

## *Chapter Three*

### **PEACE BUILDING THROUGH THEATRE: THE ANGWAN ROGO COMMUNITY FIELD EXPERIENCE**

By

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Right from the period of the masters of the theatre till now, theatre has been used as a broad public platform to criticize the happenings of the time, most often in a way that is both caustic and entertaining. The comedies of Aristophanes and Moliere, and the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, among others, are good examples. However, beginning from the seventies in Nigeria, theatre is meant for entertainment and also to express certain ideological positions or to condemn decadent socio-political and religious practices. Theatre has, since then, become a vital and organic part of the society mediating between man and society as it provides new insights and provocative perception and actions about diverse human issues. This is evident in the forms it has taken and the values that are placed upon it. In it, we see human beings in action, what they do and why they do it. The experience is always entertaining, provocative, imitative and magical. This means that the sociology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century theatre is characterized by lots of theatrical and performative engagements-music, dance, songs and drama, among others. Since the contemporary world is besieged by all manner of pretences, returns, adaptations, entertainment and performative experimentations, all this

goes to show that theatre and theatricality are present in every society, no matter how complex or sophisticated that society may be. Theatre over the years has remained a functional communication tool that enhances development action, community organization, and also promotes good governance and peace building. It is in view of these and many other functions that the researchers intend to showcase the dynamism and relevance of community theatre in addressing the security brouhaha as well as its role in enhancing peace building in Jos.

### **Community Theatre: An overview**

It is evident that prior to the colonial invasion of the continent, theatre in Africa was a purposeful socio-cultural activity of the entire community. It translated the totality of human expressions by providing glimpses of the social, religious and political life of the people. Traditional African theatre was used in the past as a vehicle of thought and a means of bringing the ethnic groups together to ensure peaceful coexistence. As a cultural activity, the medium provided opportunities for enhanced collective thinking and action. Above all, it provided space for ventilating the very issues the people celebrated as community theatre. In the recent past, scholars of different disciplines, development agents, and donor agencies have engaged and encouraged new perspectives on development thinking and approaches. For instance, there is the perspective that considers 'People first' and critical determinants other than structures as prerequisites in community development planning and action. Indeed, this is a perspective that promotes the involvement of the communities directly in the entire project circle. 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 'holistic approach' have become part of the performance language of development planners, workers, government and other development sectors. The logic is that this approach also creates a democratic process where the community members are involved in identifying and resolving their vast community needs. The opportunity this perspective provides is that it mobilises people for community action and encourages collective responsibility. In the process, the people become more challenged and committed to initiate structures and execute programmes that make meaning to them.

Community Theatre is not a theatre by professionals for entertaining communities. Rather, it is a theatre in which people themselves become engaged in issues about their own lives for their own immediate consumption. It promotes development, good governance and peace building. It stresses participation, critical consciousness, sensitization and social transformation by stimulating dialogue within the people using their own familiar artistic expressions to the extent that they take positive action towards the improvement of their lives in the interest of communal stability and nation building. It equally enables communities to identify their needs, the types of change they desire, the necessity of change in their community and the means of attaining such a change. Chris Nwamuo cited by Betiang Liwhu argues that:

*Community Theatre is not necessarily a theatre in a local community, but rather a theatre that*

*aims at achieving developmental objectives within a community through the use of traditional media. These traditional media include dance, demonstration, drama, festivals, exhibitions and songs, among others (71).*

This statement vividly captures what the paper tries to explore. This is because, over the years, a good number of people have thought that Community Theatre stands for a form of theatre meant for the rural people. With the dominant and emergent developmental and public security issues that have characterized most developing countries of the world today, what is regarded as community theatre goes beyond a mere matter for the rural population. Therefore, Community Theatre is not necessarily a theatre for the rural communities alone. Rather, it is a theatre that aims at achieving developmental objectives within communities, whether rural or urban.

Tor Iorapuu (2) has submitted that community theatre is “an educational drama or theatre for social change. It aims to raise awareness by exploring issues in creative and exciting ways. It is a participatory technique of teaching and learning. It is simply interactive, empowering, creative, active and full of fun and action”. By this definition, we can see that community theatre is an alternative, interventionist and democratic theatre of the people by the people and for the people. The essence is about the people playing people. Community theatre is a theatre that advocates for social, political, religious, cultural, economic and psychological changes and experiences about human society.

Augusto Boal, (xxx) has expressed the point more succinctly. To him, "Community Theatre is a form of knowledge and can also be a means of transforming society. It can help us build our future rather than waiting for it". The above approaches and definitions of community theatre vividly have captured what is reflected in the Angwan Rogo community during the peace project conducted by the Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies, University of Jos in collaboration with the Netherlands Embassy on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 2011.

### **Peace Building**

The relationship between theatre and peace building cannot be overemphasised. This is evident in the role theatre plays and the values placed upon it, as it reflects mirrors, refracts and mediates human experiences and values that build and promote peaceful coexistence in the human society. The term 'peace building' has been generally associated with the former United Nations' Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros Ghali in his "An Agenda for Peace" launched in 1992. In that material, he discussed a number of interrelated peace concepts and outlined various options for outside intervention in conflictual situations that had become rampant in the aftermath of the Cold War. Boutros Ghali, cited by Shedrack Gaya Best (26), noted that "preventive diplomacy is purposed to prevent the escalation of conflict into violent confrontation by dealing with its underlying contradictions; while peace building consolidates conflict solutions, aiming at sustainable settlements".

John Paul Lederach (20), in reacting to Ghali, differs from him concerning the placement of peace building and what it entails. According to him, "peace building is more than post-transformations, and accords more with reconstruction. It is

understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates and sustains the full array of processes, approaches and stages needed to transform conflict towards a more sustainable, peaceful relationship". Lederach further likens peace building to the metaphor of building a house, a process requiring different components and stages. It includes, for instance, a vision usually contemplated in the architectural design, the structure and its details, sourcing for material, a strong foundation with strategically placed pillars, cross cutting, beams and board to strengthen the structure, detailed finishing and maintenance, among others. Lederach in this discourse provides what he calls a comprehensive framework for peace building that should incorporate structure, process, relationship, resources and coordination.

Peace building is not a one-off event that can be started and completed, after which its main stakeholders can walk away believing it has been achieved. Peace building is a continuous exercise needing constant investment, re-investment and counter-investment. Ignatius Ayau Kaigama (14) in his book titled: Peace not War: A decade of interventions in the Plateau State Crises 2001-2011, says peace is the most basic instrument for building a virile society. He defines peace as "a condition of social harmony in which there are no social antagonisms and conflicts, and individuals and groups are able to meet their needs and expectations". According to him, peace building is the effort of adopting proactive measures to stop crises and the attempt to neutralize the negative effects of crises where they have already taken place, and this is usually a gradual process (Kaigama 126). By this statement, it means that peace building is not a hasty affair like having a meal when some one is hungry,

and neither is it rushed.

Today, many agencies are practically involved in peace negotiation, especially in the United Nations, realizing that many ethnic, political and religious groups the world over are yet to find an enduring formula for peace. The Kofi Annan Peace Plan projected into the Arab Republic of Syria is a good example. Even with the formula for peace developed by him, violence is occurring on a daily basis in Syria. Here, in Nigeria and Plateau State in particular, different committee reports on peace building and their sustenance have remained a mirage. The Bola Ajibola and Solomon Lar committees of inquiry have long completed their work, but releasing the reports and implementing the recommendations have remained elusive. Be that as it may, the concept of peace building has come to stay in the nomenclature of conflict and peace practice in Nigeria. Yet, the question begging for an answer is whether or not a peace building process exists. Who are its builders and what is the content of the building? If indeed there is a peace building process, why do we have repeated episodes of violent confrontations in Jos?

These are rhetorical questions, many of which need to be answered. This is because a series of peace building measures have been embarked upon by the government and non-governmental organisations; yet violent conflicts in Jos have remained a recurring decimal. But for the researchers here, one of the fundamental ways and strategies to promote peaceful coexistence and enhance peace building in Jos is through community theatre as demonstrated during the peace project initiated by the Centre for Conflict Management and Peace

Studies, University of Jos, in Collaboration with the Netherlands Embassy in Angwan Rogo, using theatre as an approach and methodology for peace building. Theatre matters a lot in peace building because it transcends ethnic, religious and geographic boundaries, and also provides a wider network for the performers and the audience.

Plateau State has a comparatively large concentration of ethnic minorities from various states in Nigeria. At least, over fifty-eight relatively small ethnic communities were counted during the Plateau State Peace Conference in 2004, all spread across its seventeen local government areas. The indigenous ethnic groups are broadly categorized into the Chadic and the Benue-Congo language groups that are found in all the seventeen local government areas. Other ethnic groups that have settled in Jos, mostly for economic purposes include the Hausa Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, Urhobo, Nupe, Kanuri, Idoma, Tiv and Eggon, among others. Plateau State is politically divided into the three senatorial zones of North, South and Central. The topography of the state is made up of lowlands and highlands that are endowed with a beautiful weather that has attracted investors and tourists locally and internationally (Hoomlong 24). In addition to these facts, John Galadima (554) has posited that "Jos the capital of Plateau state is a cosmopolitan city with residents drawn from different parts of the country and other parts of the world. All the people live in peace without any major crises until September 7, 2001 when the city witnessed one major violent conflict that came to be known as an ethno-religious crisis between the indigenes and the Hausa Fulani in which many lives and properties were lost".



## **The Violent Jos Conflicts**

Conflict is an inescapable reality of social existence. Nations, communities, identity groups, families and even individuals experience conflict in their interactions with similar constituted entities. This was what perhaps prompted Marx and Engels (35) to put forward a potent thesis that “the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles”. This struggle is usually waged between the minority and the dominated classes which may either end in a revolutionary and fundamental reconstruction of a society or in the common ruin of the contending parties. Otite and Albert, as cited by Ziporrah Tanko (131), have articulated the view that “conflict is a fact of life and could be the precursor of positive change as it challenges rational man to think of alternative ways of meeting contesting human needs and interests”.

Embedded in these definitions is the assumption that all conflicts, if not managed well, could result in violent clashes. Nigeria has been confronted with numerous conflicts that have inflicted monumental damage on the economy, politics and peaceful co-existence amongst many groups. These contentions, which often assume ethnic and religious forms, have led to the heavy depletion of human resources and/ or the displacement of persons, the weakening of state apparatus, increasing threats of secessions, and are increasingly challenging the rights of many Nigerians as citizens. The Jos conflict right from its inception has not been adequately managed and therefore has resulted in mass violence of high magnitude. The similarity in these conflicts lies in the fact that all of them have assumed ethnic and religious dimensions, especially those of 1994, 1997 and 2001.

Prior to the major violent conflict that rocked the State from 1994 till date, the state had been an oasis of peace in the country, hence the designation: "Home of Peace and Tourism". Even when the surrounding states of Bauchi, Kaduna, Taraba and Nasarawa witnessed several rounds of violence, the state remained calm and stable. Except for the unease generated by the influx of refugees from other states, only minor clashes over grazing areas between farmers and pastoralists and land ownership tussles were the norm. Even then, such clashes were rare and far between. Jos, the capital of Plateau State in North Central Nigeria has witnessed one of the most violent conflicts tied to issues of ethno-religious identity as well as the context for being citizens or indigenes. However, the combined factors of wrong government policies, power tussles, fear of domination, poor response to security reports, politicization of religion and ethnicity, poverty, religious hatred and the polarization of the military in the conflictual situation have played leading roles in the discord that led to tremendous loss of lives and property, and further created apathy and loss of confidence by the people in the government's ability to manage the crises.

From 1994 to 2010, Jos has increasingly experienced mass violence, which has culminated in the wanton destruction of lives, property and the informal and official partitioning of the city along ethnic and religious fault-lines. Indeed, this sad development has attracted both scholarly and policy attention in view of the security challenges the situation poses to Nigeria as a whole (Obadiah et al, 182). The formation of identities discussed above and the development of settlers' consciousness in Jos formed the background for the overt

ethno-religious violence observed in the city and its environs over the years. It is evident that the native communities in Jos are Christians and traditionalists, while the Hausa/ Fulani people are Muslims. These ethnic groups often use religion as a mobilising force and even manipulate it to suit their ethnic projects. Pam Sha (3) has posited that "Socio-economic classes were involved in the generation and prosecution of the conflicts, which implies that classes employed ethnicity and religion to prosecute their class projects".

During the period of the state of emergency, the Colonel Chris Ali-led administration organized a peace conference to enable Plateau people to resolve their differences. What came out vividly in the resolutions of the conference is that the Joshua Dariye-led government in Plateau State was complacent in its actions during the crises, and that is why it took the serious dimension that it did. Secondly, the Berom, Anaguta and Afizere were identified once more as the true indigenes of Jos while the Hausa, Fulani and other Nigerians were recognized as citizens that had chosen Jos to settle for whatever endeavours (Bingel 53). For instance, the indigenes –Berom, Anaguta and Afizere – argue that in the whole of Nigeria there is no place where minority groups enjoy indigeneship rights and by extension participate in the governance of areas dominated by big ethnic groups. They could not see how the Berom, Anaguta and Afizere people can be allowed to participate in the politics of Kano, Sokoto or Katsina, not to talk of involving themselves in their traditional matters. This is a clear case of dominating ethnic minorities right down to their homeland. The government was also accused of refusing to make public, by way of White Paper reports, the findings of various commissions of inquiry in Jos

and other parts of Plateau State. Thereafter, a series of peace conferences, workshops, seminars and projects have been going on to see how best the violent conflicts can be permanently nipped in the bud and to enhance true peace building. The Jos Peace Project and the production of *Bond of Peace* written and coordinated by Reuben Embu was one of the parameters initiated to kick start discussions and engage the people on peace building.

### **Production of *Bond of Peace*: The Field Experience**

*Bond of Peace* is a play produced as a peace project on the Plateau and was organized by the Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies, University of Jos, in collaboration with the Netherlands Embassy at the Angwan Rogo community in Jos North Local Government Area on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 2011. The play was prepared, taken to, and produced in the community. It reflects on the series of conflicts that have bedevilled Plateau state over the years and examines different factors that are responsible for the conflicts and tries to initiate ways of resolving the conflicts through dramatization. It was performed using the Hausa, English and Pidgin languages. During the performance of the play, the actors reflected, mirrored and mediated on the different factors that were said to be responsible for fuelling the conflicts over the years. When the performance was going on, the audience watched and listened with keen interest and rapt attention to the issues being projected. After the performance, a post-performance section was initiated where members of the audience were given the opportunity to ask questions in relation to what had been performed. Different questions, answers and comments came especially on the need for peace

building through theatre. The audience commended the methodology and strategy of using theatre as a tool for peace building and implored the team to sustain the practice as a recurrent measure for peace building on the Plateau.

The peace project kicked off on the 10th October, 2011 in Angwan Rogo, which is one of the target communities. The members of the University of Jos Peace Project entered the community at about 11:30am. The programme started at 11:45am with the opening prayer by Alhaji Zakari, followed by the welcome address by the Master of Ceremonies, then acknowledgements and opening remarks followed suit. In the opening remarks, the village Head of Angwan Rogo, Mallam Abdullahi, stated that Angwa Rogo was a peaceful place. According to him, it was the first time University of Jos and Angwan Rogo were sitting down together to discuss about peace and its sustenance around the vicinity. He confessed that the first time the people of Angwan Rogo recorded crisis was in 2001 and since then they had been clamouring for peace, but all to no avail. He wondered why some people had painted the community black as a "No-Go-Area" in Jos. To him, Angwan Rogo was a peaceful community. He appreciated the peace initiative by the University and appealed for complete and comprehensive peace in Plateau and Nigeria as a whole.

Hajiya Aishetu Lawal, a Woman Leader, after watching the performance commended the effort of the performers. She posited that "they have had series of workshops on peace on the Plateau, but this is distinctive. She appreciated the vision and mandate of the visitors and advocated that plateau people should begin to see the need to live in peace without the security dictating peace for the people". Dr Isa Abdullahi, who is

the Youth Leader for both Angwan Rogo and Angwan Rimi, said that he was always surprised that in spite of all the efforts by the government, non-governmental organizations and even the communities themselves, peace could not be sustained in Jos. He used Nasarawa State as an example, where Muslims and Christians lived together in peace, and advocated that Plateau people should emulate the culture of peace from Nasarawa state and the lessons learnt from the drama and begin to see the need to live in peace. Alhaji Mohammed Bello commented on the drama and debunked the new generation of clergy and imams who preached evil and incited their worshippers to perpetrate crime and violence. He spoke on the issue of settlers and indigenes as one of the problems militating against peaceful co-existence on the Plateau, and said the matter should be addressed immediately because the so-called politicians capitalized on it. He argued that the University and Angwan Rogo which happened to be the host community should create a synergy and relate peacefully.

Hajiya Fatima Adamu Tsoho, who is an elder in the community, said that Hausa people were highly accommodating. She said that as a people we needed peace first in our minds before we could advocate for it in the wider society. She lamented bitterly on the bad legacy that would be left for posterity. She prayed for peace and positive change in the minds of the Plateau people. Another woman leader, Hajiya Hadiza, argued that women's involvement in peace building was very important. She therefore advocated for massive involvement of women in peace building efforts and pleaded that husbands should allow them to participate. One Mohammed Yusuf, an elder of the community and a member of the National Union of Road

Transport Workers, Bauchi Park, Plateau State, expressed appreciation for the visit and urged the University to collaborate with the Plateau State Government on the need to maintain peace in the University vicinity, and lamented the bad impression people had had about Bauchi Motor Park close to the University. He lamented that the people themselves had sown a seed of discord and maintained that the people themselves should uproot the bad seed for the sake of posterity and generations unborn.

Mallam Bello, the proprietor of Hikima Academy and Green College in Angwan Rogo and a stakeholder in the community, commented on the lessons learnt from the performance and the performers, and advocated for a follow-up visit and the sustenance of community relations between Angwan Rogo and the University. According to him, politicians and the elite had caused the crises that are hampering development in Plateau State. For him, both Christians and Muslims were not enemies, they both preached peace. He lamented that whenever there was violent conflict, some people benefited from it. He was worried about the incessant conflicts and the divisions and disunity that were taking place between Christians and Muslims, and prayed for peace and unity among the people.

Alhaji Mohammed Usman said soldiers would not bring peace; it was the people that would pursue peace themselves and sustain it. Unfortunately, today, Plateau people depended on security forces to pursue their daily activities. Security forces dictate the pace of their lives for them. This was evident in the performance when Mama Chundung asks the security man around her area to escort her to fetch water:

**MAMA CHUNDUNG:** *Security, my son, please escort me to the borehole to fetch water. (Security stands) Thank you. Please be in front, if not they will slaughter me (pumps a bucket full). Help me put the water on my head. (P.7)*

*This was one of the many experiences the Plateau people always passed through whenever there was a violent conflict. The question was how long would the people continue to live under the apron strings of the security agents? Were they the solution to the violent conflicts militating against the growth and development of the people and the State? Again, this is evident in the drama when even the security man feels it is about time the people learnt not to depend on the security forces for peace building. He vents his anger on the people thus:*

**SECURITY:** *(Shouting) Order! I am Security Lantanka and I will not accept this anymore. Security fetch water, security sleep, security shit, security piss. I am tired... (Asks both sides) don't you want peace? Don't you want peace? (P.9)*

This statement by security Lantanka vividly and passionately captures the recurrent questions whenever there is a peace workshop, conference, seminar and dialogue on peace building on the Plateau. This clearly buttresses the simple fact that the solution lies in the hands of the people themselves.

Audu Gambo (2) made this point succinctly clear and submitted



that “the changing character of security shows that reliance on the military as the foundation of national security is no longer adequate. This is because exclusive focus on the military factor to the neglect of other key factors could only widen the frontiers of national vulnerability”. This was obvious in Nigeria today. During the 2012 budget presentation in Nigeria, the Federal Government allocated a huge sum of money for security purposes. Resources meant for the development of the country were being diverted to the security vote because of the security “wahala” that had characterized the Nigerian State.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident that the theatre, through its fundamental role of reflecting, correcting, provoking, imitating and mediating, can be a parameter that can be used to bring peace in Plateau State, as exemplified in the performance of *Bond of Peace* during the Peace Project at the Angwan Rogo community in 2011. This goes to show that theatre has become the voice of the voiceless, and whatever the artist writes about, he is writing about his social surrounding and the social contradictions of his existence. Through the theatre medium, the artist finds the means of documenting issues that permit dialogue and gives the issues vital social meaning through dramatization.

Community theatre has not only emerged as an effective weapon in raising the consciousness of the people towards the maintenance and sustenance of peace and peace building. It also serves the people's aspiration of building a nation where peace and justice shall reign, where the Nigerian people will do the right thing at the right time. Some literary scholars, particularly in the humanities in Nigeria, since the civil war, have

opened up new vistas in the study and practice of theatre. Saint Gbilekaa, (iii) has argued that: "Theatre today has become a medium or a testing ground for ideological war". Such scholars see theatre as an instrument of bringing about social change. This is because of its ideological position in the on-going class struggle and conflict like the one in Jos. Richard Wilbur (102) has argued that:

*If the purpose of theatre is to chastise human weakness, I see no reason why any class of people should be exempted. That the theatre is a great medium of correction, and for the majority of people there is no better way of reproof than depicting their faults to them. That the most effective way of attacking vice is to expose it to public ridicule through performance.*

The above assertion is pertinent and timely, as it relates to the elite and government officials; for injustice and corruption on the part of the government of the day have made the conflict in Jos degenerate to this level, as enormous resources for the development of the state are merely shared among a few individuals and groups who benefit from the dissention, and thereby do not want the resolution of the conflicts.

In the final analysis, it is to be noted that civilization is not mainly about advancement and modernization, but largely about being able to propagate peace, harmonious coexistence, and to live and share with others (Gadzama 71). Life is precious and sacred. This necessity to live a life of peace, freedom and to guarantee the safety of all can be projected, reflected, refracted

and mediated through the weapon of the theatre, which over the years has remained a potent force for the propagation of value system reorientation and peace building in human communities. All that is needed to bring violent conflicts like these to a halt is mustering the necessary political will in order to restore confidence and hope to the people who have made enormous sacrifices in their quest for peace in the State over the years.

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