

# **THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT AS TOOL FOR COUNTERING RURAL BANDITRY: THE MAGANDA WORKSHOP EXPERIENCE**

**Jamila Aliyu MOHAMMED**

Department of Theatre & Performing Arts

Ahmadu Bello University (ABU)

Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria

Email: eemagine007@yahoo.com

&

**Victor Osaë IHIDERO**

Department of Theatre & Performing Arts

Ahmadu Bello University (ABU)

Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria

Email: vihidero@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

This paper examines the deployment of Theatre for Development (TfD) as a tool for countering rural banditry in northern Nigeria. The premise of our argument is anchored on the fact that the TfD has the potentials of addressing divergent issues of community concerns however these potentials have not been tested enough in a terrorised domain or community. The paper uses the Maganda TfD Experience, one of the five TfD workshops, which took place in Birnin Gwari Local Government Area of Kaduna State to contend for new approaches in gaining entrance into communities in siege, addressing issues of development concerns and ultimately creating safe spaces for community facilitation. This paper uses Oga Steve Abah's *Methodological Conversation* to argue for an expansion of methods and approaches stemming from TfD workshops in the face of incursions and terror. The paper found out that some of the existing TfD tools may not apply to communities under terrorist siege. The paper also discovered that the inaccessibility or paucity of TfD workshops or reports conducted in incursive spaces affect pedagogy in terms of the adaptive processes of using TfD, especially when confronted by terror.

## **Introduction**

In the last decade, Nigeria has witnessed increased insecurity, especially in rural areas in Northern Nigeria, including widespread armed conflicts. Security agencies in the affected areas have been unable to curb the violence, and this promoted rural banditry. The rising insecurity led to formation of vigilante groups to aid in the control and prevention of banditry and cattle rustling in the affected areas.

The vigilante groups that emerged proved ineffective in preventing crimes, but rather, led to alleged excesses by the vigilante groups, whose members are accused of collusion (such as cover ups for criminals), harassments of citizens, unlawful killings of “suspects” even without any tangible evidence and confiscation of properties such as motorcycles, cattle, goats and other livestock especially those owned by pastoralists (Egwu 13). In some areas, particularly in Birnin Gwari, Kaduna State, pastoralists and farmers have also alleged that some vigilante groups are aiding rural banditry.

Furthermore, the low level of education, the isolated nature of the affected settlements and the weak representation of the affected farmers/pastoralists and other rural people in governance resulted in poor institutional and security response to the challenges, thus the on-going acts of violence against community members (such as, rape and abduction of young girls and women) continued unabated. The consequences of rural insecurity identified in the study of Oluyemi-Kusa and Salihu were very alarming, the most visible being the high level of frustration and abuse of people’s fundamental rights (113). As Women Connect Initiative note, the violence has been particularly directed against women and children, who suffer sexual abuse, abduction and other cruelty leading to their death (3). Young men and family heads were repeatedly killed by cattle rustlers in the local government, which has led to reprisal attacks on various communities and/or households. Many heads of households affected by rural banditry have abandoned their families, leaving women to engage in excessive labour to cater for the families.

It is also worth noting that farming activities have been seriously affected due to reduction in number of animals used for traction and decrease in quantity of manure, which has led to reduced crop yields. Farming communities in various parts of the local government like Maganda, Gwaska, Sabon Layi/Tudun Wada, Dakwaro, Mashigi, Janruwa, Dogon Dawar and Tsohuwar Gwari have lost substantial parts of their crop yields to conflicts that were triggered by cattle rustling. Worse, members of the armed forces, including soldiers, police and mobile police officers have been kidnapped and killed in Birnin Gwari, the latest being the brutal death of eleven men of the Nigerian Army. The situation in Birnin Gwari, especially Maganda is bleak and appears to defy conventional military bombardment.

The security concerns in Birnin Gwari led Women Connect Initiative (WCI), a Kaduna based non-government organisation to embark on a pilot study on “Save our Women Project” in Birnin Gwari communities of Maganda, Gwaska, Sabon Layi and Tsohuwar Gwari. The life-span of the project was six months beginning from May 2017 to November 2017. TfD tools were largely used to facilitate Maganda community. This study examines the outcomes of the TfD workshop in Maganda vis-à-vis the inherent problems associated with deploying the existing TfD tools in terrorised communities.

### **Conceptual Clarifications: Theatre for Development and Rural Banditry**

The premise of theatre for development (TfD) is identifying needs and meeting them. Asante and Yirenyi note that it is a way of using theatre to enhance development in the real world (595). For Austin Asagba, it is a practice in which community theatre is used as a tool for community mobilisation, education, awareness, sensitisation and facilitation with the purposes of effecting change in communities (321). According to Abah, theatre

for development is a medium of communication which employs other literary elements like songs, mimes, dances and dialogue to cause a change in behaviour (27). It is the deployment of methods to enhance participation which in turn brings about development. Theatre for development thus becomes an interactive process utilising reality and fiction to create experience of performance in the framework of community development. It entertains as well as educates (Abah 13). Through entertainment, issues in development are teased out and possible solutions are suggested. Tfd uses the language and idiolects indigenous to the community under engagement. The idea is to raise the level of inclusiveness among most community members who most often feel a sense of ownership of the development process (Okwori 94). Theatre for development promotes a true democratic and participatory approach to development which augurs well for smaller and rural communities (Asante 28).

Theatre for development is capable of integrating indigenous and popular systems of communication that exist already in communities through which engaging the community at any level and time becomes less cumbersome than other community engagements approaches. Daniel and Bappa see theatre for development as, “an avenue where community members get the opportunity to identify their own problems and issues that concern them and through discussions and consultations lay down strategies to overcome them” (56). As a generic term, Eskamp describes Tfd as:

a range of theatrical practices and participatory methods [used] to engage marginalised members of communities in a dialogical process aimed at enhancing awareness of political and social issues, building up social cohesion and stimulating the participation, awareness and organisational strength of groups and communities (cited in Adie 156).

Eskamp’s assertion means that Tfd thrives on community dialogue, sharing and learning. It is a process rather than a finished project (156). Also, Byram and Kidd note that, Tfd has a dual nature where a theatre performance is prepared outside of the community and staged on the community or secondly, the performance is done with and performed by/for the community (23). In describing the dual nature of Tfd, Byram and Kidd opine that:

the first type is that which is created out of researching in the community but performed by the outside artists. The second type is that which is investigated and created with the community and performed jointly by the professional artists (outsiders) and members of the community (insiders). In both cases the presentations take place in the community itself, and the venue does not require any special requirements of the theatre (24).

Theatre for development thrives on music, drama, dance, puppetry and other indigenous forms found within a given community. It dwells on indigenous community materials which are recycled to fit into different forms. According to Chukwu-Okoronkwo, Tfd presents the opportunity for the indigenous art forms of a community to be used for development purposes (9). Because of its democratic and fun nature, it can be

used both to investigate and probe issues within the community as well as to stimulating discussion on issues to find solutions.

As a tool that can easily be adaptable to facilitate diverse community based issues and needs, Tfd lends itself as a ‘thermostat’ of change. As thermostat, it is capable of initiating sustainable change while its methods can be changed themselves in the process of initiating development. It is not like a catalyst that is capable of accelerating or reducing [changing] a process while itself remains unchanged. Like other areas of applied theatre, the potentialities of Tfd have been tested in theatre-in-education, drama-in-education, voters’ education and electioneering, reproductive health, communication, agriculture and extension services, among other safe spaces. Diverse mixed methods have been used to facilitate development with theatre.

From the foregoing, Tfd can be said to be a development practice that uses performance as a participatory tool to help individuals and groups share their experiences with the intent of social transformation. Abah conceptualises the interaction between methods as “methodological conversation” (46). The idea that informed methodological conversation is anchored on the premise that research and investigation in Tfd has experienced a marked shift from other previous experiences and experiments to complementary participatory methods to communicating development. For Abah, methodological conversation means that drama, which in itself is a method, takes on other research and other participatory methodologies (47). In other words, there are other methodologies which will have to link with drama to produce a more effective result. Instead of just drama alone, drama is now cohabiting, collaborating and partnering with Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) or Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), which are a body of tools meant for action research; so that a mixture of both drama and PLA now provides a more comprehensive and more effective provocation of community consciousness. The implication of this concept, therefore, is that while methodological conversation is a research method, analysis of data from the research, rehearsals, play productions and post-production discussions still remain integral to the practice, as well as follow-through, all in the bid for the ultimate realisation of applied theatre goals. Abah says:

The approach that we have evolved, and which has worked quite well, is the combination of approaches which I have called methodological conversations. All of these approaches engaging in the conversations may be put under the homestead label. The array of instruments/approaches has included focused group discussion, participant observation and interviews, transect walks, mapping and storytelling. I have always enjoyed this combination because of the many layers of conversation that goes on and the amount of information it is capable of generating. The next step is for the community, with the input of the amateurs, to prioritise the issues that have emerged. The issues that they consider to be the most critical are the ones that the drama will focus on (47).

Abah’s assertion holds sway for this research. It offers this research a premise to appraise the TFD workshop in Maganda. However, this study diverges from the premise

that all the viable approaches can be put under homestead. The study argues that Abah's *homesteadisation* of methods is a *problematique* since it has not been hitherto tested in troubled waters of siege, terror and a climate of fear. One of the myriad areas where Abah's conceptualisation needs to be tried is the domain of rural banditry.

Banditry is taking property by force or the threat of force, often done by a group of people (Hobsbawm 851). It is a type of predatory, acquisitive, and violent action by groups of men (sometimes including women), in remote, difficult-to-control mountainous or forest areas containing large numbers of semi-mobile and state-resistant pastoralists or farmers (Hart 3). The characterisation of banditry depends upon how it is approached. Banditry can be seen as a legal category, a social category, and as a series of powerful stories and myths. As a legal category, banditry is a pernicious form of crime that subverts the state's monopoly of legitimate violence. From the perspective of the modern nation state, bandits or brigands are criminals who resist the civilising power of the state through violence, brutality, extortion, theft, and protection rackets. Banditry is a symptom of the low level of development in the countryside (Wilson 208). Bandits often terrorised and oppressed vulnerable communities. They prevent and suppress peasant mobility by putting down collective action through terror and by carving out avenues of individual social mobility that weakened collective action.

Rural banditry, within the Nigerian context, is often associated with cattle rustling and planned violence on communities. Samuel Egwu acknowledges that:

rural banditry and cattle rustling intersect with several other important themes in the Nigerian political economy: the problems of human and national security; altered balance in state-society relations; the impact of climate change on agricultural practices and different occupational groups; the emerging challenge of food security and the modernisation of agriculture; and the question of intergroup relations and social harmony in Nigeria's diverse and plural context (14).

The divergent intersections highlighted by Egwu are constructs of post-colonial insurrection. The postcolonial rural banditry is an economically-based form of criminality perpetuated by informal networks (Kwaja 3). It is the practice of stealing cattle and animals from herders, or the raiding of cattle from the ranches. It thrives as a means of 'primitive' accumulation of cowherds in the context of subsistence and commercial pastoralism. In Birnin Gwari, rural banditry is accompanied by rape, kidnapping, organised attacks on villages and communities, and looting.

Rural banditry in Birnin Gwari as well as Nigeria intersects with the incessant conflict between Fulani herdsman and crop farmers. The conflict is connected to the wider context of identity politics and intergroup relations, including the relationships between pastoralist groups on the one hand and the Nigerian state system on the other (Egwu 5). The Fulani pastoralists are mostly perceived as violent and deliberately armed to deal with unsuspecting crop farmers; the farmers allege intentional crop damage by animals. The herders, on the other hand, perceive themselves to be victims of political marginalisation, lacking a voice within the Nigerian state system. This contraption is the

problem that besets the Nigerian State, which in turn finds expression in attacks and reprisal attacks between communities. Maganda community in Birnin Gwari is one of the many communities in the local government area faced with the problem of rural banditry.

### **Maganda Community in Context**

Maganda is a district under Birnin Gwari Local Government Area in Kaduna State. Maganda is about forty kilometres from Birnin Gwari town and about fifty-six minutes away to Funtua in Katsina and another thirty-five minutes to Dansadau in Zamfara. The dense Birnin Gwari forest cuts across these three states and its routes are mostly known by bandits running the forest. Maganda is an agrarian community with an active youth population. It is a Hausa speech community. Before the spate of banditry, Maganda had a burgeoning economy due to its closeness to other market-driven communities in Birnin Gwari. Maganda is a hub for crop and livestock market producing tons of grains which contribute to the general grain output of Birnin Gwari.

Islam is the main religion practiced in the area and this guides the thought and, arguably, the behaviours of people in the area. By all indications, Maganda can be said to be in siege considering the seemingly climate of fear amongst its people and with communities around its borderlines. The community relies heavily on local vigilante for their security as the activities of bandits has defied all the measures put in place by the Nigerian Police Force and army. Banking activities in the area has also packed up due to the several attacks on the institution. Worse, divergent bandit groups have emerged and communities in Birnin Gwari bear the brunt between inter-group clashes. The climate of fear in Maganda necessitated the Tfd intervention in the community in 2016.

### **Methodology**

The research adopts a largely qualitative approach, and focuses on the narratives that create the climate of fear. The primary sources of data are Focus Group Discussions (FGDs); drama and Interviews with youths, community leaders, and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in Maganda. Two focus group discussions were conducted and the issues raised formed part of the dramatic performance. The first focus group was conducted with the community youths who are members of the local vigilante group and the other with community leaders. Interview with the community women also provided a context into understanding the situation in the community. The workshop used transect walk and problem-tree to appraise the problems in Maganda then used dramatic performance to re-present the issues which members of the community themselves have identified.

The research team entered Birnin Gwari on Tuesday, 30<sup>th</sup> May at about 1:32pm. The team was received by the community contact person Mallam Hassan and was further introduced to Mallam Aminu who led the delegation to Mallam Zubairu Jibril Mai Gwari II, the Emir of Birnin Gwari. The team was received at the Emir's palace and was given the go-ahead to conduct the workshop after briefing the research on the situation in Birnin Gwari. To understand Maganda's context, the team of enumerators embarked on a journey to Maganda. On arriving Maganda, the team embarked on a transect walk in a group of four comprising twelve field workers. The team met immediately after the walk

to discuss its findings. The problem-tree technique was used to link the problems that beset Maganda.

The team discovered that lack of planned security measures is the central problematic and this easily becomes the trunk of the tree on which other security problems – uncoordinated information sharing and intelligence gathering, slow-paced communication system with Birnin Gwari town and Kaduna, bad roads, and fear resulting in confusion which in turn leads to high casualty. The initial plan for WCI was to facilitate women in Maganda on safety measures in times of attack but the plan changed during the focus group discussion with the community members as divergent issues were teased out. One of the issues raised was that the modus operandi of bandits was to surprise the community by sporadic shooting in order to put fear on people after when they go ahead to commit mayhem. The community people identified “the fear of being attacked” rather than “the attack itself” as the problem. Women Connect Initiative abandoned her plan to meet the identified community needs of Maganda community.

### **The Maganda TFD Experience**

From the focus group discussions and interview, the team working with members of the community came up with a story on the extant realities in Maganda. The story was then broken into different scenarios to provide different contexts of attacks and counter-attack. The scenarios were arranged so much so that they could stand alone as complete performance on their own. The performance scenes were then merged with dance performances. The scenarios were carefully chosen, edited, re-edited and presented before the community leaders who finally chose the scenes to be performed.

### **Casting the Story and the Performance**

The cast were youths mostly drawn from the community members with support of two staff members of Women Connect Initiative (WCI), Victor Ihidero and Danliti Kpanja. The WCI research team wanted to hear and watch their stories in performance and what they did is a playback of a happening in Maganda – how communities are attacked and how people react before and after every successive attacks. They cast themselves into roles. The staff members of WCI were portrayed as outsiders and by implication the catalysts that drive banditry. The performance was entirely rendered in Hausa with interludes of dance performance to separate the scenes.

The community members tell the story of Zaman Lafiya, a prosperous peaceful community with vibrant hardworking young men and women. Zaman Lafiya is surrounded with other communities faced with security challenges. Every time, a group of bandits crosses Maganda district to carry attacks in Birnin Gwari, Sabon and Kakangi and Zaman Lafiya show no concern of who uses their territory. Whenever neighbouring community leaders call for meetings, Zaman Lafiya refuse to attend citing their peace as valuable to their existence. Collectively, Doka, Sabon and Kakangi come up with a temporarily defence strategy to defend themselves against the aggressive bandits led by Daji.

On a market day, Daji and his men attacked Birnin Gwari. Sabon and Kakangi with support from joint forces of the local vigilante pushed the bandits backward killing

Daji. On their way back to the forest they stopped over and ravaged Zaman Lafiya for not informing them of the activity of other neighbouring communities. Zaman Lafiya becomes a constant field of savagery as men are kidnapped on their farms, women seized from the husbands and children, cattle rustled, livestock seized and crops harvested by bandits. For every attack, bullets are first sprayed all around as men are killed and their women captured. Gradually, farmers stopped going to their farms and every agricultural activities were paralysed. This did not deter the activities of the bandits in the community to kidnap its members for ransom. Fear began to reign in the hearts of Zaman Lafiya men and vigilante. Help at the same is distant since other communities are faced with resisting bandits of rival groups.

The Daji boys send a message to Mallam Abdullahi, the village head of Zaman Lafiya notifying him on their coming. The Town Crier is sent to town to broadcast the message and to get the people ready for attacks. Men and women are seen fleeing Zaman Lafiya but they are informed of a greater danger on the road. There is general fear on the air as the villagers converge at Mallam Abdullahi's house for solution. Mallam Abdullahi tries to douse the fear but he fails however hard he tries. The eldest man in Zaman Lafiya, Dantijo, the Narrator appears to douse their fears as he recounts the bravery of Zaman Lafiya. He pauses and asks the community to suggest on how to counter the threats posed by the marauding bandits.

At this point, the facilitator stepped in to ask questions relating to the performance. The questions were anchored on four thematic areas. Firstly, what are the genesis or root causes of the problem as seen in the performance? What sustained fear in the community? Why are there no effort at resisting attacks and what can be done to fight back? These questions helped to shovel up deep issues in the community beyond the façade of the attacks themselves.

### **Post-Performance Engagements**

The performance story, told by Dantijo, reflects the realities in the Maganda community. The facilitator, Mr. Timothy Elisha broke the participants into group of three, each facilitated by different communication consultant contracted by WCI. The idea was to arrive at what the community members made from the performance in terms of what they think about the performance and what action to take to stop the marauding attacks of the bandits. The report from the diverse groups is then analysed independently and read before the entire community.

As in the performance, the first respondent, Mohammed Ibrahim noted that the lack of concern of Zaman Lafiya on the attacks of Doka and other communities contributed to the insurgence of bandits into their lands. According to Mohammed, it is evil not to help one's neighbour at the time of need and "what caught up with Zaman Lafiya is a result of their carelessness". Another respondent, Baban Ahmed noted that bandits shoot at children and anyone and everything and that one cannot think on what to do as of that point resulting to utter confusion and death. According to Ahmed the situation in Zaman Lafiya resembles the challenges they are faced with only that they did not allow strangers use them to attack other communities. He noted that there is fear everywhere for them because:



They (bandits) invade our community when we least expect and when we think that peace has finally returned. We don't know what to do or where to go. Even from here to Birnin Gwari is full of danger and we cannot sleep with two eyes closed. We have stopped going to farm because of the fear of being kidnapped. Our women are locked up for fear of them and all our cries to government have failed to bring any result. The Birnin Gwari town that we would have gone to is not safe too.

Similarly, Danladi, a local vigilante affirmed Ahmed's position and noted that he sees in the performance that they do not have effective information gathering networks and security outposts on key entrance and exits paths in the community. He noted that this situation contributed to the lack of confidence on local vigilante. This, according to him, sustains the fear Baban Ahmed spoke about. Bashir, another local vigilante also hinted at lack of cooperation between neighbouring communities noting that this has affected coordinated defence system and resistance. At this point, the facilitator jumped in again to suggest ways they could collectively resist the threat posed by bandits.

The Birnin Gwari Vanguard for Security and Good Governance, one of the community based organisations (CBO) invited for the intervention workshop suggested that local vigilante groups should work together instead of policing only their immediate community. According to the group, vigilante groups can have security outposts at the borders of all Birnin Gwari communities. He said:

This will help us in the sharing of information and pose initial resistance to attacks. This model has worked for communities in other districts and we believe it would work here if we put our minds to it. The problem we have is that we usually don't have information before attacks. When bandits themselves manage to inform us about attacks they are not specific when they will come. Police and military presence here makes the whole thing even complicated because sometimes they attack us wearing military uniforms. Only our own solution can help us.

Another CBO, Birnin Gwari Stakeholders suggested the re-training of the vigilante groups for effective resistance of bandits. The group accused local vigilante of carrying out jungle justice on members of other communities they suspect are informants. They propose a coordinated resistance where every community youth should volunteer to join local vigilante groups to protect fatherland. Women Connect Initiative (WCI) promised to fund the re-training of local vigilantes and to facilitate the deployment of more security personnel to the area. The organisation recruited the services of retired army sergeants who trained local vigilantes for two months and eleven days and also provided reconnaissance toolkit to aid information gathering. WCI also provided farm tools which Maganda community can also use to defend themselves at times of aggression.

## **Challenges**

The much valued homestead approach to Tfd did not work as the general climate of fear affected the amount of time spent in evaluating the process in Maganda. The original plan was for the enumerators to spend three weeks of the six months [every weekend] with members of Maganda community but the spate of false alarms intensified the fear and this made the enumerators to opt for the ‘nomad approach’ which itself is as unsafe as living with the community people. It affected the confidence and trust the community people had on the Tfd process WCI introduced to them

The security consultant contracted to prepare and instruct the vigilante groups could only use routine local weaponry for the training against the sophisticated arsenal of bandits. However, they were taught how to organise their lines and how to disarm bandits without or less casualty. Planned follow up programmes and activities for Maganda community have been placed on hold by the consortium of Women in Governance, the sponsor of Women Connect Initiative, due to the increased activities of bandits in Birnin Gwari.

## **Follow up and Successes**

The Birnin Gwari Vanguarders for Security and Good Governance promised to sustain the intervention by organising bi-monthly stakeholders’ review which Women Connect Initiative has participated in four different occasions.

The Maganda TFD workshop contributed in resisting the aggression of bandits into Birnin Gwari on Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2018, when Yan Sakai (the local vigilante group) resisted a fleet of bandits. Three bandits were killed. As they escaped into safety the corpses were carried away by their gangs. The local vigilante chased after them and captured the commander of the bandits. He was handed over to the military outpost at Kampanin Doka before he was rescued by the planned attack which took the lives of eleven soldiers. Maganda was then attacked on 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2018 but with fewer casualties. Three women were kidnapped as the men put up resistance which cut short the operation of bandits.

## **Conclusion**

Theatre for Development is a tool that is has been deployed in facilitating divergent development needs. Nevertheless, its potentials are yet to be fully tested in countering terrorism as there are little or no reported workshop experiences to show the veritable nature of Tfd in the times of siege – like the siege currently experienced in Birnin Gwari Local Government Area of Kaduna State. The Maganda Tfd workshop which took place from the month of May to November 2017 is a testament that Tfd requires new viable methods which can be used to communicate counter-terrorism or siege. Whilst the extant methods of homestead or nomadic approach is well known amongst development communicators and teachers of theatre for development, the depth, width and breadth of interventions that deploy any of the aforementioned approach is limited to the extent to which their gut-feeling allow them. This places Theatre for development on the spot.

Firstly, as a discipline that thrives on the release of emotions and secondly as an area that calls its audience to reason in order to change their own status quo. For this

study and by implication Tfd, the penumbra between catharsis and reason is packed with critical decision which both Tfd practitioners and community people themselves must make especially when confronted by siege. What does methodology, theory or practice say about ‘safety’ in a besieged community undergoing Tfd facilitation and at what point should reason or emotion takes over each other in Tfd process at points of attack.

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