

# Chapter Twenty-Five



## THEATRE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN IN VIOLENT CONFLICT: D B ZANG IDP CAMP AS A PARADIGM

**Hussaini Ufyam JENNIFER**

**Hussaini U. TSAKU**

Department of Theatre and Film Arts,  
University of Jos

### **Introduction**

Throughout human history, people have organized to change social conditions. However, some collective efforts have had dramatic success, while others have failed miserably. Nonetheless, the advancement of human society has largely been achieved through citizen-based actions. The coming together of unrelated people to achieve common goals has long fascinated others to participate and engage in activities for empowerment and development. Hence, one area that is deeply affected by this development phenomenon is the theatre. Theatre provides a platform that cannot only create drama but also provides space for people to express themselves. It opens forum for expression to people who otherwise would not have one. It is an organised performance, a collaborative form of art that uses performers to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience in a specific place. It sensitizes audience to issues and ideas that lead to deeper understanding and change.

Undoubtedly, it has over the years remained a functional communication tool that enhances development action, conscientises and engages members of a community for good social living. The kind of theatre that performs these functions is called Theatre for Social Change. Iorapuu avers that:

A few years ago, scholars in different disciplines, development agents, and donor agencies engaged and encouraged new perspectives of development thinking and approaches. For instance, the perspective that considers 'People first' and other critical determinants other than structures as prerequisites in development planning and action. Indeed, a perspective that promotes the involvement of the communities directly in the entire project circle (1).

The logic of this phenomenon is that action creates space for participation and involvement of people. Consequently, such words and expressions as 'dialogue', 'participation', 'empowerment', 'sustainability' and 'wholistic approach' have become part of the performance language of development planners, workers, government and other development sectors.

Recently, programmes that have to do with social change are widely circulated in the media, performed at conferences, workshops and seminars across the country. Issues such as gender based violence, electoral malpractice, electoral violence, conflicts, hate speech, examination malpractice among others have become recurrent decimals. Government, non-governmental organizations and even spirited individuals have become carriers of message of social change. For example, towards the end of 2016, a development consult-M2G consult, a non-governmental organization situated in Jos, Plateau state engaged some communities in Jos North, Jos South, Riyom and Wase local government areas on the issue of gender based violence, using theatre for social change. The essence of the engagement was to educate, inform, sensitize and conscientise the community members on the evil of gender based violence at home, in the church, mosques, schools and community levels. The process was engaging and participatory in nature because members of the latter communities

were practically involved in the entire process.

Conflict does not have a single meaning, even though scholars may present different images, meanings and interpretations to the word. The term originates from the Latin word *confingere*, meaning to clash or engage in a fight or to disagree (Best 23). Conflict as a phenomenon can occur in variegated forms. It could occur at the intra-personal and inter-personal levels; it could also express itself at the group level, local, state or national levels. Zipporah says, "Conflict is an inescapable reality of social existence. Nations, communities, identity groups, families and even individuals experience conflict in their interactions with similarly constituted entities" (131). Conflict can also assume international dimension when such situation is between two or more countries. The current conflict between Russia and Ukraine is a good example.

Conflict could take several forms; physical, psychological, social, political, economic and even cultural depending on its capacity. In other words, it could occur at any level of human interaction. It arises from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals, and aspirations by individuals or groups. In essence, conflict itself is part of human nature and is not necessarily bad, but it is the 'violence' linked to the conflict that makes it a threat to peace. Violent conflict however occurs when two or more conflicting parties, individuals or groups pick up weapons against one another. At whatever level it occurs, a violent conflict usually involves more than one confrontation. Violent conflict is the resort to the use of force and dangerous weapons which results to wanton destruction of lives and property.

Some countries in Africa have stories of one or more conflicts engraved in their history. Nigeria is not an exception as the country has been witnessing conflicts of different magnitudes which cut across her length and breadth. From the North to the South, from the East to the West, conflicts of different magnitudes- ethnic, religious, political, communal among others have ravaged the country's unity, peace and development. These conflicts have shattered the comfort of predictable daily routines and expectations of many communities. They have brought a lot of devastations and attendant consequences many a times, owing to leadership problem most especially, which has become a recurrent decimal in the country's body polity. These conflicts which

often assume ethnic, political, communal and religious forms, and most recently the prolonged terrorism have led to heavy depletion of human resources and/or the displacement of persons, weakening of state apparatus, increasing threats of successions are increasingly challenging the rights of many Nigerian citizens especially women. When conflict happens, its short and long-term effects particularly, affect women in most cases.

Nigeria has continued to witness high level of violent conflicts which have become a recurrent decimal and the bane of her development over the years. Unfortunately, those that have always been at the receiving end during these conflicts are the women and children owing to their being and social existence. Hence, they constitute close to 80% of internally displaced people and refugees around the world (UNICEF 17). However, the sudden return of Boko Haram in Nigeria has turned the country especially the North East region into theatre of war, destroying lives and property and rendering many destitute. The insurgents target all Nigerians regardless of religion, ethnic, region, political and cultural backgrounds. According to Kashim Shettima, the former Governor of Borno State who stated that "Since the appearance of the dreaded group, one hundred thousand (100,000) people across the state have been killed, while two million (2, 000, 000) have been displaced" (Monday 6<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2016, 9 pm NTA Network News). Sexual assaults and exploitations for instance, are frequently employed as tools of war and victimization which lead to isolation, alienation, prolonged emotional trauma, and unwanted pregnancies that often result in abandoned children.

Women as caregivers, always struggle to support their families and keep their households together whenever the traditional bread-winners (husbands and sons) are caught up in the fight and are unable to provide for their families. The new role as primary providers (in case of a deceased spouse) exposes many women to further abuse and exploitation. Some women have been left with the responsibility of taking care of their families single handedly during and after conflict, some have children who have been abused by those who are supposed to safeguard them. There are those who have been assaulted and exploited are left without any care from the government for their rehabilitation. These traumatized victims are left without help but they

have to do all kinds of jobs to feed and clothe their families even when the husband is alive. "The real experience of war is not the shelling and so on, those are just moments, though they are the ones seen on Television. War is what happens afterwards, the years of suffering hopelessly with a disabled husband and no money, or struggling to rebuild when all properties has been destroyed"(Benette, etal 2).

Therefore, it is these negative impacts of violent conflict and the attendant effects on women such as the violation of rights, sexual assaults, poverty, exploitations among others that the writers examine in this paper, with particular reference to an IDPs Camp situated at Bukuru Gyel, Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State.

### **Women in Conflict Situations**

Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have been plagued with diverse forms of conflicts, some are ethnic, some religious, political, economic, communal among others. Nigeria is one of such countries that have experienced enormous conflicts over the years especially, at the emergence of democracy in 1999. The frequency of these conflicts at the dawn of democratic dispensation in Nigeria has led to the loss of so many precious lives and property. For example, some scholars believe that the seed of ethnic consciousness were sown and nurtured by the British colonial administration. Egodi argues that the division of the country into three distinctly dissimilar and unequal regions as mandated by the Arthur Richard's Constitution of 1946 upgraded erstwhile administrative units to semi-sovereign states. He avers that the Richard's Constitution bequeathed to the northern region a territorial expanse larger than both the Eastern and Western regions put together, allowing the North to enjoy more political power than the remaining two regions (51). Doki also provides another dimension to it as he asserts that:

Upon the attainment of independence, Nigeria has been plagued with one conflict to the other: Civil war in 1967, Sharia conflict in 1977, Maitatsine conflict in 1980, the oil conflict in 1986, the declaration of Jihad in Kaduna state in 1996, the Kaduna and Abia religious riot in 2000, Tiv/Awe communal clashes in 2001, Tiv/Udam conflict in 2002, and a host of other sporadic attacks at different times and places (142).

These conflicts often assume ethnic, political, communal and religious forms causing massive depletion of human resources, displacement of persons, weakening of state apparatus, increasing threats of successions as well as challenging the rights of many innocent Nigerian citizens. By implication, conflict as it is today is not a new phenomenon. Issues such as the unequal distribution of resources, power, injustice, leadership as well as the scramble for political and geographical space triggered so much anger, leading to violent conflict of different magnitudes.

McKay submits that "conflict has a devastating effect on the lives and dignity of women, as well as on the health and educational services that are essential to family and community survival" (383).

She goes further to state that:

Among the specific effects experienced by women of all ages are displacement, loss of home and property, loss or involuntary disappearance of close relatives, poverty and family separation and disintegration, victimization through acts of murder, terrorism, torture, sexual slavery, rape, and sexual abuse (383).

McKay reiterates further that "along with reproductive health complications, the adverse effects of conflict hit women harder than they do their male counterparts, since deliberate gender-based violence and discrimination are rampant in these settings. As such, these gender-specific threats to women compound the challenges of ensuring their protection and resulted in gaps in the design and delivery of assistance and protection, short-changing the priority population of women in conflict and post-conflict situations. Essential services such as basic health care, including reproductive healthcare and counselling, are often disrupted or become inaccessible during conflicts situations" (388).

While violent conflict inflicts suffering on everyone, its short and long term effects particularly affect women more than any other category of the demography. Nigeria and many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa as well as Asia are good examples. Benneth et al affirm that, women and children mostly constitute about 80 percent of the



millions of refugees around the world (3).

In his submission, Egodi also corroborates and reaffirms that:

Women more than men abandoned their homes at the sound of shelling. They either made temporary homes in the bush and farm areas or took refuge in communities yet to be visited by troops, thereby constituting a major group of internal refugees (73).

Oluwakemi reaffirms this position and posits that: "Women of all ages suffer displacement, loss of homes and property, involuntary disappearance of close relatives, poverty, family separation, disintegration, murder, terrorism, torture, sexual slavery or prostitution" (83). Egodi reiterates again thus: "...Prostitution thus becomes a profitable occupation for both married and unmarried women, offering many of them access to goods and services not commonly available" (156). What this means is that, most times when violent conflict occur and husbands die in the process, wives struggle to support their families and keep their households together. They have no option than to struggle and provide for their families through whatever means possible. Some of them even engage in sexual slavery and prostitution as a means to an end, just to survive and fend for their families.

### **Theatre For Social Change**

Theatre all over the globe has been tested and trusted in building human development and human capacity. Theatre has always been used as a tool for social change through the ages. It has been used in situations of conflict resolution and reconciliation, health, agriculture, community development, human capital development, advocacy among others. It has also been used by NGO's, and even governments at Federal, State and Local levels to bring about social change in the society. A look at African theatre especially, the Nigerian traditional theatre, literary theatre, and radical literary theatre, shows each, as being very effective in taking a particular position that tallies with the held views and practices of the practitioners. Theatre for Social Change (TfSC) shows how humans have taken actions having been

conscientized and sensitized.

The concept of change here is relevant because theatre for social change is capable of projecting and propagating development among people and their communities. Abah posits that "It is a continuing proof of analysis and action and a play is therefore a collection of ideas, issues and perceptions towards their development" (10). Again, Abah adds more credence to his explanation of what true theatre for social change is. He puts it that:

Theatre for social change is the theatre of consciousness that awakens the people to understand their societal configurations as well as build faith in them as vectors of change. It is a process whereby men are made to see their problems as a consequence of a particular social order. Social change involves a shift in beliefs, behaviour and acceptance of new tools, techniques and ideas. This theatre works within the existing social norms except where the norms are proved to be counterproductive. The theatre practice tries to take the people through stages that will make them recover their lost confidence and humanity (10).

Freire's "culture of silence" describes a process whereby "the values of the society are not only imported and adopted by third world countries but are actually reinforced through the attitudes of their ruling elites in their relationship with the ruled. With the emergence of this theatre practice, the people's mind became opened to new ideas. The people began to perceive a new awareness of selfhood and began to look critically at the social situations in which they found themselves. They decided to take initiative in acting to transform the society that has denied them the opportunity of participation" (3). It means that when humans attain this sense of awareness and development, they assume a new sense of dignity and hope. This is because they refuse to be passive, merely observing changes happening around them. They take upon themselves the task of actualizing social change.

Change here relates to the raising of consciousness and the encouragement of dialogue and participation in issues relating to the people's economic, political, religious and social realities within their



environment. This is because the drama that is created seeks solutions through an objective analysis of the people's problem (Akpan, Adeoye and Odeh 37). Iorapuu theorizing his concept of Theatre for Transformative Change (TFTC) avers that:

TFTC provides the environment in which "percipients" can articulate and critically reflect on their assumptions and perspectives... Transformative learning occurs when individuals critically reflect upon their environment and learning. Through intense reflection, individuals transform their thinking and view of the world (215).

This is true, because what this form of theatre does is to make the people who are the real targets aware of the ugliness of the gap that separates them from good things of life. As a tool for development, it tries to make them accept the challenges of development. In other words, it challenges their positivism and makes them wish to do things to improve themselves and their environments. It recognizes that once individuals are able to sustain themselves without having to beg the next person for this or that, they have substantially won the war against exploitation (13). Hence, it is evident that what theatre for social change does is to open up the people to the discovery of new realities that imbue them with hope and confidence as agents of positive change.

Like many other political and applied theatre practices, TfSC seeks to reveal more clearly the way the world works: to make strange the familiar and expose the systems and tacit understandings that remain largely invisible in our everyday lives. Brecht's alienation effect is a clear example of this. But TfSC seeks more than raised consciousness, it seeks conscientization: awareness leading to action. This idea is borrowed from Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996) and has been influential in shaping the methodologies of Theatre of the Oppressed and other forms of Applied Theatre. TfSC can bring people together, bridge difference, heal divisions and shatter stereotypes; and help build community.

Theatre for Social Change is based on the idea that all people are important and should have a voice in community decisions, have potential to contribute, resources to share, and a responsibility for community action and outcomes. Citizens are entitled to make informed

decisions about the factors influencing their community. The process is always open and transparent.

### **The Field Experiences in D. B Zang Commercial IDPs' Camp, Gyel Bukuru**

The women in Zang Commercial IDP camp were among numerous women who had different stories of how violent conflict of different magnitudes affected them. During this research work, the researchers had the opportunity to hear different experiences the women went through during and after the conflict in their areas notably Borno and Adamawa where the Boko Haram insurgents and the military engaged in a theatre of war. Women became confused by the noise from shelling. On hearing the sound, most of them abandoned their homes and fled to where they called safe haven. They either made temporary homes in the bush and farm areas or took refuge in communities yet to be visited by assailants, thereby constituting a group of internally displaced persons within such domains.

Saratu Yohana, 50, a resident of Goza in Maiduguri, which was one of the strongholds of Boko Haram, said that, why they survived from the insurgents was because they escaped at night. According to her, they walked through the night in the bush without being mindful of dangerous animals they might meet. She said once the day broke, they stopped and hid in the bush and under the rocks and continued their journey at night. Sometimes they cooked the food they could escape with. She specifically said that in the process of trying to escape, when they became so hungry, they had to cook maize flour and drink as gruel (kunu). That actually became a recurrent decimal throughout the period. At times, in the course of the movement, women sacrificed their share just for the children to eat and survive.

Another interview with Nancy Bitrus, 36, also from Goza revealed how they faced so many health challenges. She said in a bid to escape from these insurgents, the women who were on their monthly cycle (menstruation) could not just find things funny at all. According to her, "When my menstrual cycle started as we were trying to escape, I had to use any available rag. In fact, at a point I could not use anything, the blood kept on flowing without anything until it finished" (Interviewed

30<sup>th</sup> Sept, 2016). Research has shown that, in an ideal situation, any woman who is experiencing her monthly cycle is supposed to be clean throughout and also feed well so as not to be anaemic. Again, Nancy Bitrus confirmed that some women also gave birth during the period of escape without the help of any medical personnel. She further reiterated that these women in one way or the other looked for a means of helping one another anywhere and anyhow they could, just to be alive.

Medical research has proven that, women and girls giving birth in the absence of trained birth attendants in unhygienic conditions are at risk of chronic pelvic inflammatory disease and muscle injury, among others. Without basic health and medical services, girls and young women increase their risks for both morbidity and mortality. Breastfeeding mothers who are malnourished or otherwise impacted by hunger, exhaustion, and trauma may be less able to nourish their infants and young children or to physically support their pregnancies (McKay 387).

Naomi Buba, 50, from Bama when interviewed said that "One devastating effect of children born by these fleeing women is the low-birth weight. This high incidence of low-birth weight babies resulted in malnourished children currently at the Camp who presently are suffering from physical and mental retardation. Again, another devastating health hazard experienced in the process is over-crowding. She said "in a bid to be evacuated from Cameroon where they escaped to, to take refuge, they were packed in a lorry that usually carried cattle". She went further to say that "men, women and children stood up throughout the duration of the long journey. Some children even vomited and defecated in the process. Even though we knew that this was risky and could lead to different sicknesses, there was nothing we could do in such situations. Unfortunately, some children and elderly could not make it, as they died in the process due to cholera. It was a holocaust" (Interviewed 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2016).

In a Focus Group Discussion with the women, Elizabeth Sale said, "The reason why Boko Haram members invaded our community most especially, the Goza hills, is as a result of mineral resources embedded in the area. Our community is filled with gold, diamonds and so much

more that I cannot mention. Even before they came, we had some Germans who had been staying there for many years, mining". Another respondent, Margret Adamu, 45, from Goza continued that, "The Germans had settled there with their families for a long period of time. She said that "Now that our homes have become the homes of Boko Haram, we do not know when we will go back home". The leader of the women in the Camp, Ladi Gadzama, 38, from Goza told the researchers that "During the time of their escape, some of their children died for lack of proper care, food and health facility. She said as some of the children fell sick and died in the bush in the process, the only way to bury them was by throwing them into a river because there was no means of digging the ground".



**Plate 1 shows a Focus Group Discussion session at the camp  
(Photo credit: Fwangshak Tengya)**

During the course of this research, Ramatu Yakubu, 36, from Goza who was among the women who volunteered to take part in the drama delivered a baby boy through the help of a traditional birth attendant in the Camp. In an interview with her, she said that "During the time of their escape, she lost one of her children to the insurgents. She said her son was shot and she could not stop to take care of him because she had to

escape with the other children". Abigail Samaila, 46, also from Goza, a traditional birth attendant at the Camp, received births of several pregnant women. Her traditional knowledge of child bearing helped a lot of women to deliver successfully. In the course of our discussion during the research, she said she had never gone to school or read any medical course, but she had been assisting women during delivery for a very long time and no woman had ever had complications or bled after delivery. For her, it is God's gift to help women and humanity in general. Unfortunately, Abigail is psychologically unstable owing to how she saw her husband being slaughtered by the insurgents. Most times she talks sensibly and at other times she talks insensibly.



Plate 2 shows a widow entering the camp with her children to be registered  
(Photo credit: Fwangshak Tengya)

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have examined that Theatre for Social Change is a significant parameter or model that is capable of healing a battered humanity. It is a technique that most scholars and development experts apply in conflict situation to raise consciousness as well as educate and sensitize the people on the need for human capital development. It is an interventionist technique where people play people in order to transform the society for the better. Conflict as seen in this paper is not bad in itself, it is a natural human phenomenon that is both positive and



negative. It is part and parcel of human existence. Conflict becomes unnecessary when it is violent and has to do with wanton destruction of lives and properties as currently seen in some parts of Nigeria, Africa and the entire globe. For instance, Russia/Ukraine violent conflict is unnecessary, unfortunate and undesirable.

Many lives and properties have been destroyed capable of creating humanitarian crises never seen in the history of the world. In this conflict and many others around the world, women are the worst hit due to their being and social existence. The paper also examines how women have been greatly affected with violent conflict in Nigeria and the world at large, but with particular interest to the internally displaced persons at the D.B. Zang Camp in Jos South Local government Area of Plateau State who have been displaced by the Boko Haram insurgents in the North East as well as other violent conflicts from the neighbouring states of Nasarawa and Kaduna. As a consequence of this, the paper recommends therefore that spirited individuals, government and non-governmental institutions should continue to invest in peace building for the betterment of man and his society. Again, theatre practitioners as agents of change should continue to play their roles as conflict mediators between humankind and their social existence.

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### **Interviews**

Adamu, Margret. (45 years). ). Interviewed at the camp. She was a farmer and a student, currently, one of the internally displaced persons

Buba, Naomi. (35 years). Interviewed at the camp. She was a farmer and a student, currently, one of the internally displaced persons.

Bitrus, Nancy. (37 years). Interviewed at the camp. One of the internally displaced persons, she was also a farmer.

Gadzama, Ladi. (38 years). ). Interviewed at the camp. She was a farmer and a student, currently, one of the internally displaced persons

Sale, Elizabeth. Interviewed at the camp. She was a farmer and a student, currently, one of the internally displaced persons

Sama'ila, Abigail. (46 years). Interviewed at the camp. She was a farmer and a traditional birth attendant.

Yakubu, Ramatru. (36 years). Interviewed at the camp. An internally displaced person and a farmer

Yohana Saratu. (50 years). ). Interviewed at the camp. She was a farmer and a student, currently, one of the internally displaced persons