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Michael Hampson, Ph.D.
College of Southern Nevada

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***Mobility, Mobilization, and Counter/Insurgency: The Routes of Terror in an African Context.* By Daniel E. Agbibo. University of Michigan Press, 2022. ISBN 978-0-472-03892-3. Map. Photographs. Index. Notes. Bibliography. Pp xii, 236. \$29.95.**

Review by Michael Hampson Ph.D.

Conflicts can be analyzed in a multitude of ways with different approaches to analysis providing differing utilities. Mobility is not one of the more common ways to look at a conflict. Assessing conflict in terms of physical environment, historical processes, gender, or power asymmetries has been more common. Daniel Agbibo applies mobility to the conflict with *Boko Haram* in his monograph *Mobility, Mobilization, and Counter/Insurgency: The Routes of Terror in an African Context*. Agbibo's analysis provides an intriguing and novel approach to studying a conflict that can in turn be applied to other conflicts. Unfortunately, the scope of the concept can at times dilute the analysis.

Agbibo's core argument is that the lack of mobility and the regulatory state have imposed rules and regulations upon the youth of northeast Nigeria, which in turn have created a set of conditions by which *Boko Haram* has been able to grow and garner support. Two groups are examined, the *achaba* drivers and the *almajirai* who are Koranic students. Both groups have similar stories, insofar that they are marginalized and economically disadvantaged (p. 59).

Agbibo argues that *Boko Haram* was able to court these groups due to the laws and economic circumstances pertaining to mobility. Both groups are seen as an underclass, and as such they were often falsely maligned (p. 94). These young men were stuck in their lots in life, and had little social mobility, since they could not earn the needed capital to gain social status through the norms of the local society. The marginalization of these two groups both socially and economically allowed for the message of *Boko Haram* to become attractive (p. 71). Ideologically, *Boko Haram* opposed the endemic government corruption that pervaded northeast Nigeria and articulated a message that linked corruption to Western ideals and

influence (p. 66). This message along with the promise of economic mobility created an ideology that became attractive to both groups Agbiboa examines.

The 2009 helmet law became the catalyst for Boko Haram to become a violent insurgent group. The law would require all motorcycle taxis to have helmets for both the driver and the passengers. This law was unequally applied in the north of Nigeria and was used by the government as an opportunity to repress the *achabas* and Boko Haram (p. 94). It was during this period that Boko Haram's leader, Mohammed Yusuf, was extrajudicially killed, and Abubakar Shekau transformed it into an insurgent group.

Agbiboa applies mobility differently to both groups, with the *achabas* being more clearly linked to the concept. This group of primarily young men suffered greatly under the economic conditions in northeast Nigeria and used motorcycles to survive economically. Boko Haram would provide microfinance opportunities to these youths that would help them buy motorcycles, which in turn would allow them social mobility (p. 72). As insurgents, the skills the *achabas* provided were invaluable to Boko Haram and dictated much of their insurgent tactics. Since the *achabas* were skilled motorcycle riders and had an intimate knowledge of the roads and region, they became a formidable force of highly mobile fighters, who could use hit and run tactics effectively (p. 106). The government forces, composed of soldiers not familiar with the area, would then struggle to combat these highly mobile insurgents. Mobility for these groups formed the locus of their social status, the catalyst for their grievances with the government, and their tactics.

From the marginalized motorcycle workers Agbiboa turns his attention to other disaffected youth, the *almajirai*, who were students at local Koranic schools (p. 94). Like the *achabas*, the *almajirai* were on the economic margins and have been blamed for much of what Boko Haram has become. The Koranic schools would attract many poor members of society in the hopes of social and economic advancement. Ideology and mobility intersect as many of the *almajirai* would become *achaba*, and would also through the guise of the Koranic schools beg at transit stations and other places where movement is the main purpose (p. 75). The intersection of

mobility and ideology allowed for Boko Haram to easily fold the *almajirai* and the *achaba* into an armed group.

The government response to Boko Haram's use of highly mobile forces was to crackdown on the ways that they were mobile. The Nigerian government response came in the form of bans, checkpoints, and crackdowns on mobility, all of which contained gross abuses. These actions led to more youths being pushed from the margins over to Boko Haram. As Boko Haram began to terrorize the civilian population, Civilian Defense Groups began to form and work with the government forces. These groups leveled the mobility advantage that Boko Haram had, but at the cost of targeting the civilian population to a much greater degree (p. 140).

As a concept, mobility provides an interesting and novel examination of Boko Haram, in a way that other forms of analysis would miss. While one could perform an economic analysis of Boko Haram to highlight some of the same features that Agbiboa does, economics and mobility are intertwined. By using mobility as a concept, Agbiboa emphasizes a unique feature of the Boko Haram movement. As a concept, however, mobility is a bit broad and becomes almost a tautological, insofar as mobility occurs everywhere and in nearly all contexts. In Agbiboa's work this shows in the uneven analysis, where in the analysis of the motorcycle taxis and tactics of Boko Haram mobility provided useful insights, but was less insightful when looking at the *almajirai* and Koranic schools, since mobility is not as prominent of a factor. I would recommend this book to those who wish to look at insurgencies and conflict in a novel way.