humanitarianism with the crises.

The intervention of the Nigerian government also attracted a lot of criticisms and this include; The response say in the videos was slow and uncoordinated. Most Nigerians living in Ukraine complained of delays in evacuation or any kind of help they need thus increasing their pains and suffering. However, through the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, attempts were made later to evacuate Nigerians but due to poor preparation and timely response, Nigerians experienced a long process (BBC News, 2022).

This paper discusses the impact of the military action whereby Russia invaded Ukraine on the Nigerian individuals who were involved in the course of the evacuation after the crises; social, economical and psychological impacts of the war. Focusing on the experiences of some Nigerian individuals in Ukraine when the war began, the authors of the study show the general themes of racial disparities in the disaster response system and the lack of proactive changes in international humanitarian practices. The study also focuses on the shortcomings of home countries including Nigeria in taking preventive measures when their citizens are under threat during international crises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Russian unprovoked attack on Ukraine in February 2022 made drastic changes in the world order, which in turn heightened a massive humanitarian crisis. Although a vast number of writings revolve around the direct and prolonged impact of the conflict on Ukrainians, not much has been put into exploring the experiences of aliens within Ukraine especially the African students. Among them, Nigerians took the largest share, and their stories have raised several concerns in regards to migration, racism, and crisis management across the globe.

1. FOREIGN NATIONALS IN CONFLICT ZONES

Refugees and internally displaced persons are often foreigners, and their protection, evacuation, and even minimum need provisions are complicated concerns. Many works have highlighted the risks of international students who are studying in militarised states regarding evacuate services, food, shelter, and health care (Adepoju, 2020). When disaster occurs, communities' needs are medical priority; foreign people are seen as less important compared to regional citizens, giving them a secondary status to audience. For instance, during the Russia Ukraine conflict, the African students had a lot of troubles trying to flee and find safety, yet there are laws of international humanitarian that require the safeguarding of all civilians during war (International Organisation for Migration, 2022).

Similarly, in emergency evacuations during and after other conflicts like the Libyan civil war and the Syrian crisis, the plight of international students and workers is shown to be one of the overlooked issues. These people are often out of protection from their home countries and the quick humanitarian response that comes with the host country (Chowdhury & Rahman, 2021). Such patterns echoed what Nigerians in Ukraine had to undergo most of whom accused local and international authorities of abandonment (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Migrants often suffer disproportionately in crises, but there is little focus on the roles and responsibilities of states and other actors to protect them. No international legal instrument covers the rights of people affected by a crisis while living, working, staying, or transiting abroad. However, international legal instruments and frameworks list obligations of states to protect the rights of people who live, work, or stay outside their country of nationality. These include the nine core international human rights treaties, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, and International Humanitarian Law. Non-binding instruments also delineate human rights obligations applicable to migrants, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, and the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (International Organisation for Migration, 2022).

2. RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN CRISIS RESPONSES

Humanitarian response has always been a cause of race discrimination especially in the western and the European countries. The way African nationals were treated during the Russia Ukraine war made people realise that the way evacuations and treatment of refugees are happening is determined by race. Several news articles and testimonials showed that African people, including Nigerians, faced Discrimination in other sectors such as transport, accommodations, and movement across borders.

Some sources indicated that most African students were barred from buses or trains out of the conflict areas, while citizens of Europe had been given precedence (BBC News, 2022). This confirms other works that posit that there has rarely been an instance in history where the response to a crisis has been fair to Blacks and people of colour. The current racially defined social hierarchy is very well represented within the international humanitarian organisations, This actually more often still puts black and non-western people in a more vulnerable position in conflict regions (Abdul Razak, 2019).

Other studies, examining inequity in global humanitarian aid allocations similarly corroborates these findings revealing that non-white people are considered ‘second-class citizens’ during refugee emergencies. Kofi-Agorsah (2018) explored participation of Africans during the European migrant crises and noted that African hence refugees were housed in dangerous and unconducive environment than their European counterparts, as besides being housed in bad environment, they were less privileged to access services than the Europeans. This pattern was realised in the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine where Nigerians and other African nationals were left to wait longer to cross borders, lacking shelter, and receiving little diplomatic help – from the Nigerian government and global organisations.

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ON NIGERIAN NATIONALS

The experience of living in a war zone is traumatising to say the least especially for those who live in foreign countries to begin with. Mollica et al. (2007) state that compared to people who did not experience forced displacement, refugees and displaced persons suffer from more cases of PTSD, anxiety, and depression, especially if the racists vitriol is directed at them during their displacement. For Nigerian students in Ukraine, danger did not only come in form of an immediate physical threat, but also their programmes’ future and financial security. Education suffered a huge blow, with many students shutting out from institutions and unable to transfer or continue their studies from other universities, while the blame forced their resultant careers into a standstill (Adeoye, 2022).

In addition, these students and their families have suffered a material cost. Loss of education due to evacuation from a war zone and the sudden disruption of education put additional economical pressure on many Nigerian families selves. In the perspective of the relevant authorities, as Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated (2022), attempts to bring citizens back home were being hindered by, for instance, practical and financial challenges and significantly reduced assistance for those who were forced to leave the host country as students and professionals.

4. ROLE OF NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL BODIES

The Nigerian government and her response to the Russia Ukraine crisis can therefore be said to have elicited a lot of criticism. Several Nigerians complained of slow access to consular services and slow evacuations (BBC News, 2022). This is not the first instance, having noticed in prior research that many African governments fail to adequately address emergencies that befall their citizens abroad chief among them is the lack of diplomatic capacity as well as practical constraints (Akinrinade 2016).

Some authors opine that to ensure citizens’ safety during overseas conflicts, governments must employ preventive measures, not responses. Afolayan (2020) has stated writing that due to the catastrophes and acts of terrorism witnessed in the present years, African nations require sounding diplomacy as well as contingency mechanism for evacuating their citizens from combat areas of the world such as Ukraine.

HYPOTHESES

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses can be posited for further exploration:

- i. Unlike European citizens trapped in Ukraine during the Russian invasion, Black Nigerian expatriates found it difficult to evacuate and access humanitarian assistance because of racism.
- ii. The absence of an early Nigerian government diplomatic intervention to ensure the smooth progress through the Russian Ukrainian conflict compounded the challenges faced by Nigerians.
- iii. The effects of the war were social and economical, and had psychological impacts on the lives and future of Nigerians especially in education and career choices.
- iv. The humanitarian response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine sees these racial disparities as common practise in terms of dealing with crisis across the globe.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. RESEARCH DESIGN:

Using data, this research manages to employ a qualitative research approach whereby the effects of the Russian incursion into Ukraine on Nigerians in the host country are analysed. Using a qualitative methodology proves appropriate for this study as it focuses on a description and analysis of the lived experiences of participants in the context of the conflict. This research proposal seeks to analyse the qualitative storeys concerning displacement, racism, social and Economics, and emotional effects of the war. Also, the secondary research data will be collected from articles, reports, organisation, bulletin, journals, newspaper, etc., available in the public domain.

2. DATA COLLECTION METHOD:

This being a secondary research, the data collection process will only entail the use of data collected from various sources. Secondary data is data that has been previously collected, examined, filtered and documented for the general public by other practitioners and experts (Bryman, 2012). The study will primarily use qualitative data from the following sources:

- **Academic Literature:** These are previous research work and scholarly articles discussing the challenges of foreigners living in a conflict zone, this will also center around topics such as Nigerians or African nationals during the period of Russia-Ukraine war. These include scholarly articles on migration, conflict management and discrimination.
- **Reports from International Organizations:** Information from other reports such as that made by the International Organization for Migration, UNHCR and Human Rights Watch will be sought to ascertain how the humanitarian response to war unfolded or fanned against Nigerians like Nigerians across other African nationals in crisis.
- **Government and NGO Reports:** This gives firsthand information from the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It also shows how officials carried out the evacuation, what problems they faced, and what steps the Nigerian government took to handle the crisis.
- **Media Reports:** These include news articles and investigative reports done by reputable media organizations, like Al Jazeera, BBC News and Vanguard and these will provide qualitative understanding to the experiences faced by Nigerians during the invasion.

This methodology enables a detailed examination of varied opinions and gives an overall

perspective on the issue without requiring primary data collection through interviews or surveys.

3. DATA ANALYSIS METHOD:

Qualitative data gathered from secondary source will be analyzed under thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is one of the qualitative methodologies for describing, analyzing and interpreting patterns or themes within data (Braun, & Clarke 2006). This method will assist in categorizing and analyzing the collected data with a view of making valid conclusions concerning themes on the research targets. The following steps will be followed in the thematic analysis:

- i. **Familiarization with Data:** To ensure a good understanding of the materials, they are read through by the researcher several times with specific focus on the reports, academic articles, and media coverage.
- ii. **Generating Initial Codes:** Stringing code into meaningful relative chunks depending on important topics to the study like race discrimination, evacuation difficulty, psychological effect and Nigerian government.
- iii. **Searching for Themes:** Clustering the codes together into categories which represent the trends and issues that were identified in the collected data.
- iv. **Reviewing Themes:** Mostly, the process of identification of the themes would capture the data and match it consistently with the research questions.
- v. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Ideally, each theme must also be defined clearly and owned by the research in terms of how they help explain the effects of the invasion on Nigerians in Ukraine.

This method ensures that the narration of Nigeria and Africans' experience in the course of racism and integration of race aspect and feature into the Nigerian entity, as well as the process of evacuation in an international crisis is captured.

4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Even though this study does not collect primary data, certain ethical issues are pertinent to secondary data. First, any data obtained from secondary sources will be referenced appropriately to avoid violation of intellectual property rights (Creswell, 2013). Secondly, there will be a consideration of credible sources only in order to keep the results of the analysis as accurate as possible. Additionally, the topic investigated is highly personal and personal violation thus equal care will be taken to avoid compromising on validity by presenting an inaccurate picture of the experiences of the subjects involved.

5. LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY:



A disadvantage of using secondary data is that the data collection procedures are not usually in the researcher's control. As such, the research will depend on other sources' reports that, at times, do not capture all aspects of the experiences of Nigerians in Ukraine. Also, the limitation with using media reports is that there are tendencies to present specific aspects of the story than others. Another weakness is that the present study will not succeed in offering the current details of the situation as the research is based on the available statistics.

However, the following are the limitations of using secondary data. The use of secondary data enables one to undertake a wise and cheap way of acquiring a broad understanding of the issue without having to garner primary data in a war torn region which would be stressful as well as dangerous.

DISCUSSION

The war in Ukraine in February 2022 led not only to a giant geopolitical upheaval but also showed the fragility of people from other countries living in the conflict, especially black Africans. This study has looked at what happened to Nigerians in Ukraine when the war erupted; racism, evacuation, and the mental health implications of war on these people. Secondary data research adopted in this study entails the use of reports from other international organisations, reviewed literature, and media to depict a picture of the multiple and unbelievable hardships Nigerians underwent during the crises.

- i. **RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES:** One of the most discussed discoveries of this research is the prejudice Nigerian nationals and other African students experienced during the evacuation. There are countless numbers of how African nationals were valued less than Ukrainian and European citizens and even denied buses, trains, and shelter. While such treatment is discriminatory based on the severity of the situation, this indicates a major problem in the supplementary international humanitarian interventions that primarily occur in the European region. Human Rights Watch (2022) notes that discrimination based on the nationality and race of the vulnerable group infringes on humanitarian laws that assures the protection of all the civilians during wars. In being Nigerian, during this crisis, race repeats its historical renditions of injustice in the distribution of humanitarian aid and conflict resolution across the globe (Abdul-Razak, 2019).
- ii. **GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSE AND DIPLOMATIC CHALLENGES:** There were some expected criticisms toward Nigerian government reaction; many Nigerian citizens stated that there were being delayed to evacuate and lacking sufficient diplomatic assistance. Although the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs later arranged for evacuations, many Nigerians in Ukraine were worried because there was initially no plan by the Nigerian government to evacuate anyone (BBC News, 2022). This shows the problems that African governments encounter in their capacities to protect citizens whenever they are in an alien country during a conflict. Lack of funds, little diplomatic connections, and no preparations for supply and support also played role in the slow response.

Other research shows that, the importance of preventive diplomacy measures cannot be undermined specially regarding safety of foreign nationals in crises (Afolayan, 2020). This study affirms the assertion that there is a need for African countries inclusive of



Nigeria, to enhance its foreign policy strategies to encompass standard operational models of evacuation and protection of fellow countrymen in other foreign countries. It may comprise creation of better and stronger offices in large areas of the world as well as addressing information exchange between diplomatic offices and compatriots living in the foreign territories.

- iii. **PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ON NIGERIANS:** The effect that it [the conflict] has had on the Nigerians in Ukraine psychologically cannot be overemphasized. Their education was cut short, they lost their livelihood and were forced to flee a war zone that presented very real huge mental health troubles that are manifested in the form of anxiety, depression, and trauma. Studies on refugees and displaced persons indicate that experiences in violence and discrimination increase psychological disorders (Mollica et al., 2007). Indeed, for many Nigerian students the war spell fear and uncertainty concerning their educational careers as many had to drop out and did not know when they would be able to return or transfer to other schools, if ever.

The other effects were as much socio-economic as they were psychological. Nigerian families invested fairly well to ensure that their children had the opportunity to study in Ukraine and when this was suddenly cut off, there were monetary losses involved. Evacuation was expensive and moreover, children lost their school terms, and possibly their futures; opportunities to further their education or gain vocations were scarce for many Nigerians. The Nigerian government and other international institutions needs to have these socio economical impacts in mind while working on their future crisis solution programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research, several key recommendations are proposed to address the challenges experienced by Nigerians in Ukraine and to improve future crisis management strategies:

- i. **ADDRESS RACIAL DISPARITIES IN INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS:** European and the western countries making up the international community too must also look at how they are racially profiling their humanitarian responses. To avoid similar discrimination in future conflicts, UN agencies IOM must develop better policies that provide stringent measures for equal treatment of all civilians, immigrants, or persons of certain ethnic origins during the evacuation or receiving refugees during the Ukraine crises and other raids.

In addition, there is dire need for raising awareness among local authorities and humanitarian workers through training to avoid discrimination on the basis of race in the conduct of crisis response operations. An independent body can also be formed to supervise the conduct of foreign nationals in conflict areas to adhering to the laws of human Right.

- ii. **STRENGTHEN DIPLOMATIC PREPAREDNESS FOR AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS:** Siemens scandals that African nations such as Nigeria require further enhancement of diplomatic and consular protection to ensure that citizens in foreign countries are protected. To prevent delays and mismanagement in future crises, the following measures are recommended:
- **Establish Contingency Plans:** There must be proper and elaborative policies in government regarding how people can be evacuated or protected in foreign countries. This entails getting transportation, accommodation, and funding for nationals in war affected areas.
 - **Improve Consular Services:** There is an argument that; Nigerian embassies and consulate generals, particularly in countries with large student communities, should be much better prepared for emergencies. This includes making sure they are equipped with the appropriate tools and communiqué technology to help the people in their times of need.
 - **Strengthen International Collaboration:** Nigeria should boost its relationship with international organisations and other countries to guarantee individuals of Nigerian origin, residing in other countries, access to multilateral evacuation and humanitarian assistance. Such things could entail signing of treaties with host nations that seek to address the plight of foreigners during conflicted instants.
- iii. **PROVIDE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR AFFECTED NIGERIANS:** Most affected Nigerian students and expatriates in the conflict ridden Russia Ukraine war still have lingering psychological and financial effects. The Nigerian government, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international bodies, should provide the following support mechanisms:
- **Mental Health Support:** Counselling on the other hand should be given free or at a subsidized price to Nigerians affected by the conflict so that they can be assisted to live with the kind of psychological torture they went through. Telecounselling could be offered for displaced students if online mental health services were to be created.
 - **Educational and Career Recovery Programs:** Since the Nigeria child may have to transfer to other institutions, courses should be created to assist the Nigeria child with, either through transfer or online classes. They should be given some type of funding or scholarship if they had their education interrupted due to the war.
 - **Financial Assistance:** Instances where families lost most of their earnings all the evaporated education or job opportunities which could have been replaced by aid packages.
- iv. **PROMOTE GLOBAL SOLIDARITY FOR FOREIGN NATIONALS IN CONFLICT ZONES:** The situation in Ukraine suggests there's little sympathy for foreign nationals caught in conflicts, whose aid international organisations have failed to supply. International organization, civil society organizations and humanitarian agencies must set priorities for formulating policies that foreign nationals get the same attention and dignity as their own citizens during disasters. Intervention for the protection of rights of all the people who are affected with conflict irrespective of their colour or the nation they belong should be a major focus in the future planning.

CONCLUSION

Analyzing the experience of Nigerians in Ukraine due to the Russian invasion, several contours of the modern humanitarian response system can be identified, which in various ways are combined with the problem of race, as well as deficiencies in diplomatic readiness for such crises. By tackling such problems with better crisis management systems, anticipatory diplomacy, and better partnerships with the international community, subsequent cases of conflict can be resolved far more fairly and effectively, thus providing foreign citizens such as Nigerians less prone during acts of crisis on the international level.

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