

A HUMAN SECURITY ANALYSIS OF LAND GRABBING AND RENAMING IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study critically analyses land grabbing and renaming as contemporary nature of insecurity affecting human security in Plateau State. Previously, scholars have conducted several studies on the nature of insecurity in Plateau State, but their focused have mainly been on the ethno-religious conflicts, resource-based attacks, and political induced violence. There are limited scholarly works that have factored the excruciating pain that comes with land grabbing, and worst of all renaming people's very own lands that have been as old as their ancestors. The main study's objective is to examine how land grabbing and renaming affect human security of the displaced communities whose lands have been grabbed and renamed. The study adopted human security theory as theoretical framework to shift focus from state-centric defence of the state space to the 'freedom from want and fear' of individuals whose sources of livelihoods have been forcefully taken away from them thereby deteriorating their human security. In order to analyse the lived experiences of the grabbed and renamed communities, the study employed interpretivist qualitative methodology. Both primary and secondary sources of data were explored, the primary data was obtained from key informant interviews and focus group discussions conducted in 2025 across 13 communities in 6 LGAs. These purposive selected LGAs include Jos North, Bassa, Riyom, Barkin Ladi, Bokkos, and Mangu have the history and manifestation of displacements, land grabbing and renaming. Secondary sources were mainly sourced from security texts to triangulate data. Findings from the primary data revealed that over 50 villages have been displaced, occupied, and some renamed in Riyom LGA, and over 35 villages in Gashish district, Barkin Ladi displaced and occupied. One common example, is the grabbing and renaming Fass to Mahanga in Riyom LGA. The finding from the secondary source revealed that in the space of three years, land grabbing and renaming rose from 54 to 102 communities that is between 2018 and 2021. From the triangulated data, result shows that renaming known as toponymic is a tactical weapon and strategy employed by armed herder militias to erase or wipe off legal memory, identity and history of people. The study concludes that individuals are never free from fear and want when their personal values such as land which symbolises their identity, history and heritage are threatened or forcefully taken. The study recommends that Plateau State Government and State House of Assembly should immediately enact a Toponymic Integrity Law that nullifies every unauthorised land grabbing and renaming of communities since 2001, and reaffirm the original indigenous names to all land registries. This will not only bring psychological relief, but it will immediately heal the mental trauma of the displaced communities and will serve as the first step to their onward return to their ancestral homes.

Key Words: Human Security, Toponymic, Operation Rainbow, Land Grabbing, Land Renaming, Interpretivist Approach, State-centric

Introduction

Humanity is increasingly facing security challenges cutting across the globe. In everyday life, people live in fear, fear of the unknown, and in most cases, due to the prevalence of

security threats, people are faced with predictable security threats that are common and are happening regularly. These security threats (can be classified into violent and non-violent) are present in all human societies whether developed or developing. Some of the violent threats that societies face includes violent attacks, insurgency, kidnapping and armed robbery. Whereas non-violent threats sometimes described as most excruciating to human security including poverty, hunger, unemployment, climate change, and disease. The insurgents' attacks on the World Trade Centre, United States of America in 2001, indicates the uncertainties and vulnerability humanity faces (Zandee and Meijnders, 2014). If such violence could happen on America's soil considered to be stronger in terms of military capability, what will be the fate of the developing nations of Africa and Asia?

In Africa, the wave of insecurity grows at an alarming rate. Amnesty International (2019) notes that the African continent has become a home to some of the world's deadliest terror groups causing intractable conflicts like armed conflicts and insurgency are ongoing in most of its countries. The Nigerian State on returning to democratic administration in 1999, was greeted with challenges of internal security management which include Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East; the Niger Delta militancy and piracy in the South-South, herders militia attacks on farming communities largely in the North Central, armed bandits in the Northwest, ethno-religious conflicts, resource-based conflicts, trans-border criminal activities, and election induced violence and so on (Dambazzau, 2014; Folarin & Oviasogie, 2014; Nwagboso, 2018; Oyeukwu & Mkpae, 2025).

Plateau State, North Central of Nigeria, has been a hotspot of insecurities that have culminated in the loss of lives and properties. For more than two decades, the State has been challenged by recurring, violent, and deadly conflicts fuelled by ethnic and religious tensions. These conflicts are usually between the predominantly Muslim Hausa-Fulani population against indigenous groups like the Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere (BAA), who are mainly Christians, over issues of land ownership and control of Jos (International Crisis Group, 2012). Furthermore, agitations by the Hausa and Fulani communities for greater political access, traditional leadership roles, and indigeneship rights have met stiff resistance from indigenous communities (Bonkat, 2015).

Consequently, violent conflict and criminality have shifted to remote villages, evolving into disputes over resources and minerals, land grabbing/renaming, and expansionism (Pam, 2021). This has prompted a severe humanitarian crisis, culminating in isolated and organised attacks, mass displacements, destruction of homes, and the proliferation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. The disruption of farming seasons has led to food insecurity, and frequent attacks on unarmed villagers have rendered Plateau State a place of extreme violence where killings occur with impunity (Zaleng, 2018).

Land grabbing and land renaming are two trending concepts found in the internal security discourse in Plateau State, emanate to becoming contemporary nature of human

insecurity in the State. Logan (2016) describes land grabbing as the sale or lease of land that is used on a permanent, seasonal, or recurring basis by individuals who have not agreed to the transfer of that land, whose land is taken by illegal means, with or without force. Land renaming on the other hand has been an age long event where societies that have been altered by the transition from colonialism or apartheid to modern or democratic societies resort in naming and renaming of areas or streets (Lungi, Kabinde-Machate, Mandende, & Cekiso, 2023). The common thread that binds these two concepts is 'illegal taking with or without force'. However, in this study, the two concepts are enforced through the act of violence and forcefully taking possession of something that is not one's own. In context, land grabbing and renaming are described as situations where violent attackers, suspected to be armed Fulani militias, no longer attack villages to steal, kill and leave. But they use different tactics such as the destruction of livelihoods of the natives to force them into surrender and submission then, grab and subsequently rename. In 2018, Nanlong reported that 54 communities in Plateau North were attacked, displaced, occupied and renamed. Pam's (2021) findings shows that this number has increased by 50% to 102 communities. Land grabbing and renaming is an attempt to take away the history and identity of a people by replacing it with the attackers' identity.

Statement of the Problem

Absolute land ownership is not only an economic asset or source of livelihood, but it gives the land owner both psychological and physical security and sanity, owing to the fact that a person that owns and dwells on the piece of land, controls all resources that are accrued to the land. However, when this ownership is threatened by physical takeover, the whole components of human security (personal, community and food securities) are affected. Once these human security components are vulnerable, one is truly not secure. These incidences are prevalent in the Northern (Barkin Ladi & Riyom LGAs) senatorial district, and Central (Bokkos & Mangu LGAs) senatorial districts of Plateau State. Jos north and Bassa LGAs are part of the study areas, however, Jos north manifested different type of land grabbing at best it can be called expansionism. This is due to the ethno-religious conflicts where the original owners are displaced and new occupants occupied their homes. In Bassa, due to the cycle of attacks, there are some areas that natives and Fulani herders no longer access.

Previous studies on the nature of insecurity in Plateau State focused more on the ethno-religious conflicts, resource-based conflicts involving land competitors (herders and crop farmers). However, land grabbing and particularly land renaming remained under-researched in the areas of human security and security governance in Plateau State, North Central, Nigeria. A significant gap exists in trying to factor the psychological imbalance and personal security of individuals whose community's name has been forceful erased equating to wiping out of one's history, identity and heritage. Just as personal name depicts identity, so it is with areas or places. The contributory factors that accounted for the persistence of insecurity on the Plateau which resulted to these emergent threats, are persistent use of force or military deployments and formation of commissions of inquiry which have yielded insignificant impact on the security.

As result of the weakness of the military deployments and commissions inquiry, Operation Rainbow (OPR), a community-based security outfit was established by Plateau

State government to complement the conventional security operatives through intelligence gathering, early warning and community policing. Even with the laudable expectations Plateau citizens have on the OPR, the displaced, grabbed and renamed villages are still not recovered, a lot of Internally Displaced Persons camps (IDPs) still exist in Barkin Ladi, Bokkos and Mangu LGAs. A recent study in 2026 revealed that regime change affected the performance of OPR operatives, as they were neglected without welfare packages and allowances. This also demystify a finding that says OPR officers are driven by passion to protect their land rather than by financial gains. It is clear, that recovering of those grabbed and renamed lands may require a more proactive and robust measures to achieve it.

This paper aims at bringing to fore the nature of insecurity and trauma that are associated with land grabbing and land renaming, and to also recommend more pragmatic and robust measures of reclaiming these lands and ensuring safe return of the displaced communities back to their ancestral lands with guaranteed security.

Research Questions

1. How does land grabbing and renaming affect human security in Plateau State?
2. What policy options can be put in place to recover and resettled the displaced communities back to their ancestral lands?

Literature Review

Security

The concept of security has become such a common and contested concept that requires no further definition or clarification (Momodu, 2019). In tracing the origin of the concept of security, Mesjasz (2004), cited in Jatau (2017), posits that the English word ‘security’ originated from the Latin word *Securus*, *se* means without and *curus* uneasiness. It implies that security means liberation from distress or a peaceful situation without any risks or worries. According to Tripp (2013), the study of security has developed within International Relations as a gateway for understanding driving forces within international politics. The study of security has its roots in the realist tradition which sees security as a means of protecting the State and its territorial integrity against external aggression (Adetula, 2014). This view stem from the fact that the international system is conflictual and anarchical; nations rely on their capability for survival. Expanding on this state-centric view, Omede (2012) defines security as a dynamic condition where nations actively counter threats that jeopardise their fundamental values and interests.

Indeed, realists conceded that security means utilising military assets to neutralise security threats. Szpyra (2014) notes that military force is a critical instrument of international policies carried out by States to protect their vital and less crucial interest. In addition, military power has a significant impact on countries’ possibility of uninterrupted existence and development, which directly shapes their security (Szpyra, 2014). However, there are instances where the State, through its conventional security, does not guarantee security. For example, Jose and Medie (2015) observe that civilians resorted to self-help to protect themselves from physical violence and self-protection due

to government neglect. In this regard, Shasheen (2018) posits that several people lost their lives through suicide attacks and door-to-door raids in Sweida, Syria. The residents valiantly resorted to protecting themselves during the onslaught. The case is similar to the civilian JTF and the military operations in Northeast Nigeria.

A significant paradigm shift has broadened the understanding of security to encompass not only the State but also the well-being of individuals (Buzan & Hansen, 2009). This paradigm shift reflects a growing awareness that threats to human security such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation can be as significant as conventional military aggression (Nwolise, 2019). The concept of human security has gained substantial traction, with scholars and policymakers increasingly emphasising the need to protect individuals from a wide array of threats, including violence, poverty, and disease (Bassey, 2019). McNamara's (1968) assertion that "security means development and without development there can be no security" underscores this interconnectedness. The idea; that security is the unilateral affairs of the state limits the complexities of security and renders it too simplistic and cheaply (Buzan, 2009). Buzan (2009) notes that such views reduced the complex nature of security to a mere synonym. The state-centric notion to Buzan suits the periods of great wars (First & Second World Wars). However, in the Post-World Wars, security should be holistic to include human security or anything that threatens human survival.

Interestingly, Lloyd (2001) posits that the world is entering an era where security will be interpreted as security of people and not just territory; security of individuals and not just nations; security through development, not through arms and security of people in their homes, jobs, streets. Buzan (2009) notes that the concept of security is multifaceted and multi-dimensional; concentrating on one and neglecting the other amounts to the underrating of the term. It implies that; security is not limited to protecting only the state's borders and territory but includes other components of the state as human lives and property.

According to Wirtschafter and Gadiaga (2017), 'the battle against the new wave of terror in Africa will require more than military operations. When variables like better living conditions, good governance, good healthcare services delivery, inclusive governance, and social justice are in place, force may not be necessary to achieve peace. Good living condition is somewhat similar to security. According to Nwolise (2006) cited in Odeh and Umoh (2015), as much as territories must be secure by a network of armed forces; the people as well must be protected from internal upheavals, unemployment, hunger, starvation, diseases, ignorance, homelessness, environmental degradation, and pollution. Similarly, Bello (2017), cited in Jatau (2017), notes that security includes the provision of a better quality of life, sustainable development, higher standard of living, good health services, economic prosperity, human security, physical wellbeing, environmental safety, food security among others. According to Bassey (2019), the new national security notion has the people and not the state as the reference object. National Security Strategy of Nigeria would focus on human security over state security, and the new document is a review of the 2014 National Security Strategy.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sees security to include non-violent threats like hunger, marginalisation, or life event that threatens the citizens' state

of equilibrium. The concept comprises freedom from fear and freedom from want, which remained the hallmark of human security. This present study on Operation Rainbow adopts UNDP conception because it shades more light to the present student that notes; the moment individuals and communities are free from fear and free from want, security is achieved. Lastly, the use of force or military security may still dominate the other security aspects. However, a security situation that has an adverse impact on humanity is increasingly drawing global attention and has the tendency to bypass military security at any moment. For instance, environmental security, the possibility of global warming, and rising sea levels can unpleasantly affect society sometimes more than military threats. Again, social inequalities, marginalisation, poverty, and food security pose non-military threats to society; culminating in violence. According to Young (1992, 1997), only when those inequalities are reduced will crime be reduced.

Land Grabbing/Renaming

According to Logan (2016), land grabbing is the sale or lease of land that is used on a permanent, seasonal, or cyclical basis by individuals who have not agreed to the transfer of that land, whose land is taken by illegal means, with or without force. Invariably, it is an application of force to coerce individuals to illegally give up their land or the otherwise illegal dispossession of land, a process known as “land grabbing,” is a violation of human rights, the arbitrary deprivation of property outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 17 & Logan, 2016). In an attempt to link this definition to the Plateau experience, recent study in 2026 on Operation Rainbow and internal security management in Plateau State Nigeria, the study found out armed Fulani herders embark on what is called economic war which means a deliberate act of destroying farm crops of the natives to activate food insecurity, and then raze their home ablaze. This is a strategy by the attackers to force the natives into surrender and helpless submission of their lands.

According to Blair (2015), naming of places as an instrument of power is also known toponym. Toponym originate from two Greek words Topo means place and onoma means name. Toponyms (name of place or an area) can be likened to personal names of individual, and they separate in same way. In another instance, toponyms are proper nouns or proper names as some scholars refer them, and the study of names is age-long and has dynamic history with the philosophy and linguistic (Blair, 2015).

Right from the period of colonialism, colonial masters embarked on renaming of indigenous areas to suit their selfish and exploitative tendencies (Oyekachi & Kayode, 2020). According to Stolz and Warnke (2016), colonialists rebaptised a place originally named Braziville to Johannesburg to meet up with the western culture demands. Also, toponymic purge took place during the periods of regime change in order to gain political legitimacy (Luni et al., 2025). In Plateau State experience, it can be said that the renaming of places like Fass to Mahanga followed toponymic purge, where the attackers renamed the villages to reflect their new socio-economic order.

The study of naming or toponymy has been a subject in different fields or disciplines including geography, linguistics, history and political science (Setyo, Muryani, & Nurhadi, 2022). In geographically, it provides deeper understanding of physical

environment and its development at a glance. Linguistic sees naming as an intentional act, naming of places and areas is a conscious act. It is important to bear in mind the patterns that are used in naming, and the relationship between them which means common landscape and place names, require some form of categorisation in relation to how names are presented. From the above, three distinct types of information can be deduced from toponyms including spatial location, temporal information, and landscape (Setyo, Muryani, & Nurhadi, 2022). There some feature that can be regarded as toponymy, and these include topography, settlement of certain ethnic groups, migration of people, religious and cultural traditions, and local language. In its true sense, toponymy is relatively partial over time, and may have survived transformations of the external environment (Setyo, Muryani, & Nurhadi, 2022).

This study considers the definition of land grabbing and land renaming as the forceful use of violence to displace indigenous people by occupying their land and subsequent changing the legal and traditional names of their community. A two-decade of crises in Jos accounted for the relocation and renaming of settlements (Borok & Tubi, 2017). Nanlong (2018) notes that 54 communities grabbed, and the number increased to 102 (Pam, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

Human Security Theory

Human security theory is an offshoot of the non-strategic approach or idealist viewpoint of security that emerged from the ashes of the Cold War. Although this theory started with Mahbub ul Haq in the United Nations Development Programme in 1994, the approach received scholarly attention in the 2000s from the well-received works of Buzan (2002) cited in Hama (2017), Alkire (2003), Burgess and Owen (2004); MacFarlane and Khong (2006) cited in Johns (2014); Krause (2005) Homolar (2015); Newman (2016) among others. This theory, according to Lloyd (2001), posits that the world is entering an era where security will be interpreted as security of people and not just territory; security of individuals and not just nations; security through development, not through arms and security of people in their homes, jobs, streets and everywhere. In contrast to the theories explaining security as state protection and military security, scholars of human security have fashioned practical indications backing up the view that the security scope embraces humanity and their property as the first point of contact (Buzan, 1991; cited in Hough, 2005). According to Tadjbakhsh, Kubo and Konial (2000), the theory reveals a people-centred and multi-disciplinary understanding of security which involves a few research fields, including International Relations, Strategic Studies, Development Studies, and Human Rights.

The logic behind its introduction and advocacy; the realist, state-centric paradigm of security that champions the primacy of territorial integrity over that of the individual, is becoming irrelevant as states rarely or no longer face the existential threat that nuclear standoff had perpetuated (UN, 1994 cited in Johns, 2014). As a people-centred philosophy, human security includes other aspects such as economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (Human Development Report, 1994; cited in Johns, 2014). It is important to note

that Johns (2014) has also recognised the relevance of the human security theory in International Relations. Human security is a holistic approach that draws different specialties to understand the interconnections between diverse aspects of human security. It may also bolster cooperation between international agencies in security, development, and human rights (Johns, 2014).

For this study, the human security theory adopted is that of Zyla (2019). The reason for this choice is that not only is Zyla recognised as international development and global politics expert and authority of this school, he explicitly prioritised humanity above the state. According to him, human security is an emancipatory concept that seeks to protect people rather than territorial space. It addresses the many causes of human vulnerability, including armed conflict, human rights violations, environmental challenges, and resource deprivation (Zyla, 2019).

The strength and relevance of this theory hinges on the fact that human life is precious and incomparable to anything; therefore, securing the lives of citizens from violent and non-violent security threats is of utmost priority. Increasingly, human beings face non-violent threats (like poverty, hunger, climate change, pandemic, unemployment, and natural and human disaster) daily. Bello (2017), cited in Jatau (2017), notes that the contemporary understanding of security extends beyond just the physical protection of territory through military intervention; it includes a better quality of life and the promotion of sustainable development. Therefore, human security is a condition that exists when the vital core of human lives is secure and when people have the freedom and capacity to live in dignity and without fear (Trombetta, 2014; UNDP, 2014; IPCC, 2014; cited in Patrick, 2019).

In choosing human security as a theoretical framework for this study, the theory critically examines the trauma, psychological imbalance, and physical pain of individuals whose history, identity, and heritage has been taken forcefully and illegally. Again, human security theory seeks to address the root causes not just the effect of the problem, it would proffer actionable solutions and recommendations on how the displaced will be resettled and reclaim their ancestry without the fear from want or fear from harm. It will significantly and truly restore human safety and order in the volatile communities, consistent to the adopted definition of human security as a condition where people's lives are secure (Patrick, 2019).

Empirical Review

Several previous studies on conflicts and crises in Plateau State focused on ethno-religious, indigene-settler dichotomy, resource-based conflict, history of Jos crises. However, land grabbing and land renaming are trending nature of insecurity that need scholarly works to uphold human security. In Onyekachi and Kayode (2022) study "Land grabs and human insecurity in colonial Jos plateau, Nigeria" The article places land grab in its primeval colonial milieu and investigates how colonial tin mining operation induced human insecurity in colonial Jos, Nigeria. It uses the human insecurity approach to address questions of colonial "control grabbing", grabbing and controlling of land in Jos Plateau. Although contemporary research addresses the recent rush for African lands, they have allocated minimal attention to historical details and lessons of

colonialism as well as its connection to human insecurity. Through the use of interviews and archival sources, the article investigates how tin mining operations stimulated human insecurity and how British land policies and politics empowered the Hausa and Fulani in Jos Plateau, to accumulate much land and how their actions and inactions provided the incentives for bloody and intractable conflicts in the post-colonial era. The article argues that scholarly analysis of land grab is largely associated with food and biofuel production ignoring the connection with tin exploitation and its legacies. To this end, discourses on land grabs need to allocate adequate attention to natural resources as a stimulant for the phenomenon and why it is a threat to environmental peace. Onyekachi and Kayode (2020) study traces the origin of land grabs in Plateau State by focusing on colonial experience and resource-based as stimulant. However, the present study is concerned about the modern and excruciating trauma that arise from forceful land grabbing and renaming motivated by the campaign for expansionism and also installing socio-economic order.

In broadening the place renaming conceptual framework, Setyo, Muryani, and Nurhadi, (2022) conducted research “Toponymic and Historiography Influences on Place Naming of Villages in Klego District, Indonesia”. The research sought to conduct an assessment of the naming process for villages and hamlets in Klego District, Boyolali Regency, Central Java Province. The study attempted to find naming patterns based on geographical appearance (toponym) and social culture or history (historiography). In addition, the study sought to find the structure of signs and meanings which those villages and hamlets used in naming. A qualitative-descriptive approach was used. Data were collected using interviews with stakeholders and local communities considered to be knowledgeable in the etymology of local names in their area. The results showed that the toponym and historiography of villages and hamlets in Klego District, Boyolali Regency were broadly based on physical, social, and cultural aspects. The physical aspects involved biological elements, hydrological elements, and geomorphological elements. The social aspects involved specific places, past activities, hope, the name of historical buildings, and the name of famous figures. The cultural aspects involved legends or folklore. However, there were many people in the area who did not know the toponymical and historiographical processes involved in local place naming. Our research showed that this was the result of low public knowledge of the meaning and origin of toponymy and historiography in the area. Setyo et al. (2022) offered significant conceptualisation of toponymy relevant to the field of social sciences particularly political science. However, Plateau State experience is dissimilar as examined by the present study. The present study went beyond examining physical renaming and historical antecedents of the people. It focused on traumatic condition of communities whose land has been taken forcefully and renamed, which depict total erasure of identity, history and legal heritage of the people. The excruciating mental pain that such experience brings on the displaced people even surpasses the conventional and traditional hit-and-run attacks that has been age-long.

Augusto (2020) in his study “Toponymy and the Issues of Memory and Identity on the Post-Soviet Tbilisi Cityscape” The article deals with the renaming of the toponymy of Tbilisi, Georgia, from as early as final years of Soviet rule in the country in the light of newly translated data from Georgian to English. It discusses the changes in the cityscape in relation to the national discourse that was built in the post-Soviet times, assessing how

this discourse relates to the city history and the broader national context, which aspects were commemorated, and which were left out. The translated data consists of the Tbilisi City Council Decrees from both pre-Soviet and post-Soviet years and a book concerning Tbilisian toponymy and their history from the Georgian Encyclopaedia tomes. With this data, an unprecedented database was produced, and from it the toponyms were catalogued accordingly. From the cataloguing, the paper then describes and analyses the toponymy replacements in-depth, mostly using qualitative methods such as discourse analysis, but hinting at some quantitative models, such as tables and comparisons between yearly renaming. The article brings a new understanding of how the national discourse is imprinted in the toponymy of the capital and its implications for the geopolitical context, also significantly contributing to the field, in the English literature, with the new data. The renaming in Plateau State sharply contrasted the Georgian experience, because in Plateau State, renaming is deliberate act preceded by forceful displacement and occupation. This forceful take over and renaming serve as a repressive tool to suppress the identity and history of indigenous people of Plateau State.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study, employed interpretivist approach to examine the socially constructed lived experiences of the people (Creswell, 2014) in the study area. The study adopted explanatory research design to examine the lived experiences of the displaced communities whose lands have been forcefully taken and living in traumatised condition. The study area included communities in Barkin Ladi, Bassa, Bokkos, Jos North, Mangu and Riyom. The data for the study was collected through key informant interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) conducted in 2025, mainly from community leaders (KIIs), and community members (FGDs).

The justification for the study area is largely based on the experiences and manifestation of displacements, land grabbing and renaming. Jos North is known for its decades of ethno-religious conflicts which culminated into in land grabs/expansionism thereby created invisible walls that settlement within the town is polarised (Bulus, Bhatti, & Beysoylu, 2020) based ethnic and religious identity. Based on the recent study in 2025 on Operation Rainbow and Internal security management in Plateau State, data from KII and FGD revealed that previous ethno-religious clashes forced some of them out of their homes and ‘new dwellers’ occupied them with time, this signifies grabbing or expansionism. Also, on the polarisation, data revealed that there are still places that are considered ‘no-go areas’ either for Muslims or Christians. Bassa LGA is made up of three chiefdoms which include Irigwe, Rukuba and Pengana, Fualani leader (KII 2025) notes that Irigwe chiefdom is the most volatile due to resource-based conflicts that saw Fulani displaced from the area. A community member (FGD, 2025) in Zikke stated since 2001 they are faced with recurring attacks from Fulani militias. In Riyom and Barkin Ladi, communities’ displacements, land grabbing and renaming is paramount, while Mangu and Bokkos manifested high rates of displacements, land grabbing with ‘new occupiers’ settling in their homes.

Previous studies have indicated that the number of grabbed and renamed communities have increased, between the space of three years, 2018 and 2021, from 54 to 102 communities grabbed and renamed (Nanlong, 2018 & Pam, 2021). These numbers

represented almost 90% increase in three years. Amnesty International (2023) reported that casualties from the Christmas Eve attacks, and subsequent violent attacks in 2024/2025 have resulted in the death of over 200 persons in Bokkos and Mangu. In 2024, attacks on 160 villages in Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi led to erection of 16 IDP camps, 409 houses were set ablaze, 335 people died and 171 injured, 18,275 displaced (WHO, 2024).

Result

Land Grabbing and Renaming

This theme is central to this study, not because of the displaced communities' plight wondering but because of its currency and calculated attempt to take away the history and identity of the people through grabbing and renaming of their lands. The district head KI 9 on explaining why Gashish in Barkin Ladi became so vulnerable to insecurity:

Communities of Riyom were attacked, and the people ran to settle in Gashish, a lot of migrants of Fulani came and settled in those displaced communities bordering Gashish. So now, when Fulani people occupied those villages, then Gashish became vulnerable, because the Fulanis now surrounded Gashish when they took over those villages. So, it was from there, in 2011, they started attacking our people in Gashish, till today. Out of the 76 communities in Berom land that have been displaced and occupied by Fulani, 35 are from Gashish districts. So, Gashish holds almost half.

In conventional violent attacks, attackers come attack and go. The remaining people will usually regroup or mobilise themselves to retaliate or wait for another attack from the same attackers. But the implication of attackers occupying the displaced communities, means that the host and neighbouring communities at high risk, because they usually use proximity advantage to hit the neighbouring communities and return as if nothing has happened like in the case of Gashish. Again, the 'new occupants' also shield distant armed criminals who may be apprehended if they must return from where they came from or their based, accommodate criminals for criminality.

KI 11 elaborated on the KI 9 views by making strong statements:

We have lost a lot of communities as a result of Fulani attacks. And some of these attacked communities the attackers killed people, burnt it down, some are completely deserted, and some have been occupied by the people themselves. In fact, some of the villages have been renamed as a result of that, a typical example of it is the one in Jol, where originally it was Fass. The community was sacked, and the Fulanis, they regrouped in that place, and they took over the place and they renamed the place Mahanga. It will interest you to know that we have lost over 50 villages (KI 11).

A person is not truly secure if his or her sense of land ownership is threatened. An act of renaming of displaced community is the highest form of land grabbing because it tantamount to wiping of one's identity and history. Just as a name of a person signifying their identity, so it is with the names of places. The renaming of Fass village in Jol to Mahanga indicates or symbolises a permanent loss, an attempt to erase their historical and cultural identity (FGD12). This renaming aligns with Oktem (2008) study on policy

of renaming of contested areas in Turkey. According to him, engaging in erasing the original names of places is known as toponymic colonialism. Toponymic colonialism is a strategy aimed to eliminate both cultural and legal memory of an area thereby making the original owner to see the impossibility of reclaiming the ownership of the place.

Data from Bokkos, Hurti (FGD4) and Ruwi revealed the tactics and methods attackers used in taking their land “they have grabbed part of the land where they are staying right now from time to time they used to terrorise our people, steal from them and our people would run and leave that area and after a while you will see them occupying the houses and lands (FGD4-P4 & KI 20). In Chngal (FGD6) and Kombili (FGD7), their land occupants by ‘new occupants’ is absolute. The reason is that the attackers used the natives building material to erect and construct their permanent structures (KI 32 & KI 41). Another significant finding was the role that the military play in handling the operations, it was reportedly that sector 8 commander in-charged of Mangu deliberately stopped the government tractor and natives the entry into their village that until he receives an “order from above”, which means they are sent to protect the new occupiers (KI 32).

The implication of entry denial of the government tractor and natives suggested the existence of the ‘ungoverned places’ as Ojo (2020) provided. However, this Chngal and Kombili situation is not the actual ungoverned spaces experience, which is a situation where a sovereign state lacks political will to exert control over captured spaces. For federal security agency to deny the sub-national or State instructions means there a tendency for a dual loyalty crisis. The State governor, constitutionally is the chief executive officer of the State, here is a federal security operative pitching his loyalty to the higher government (order from above) allegedly, but disregarding the instructions of the chief security officer of the State.

Participants in (FGD17) in Shonong made bold a declaration and said this is not herder-farmer clash but a planned campaign to grab and occupy our heritage. “The attackers attacked and the people dispersed, our displaced communities are now carrying new names” (FGD17-P5). It is obvious that the land grabbing and renaming is not just about cattle rustling, it is not about cow poisoning, it is not just accidental grazing that led to destruction. But it is about taking full ownership of the native lands by using every means to displace them then grab, and subsequently rename.

Discussion

Land grabbing and renaming are two serious sources of human insecurity, their existence suggested the vulnerability of humanity or community. Land is a God-giving and valuable commodity, a primary factor of production which represents all the natural resources. In other word, owning a piece of land is equivalent to having wealth in assets. So, if such commodity is forcefully or illegally taken away from a person who is totally depending on it is an indication that peace of mind is taken, personal security is gone, source of livelihood is collapsed. Human security theory posits that security is freedom from want and freedom from harm. Communities who have lost their source of livelihood, personal security, community security and food security indicated a total failure of human security. For this study, the human security theory adopted is that of Zyla (2019).

The reason for this choice is that not only is Zyla recognised as international development and global politics expert and authority of this school, he explicitly prioritised humanity above the State. According to him, human security is an emancipatory concept that seeks to protect people rather than territorial space. It addresses the many causes of human vulnerability, including armed conflict, human rights violations, environmental challenges, and resource deprivation (Zyla, 2019).

The key word in Zyla's (2019) conceptualisation is 'emancipatory' which also means freedom. In simple terms, nobody is truly free if their valuables such as land is illegally and forcefully taken and they are displaced. The worst experience is the change of name or renaming the area to reflect 'new occupiers' identity like Mahanga. The name 'Mahanga' is not a Berom extraction but an identity of the attackers. Living with this memory is enough to make someone lose sleep for several nights.

Another point worthy of discussion is the role of the military in handling the security in the State. The composition and structure of Operation Rainbow (OPR) is made of military, police, civil defence and civilian recruited operatives from various communities Plateau State. For a security agency to stand in defence of attackers by refusing to provide security for the owners of the land, suggested that the inter-agency collaboration of OPR is failure. This is because military unit which forms its membership does not conform to the mandate of securing lives and property of citizens. The reality on the ground of aiding and enforcing natives' displacement by the federal or state security actor contrasted the previous study of Nwagboso (2018) who faulted the non-performance of security operatives on the weak security policies. Literature and intellectual debates on the political economy of land grab tend to suggest that governments of receiving states are accomplices in land deals implying that interests of governments play important roles in facilitating these deals (Onyekachi & Kayode, 2020). Based on the phrase 'order from above', one can draw a conclusion to say the statement in the Onyekachi and Kayode's (2020) is playing out here.

Summary of Findings

1. Human Security Failure: The loss of identity, history, and heritage of the community or the people displaced, land grabbed, and land renamed suggested their personal and community security in total disarray. The people's sources livelihood that has been destroyed, tempered signifies food security.
2. Total Take Over: The renaming of those communities like Fass to Mahanga revealed that the intention is to erase the history, identity and legal heritage of the people so that reclaiming or recovery becomes like mission impossible.
3. Security Governance Failure: The finding of military unit aiding and enforcing natives' displacements indicate a serious security governance failure. The military unit remained a critical agency in the nation's security architecture expected to be show neutrality in the security governance.

Conclusion

The finding of this study demonstrates that human security of the people and communities' displaced is great jeopardy. This is because physical take over of the land left shattered and confused and do not even have anything to hold on. This has caused them psychological trauma and physical pain seeing themselves parting with what they have ones held dear to their lives. Person whose valuables or sources of livelihood are forcefully taken away from them are truly not secure under any circumstances. Human security theory states that security means a person is free from want and has freedom from fear. These attacked communities are victims of wants. This is because their source of livelihoods has been stolen and destroyed and automatically that has put them in the place of want and lack. Freedom from harm is already embedded in their subconscious minds and have the fear of being harm anytime.

The finding that revealed the real but a disturbing intention toward this act of land grabbing and renaming is central to this study. It revealed that the intention is to totally erase memory of the people by displacement them, occupying their land, and change names to reflect the attackers' identity. It is a tactical strategy to wipe off age-long identities and long-standing history of the people, so, that even if there may be future opportunity to reclaim and recover the land it would look like herculean task and mission impossible.

The security governance failure demonstrated by the military in aiding attackers and enforcing displacement of the natives is a significant finding in to this study. This is because the military institution all over the world hold significant place in the security governance and security architecture of every nation. The expectation is that such revered institution will play a neutral arbiter in the security governance, affirming following 'orders from above' even when doing the wrong thing does not conform to the ethic and the mind of the military.

Recommendations

1. Plateau State Government and State House of Assembly should immediately enact a Toponymic Integrity Law that nullifies every unauthorised land grabbing and renaming of communities since 2001 and reaffirm the original indigenous names to all land registries. This will not bring psychological relief, but it will immediately heal the mental trauma of the displaced communities as the first step to their onward return to their ancestral homes.
2. Plateau State Government in conjunction with Federal Government of Nigeria should gradually but intensely evacuate all the 'new occupiers' on the displaced lands and safely return the original owners of the land back home. Federal should immediately build Mobile Police Barracks with full deployment of MOPOL to work closely with Operation Rainbow operatives in the communities. State government should immediately rebuild relatively decent houses for the people in

- their villages. These arrangements will meet the requirement of physical security which is the hall mark of human security.
3. The military authorities should consider ensure that officers deployed for internal security operation should maintain a good working relationship with the State's Chief Security of Officer, the Governor. This will facilitate a degree of State's executive oversight which will address unethical behaviour of the field officer engaging in bribery to support criminality.

Contribution to Knowledge

1. Theoretically, this study expands human security theory by introducing toponymic purge, the idea that name-change or erasing the original name is tactical strategy used to destroy communities' legal memory and identity.
2. For policy, the study informs States particularly volatile States like Plateau State to strengthen the land use laws ensuring nobody's land is grabbed and renamed forcefully.
3. In practice, the security agencies on the ground offering conflict resolution, the study serves as the guide to achieve safety and the wellbeing of society.

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