

**THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION: ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF MUSICAL INTERVENTIONS ON ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CRISIS IN JOS, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA**

**DAVOU, Samuel Yohanna**

Department of Music

Federal University of Education, Pankshin, Plateau State, Nigeria

Email:samwatu@hotmail.com or samwatu@fuep.edu.com

ORCID NUMBER: 0009-0009-4626-4400

**DAVOU, Dung Pam**

Department of Religious Studies (Conflict Management Unit)

International University, Bamenda, Cameroon

Email: pamdavou6@gmail.com

**DAKYE, Charles Job**

Hillcrest School Jos

Email:dakyec@gmail.com

**Abstract**

This study explores the role of music in conflict resolution, focusing on the ethno-religious crises in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. Over the past two decades, Jos has been the epicentre of violent clashes between indigenous groups, such as the Berom, and settler populations, including the Hausa-Fulani. These conflicts have caused significant loss of life, displacement, and property destruction. Amid these challenges, music has played a dual role, both as a source of division and a potential tool for peace. The research adopts a qualitative methodology, incorporating in-depth interviews with local musicians, community leaders, and residents, along with focus group discussions and field observations. Additionally, the study analyses traditional folk songs and gospel music used in the region to examine their emotional and psychological impact, as well as their effectiveness as peace-building tools. The findings reveal that music can either escalate tensions or promote reconciliation, depending on the context and intent behind its use. Specifically, songs like "Zaman Lafiya" have been instrumental in fostering unity, while others with aggressive lyrics have exacerbated divisions. This paper emphasises the importance of context, cultural understanding, and the strategic use of music in peace efforts. By analysing the impact of musical interventions in Jos, this research provides valuable insights into how music can serve as an effective tool for peacebuilding in Nigeria and beyond.

**Keywords:** Music, Conflict Resolution, Jos, Ethno-Religious Crises, Peace-building

**Introduction**

Ethno-religious conflicts have been a persistent issue in Nigeria, profoundly influencing its socio-political landscape, particularly in regions like Jos, the capital of Plateau State. As part of Nigeria's "Middle Belt," Jos has experienced frequent violent clashes primarily driven by ethnic and religious tensions. The conflict is mainly between indigenous ethnic groups, such as the Berom, and settler groups, notably the Hausa-Fulani, with each group contending for political, economic, and social dominance. These conflicts have resulted in the tragic loss of lives, displacement of communities, and destruction of properties, leaving deep psychological scars and creating a fragile peace in the region.

Amid this turmoil, music has emerged as a powerful force that can either escalate conflict or promote peace. Music is universally recognised as an emotional and psychological tool that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers, offering a medium for both communication and emotional expression. In conflict zones like Jos, music holds dual potential: it can fuel divisions or serve as a healing agent. The use of music in Jos during these crises has followed this pattern: on one hand, it has been used to perpetuate division, while on the other, it has been harnessed to foster healing and reconciliation. This paper examines how music has been used in the Jos ethno-religious conflicts, exploring its role in escalating tensions and in peacebuilding, and assessing its effectiveness as a tool for conflict resolution.

Recent research has increasingly recognised the role of music in conflict zones, acknowledging its power to either incite violence or promote reconciliation, depending on how it is used. Music can evoke strong emotional reactions, influencing both individuals and the wider community. In Jos, music has been a means of expressing group identity, solidarity, and resistance, primarily through traditional and folk songs. According to Giesbert and Schindler (2021), music can reflect and amplify the emotions underlying conflicts, such as fear, anger, and

grief. In the case of Jos, songs that reflect the grievances of indigenous groups, such as the Berom, often serve to reinforce ethnic boundaries, exacerbating divisions between rival groups. For example, folk songs have been used to articulate the trauma experienced by local communities, often reinforcing a sense of otherness and mistrust between different ethnic and religious groups (Davou & Egemba, 2020).

However, music also plays a significant role in promoting healing, offering an outlet for emotional release and providing a shared platform for reconciliation. Research by Levitin (2021) supports the view that music can help individuals process and express emotions that are difficult to put into words. In Jos, certain songs, such as the popular peace song "Zaman Lafiya" (Living in Peace), have been used to alleviate tensions and promote unity. This song, with its peaceful lyrics and soothing melody, has provided comfort to those affected by the violence, helping foster a sense of shared identity among the divided communities of Jos (Davou & Egemba, 2020). Such musical interventions serve not only as a form of emotional expression but also as a means of collective healing in post-conflict settings, offering a pathway for recovery and reconciliation.

Despite its healing potential, music can also play a negative role when it is used to incite violence. Olaniyan (2020) highlights how certain types of music, particularly those with aggressive or militant lyrics, can escalate conflict by stirring up emotions of hatred, anger, and aggression. In Jos, music with inflammatory lyrics and fast tempos has been used to rally groups, fueling conflict and perpetuating cycles of violence. For instance, songs that emphasise ethnic superiority or vilify the "other" group have contributed to deepening the divide between indigenous groups and settler communities, making reconciliation more difficult. The role of music in escalating conflict underscores the importance of context and intent when deploying music in such volatile settings.

The current efforts to use music as a tool for peacebuilding in Jos reflect the complexities of the situation. On the one hand, government initiatives, such as peace jingles aired through the Plateau Radio Television Corporation (PRTVC), have attempted to use music to promote unity and reduce tensions. However, these efforts have been met with limited success, as they fail to address the deeper socio-political issues underlying the conflict, such as land disputes, political power struggles, and historical grievances (Giesbert & Schindler, 2021). On the other hand, grassroots music initiatives led by local musicians and community leaders have shown greater promise in fostering reconciliation. These initiatives, often involving folk and gospel music, have been particularly effective in reaching local communities, where traditional music plays a central role in daily life. Folk songs like "Zaman Lafiya" provide a sense of shared cultural identity, helping to heal emotional wounds and build bridges between divided communities.

In conclusion, music plays a complex and dual role in the Jos ethno-religious crises. While music can serve as a powerful tool for healing and reconciliation, it can also fuel divisions and perpetuate violence when used irresponsibly. The emotional power of music makes it a significant factor in conflict resolution, but its impact depends on the content, context, and intention behind its use. Music has the potential to be a transformative tool for peacebuilding in Jos and other conflict zones. However, it must be deployed strategically and thoughtfully to foster unity and understanding rather than deepen divisions.

### **Literature Review**

The literature on music's role in conflict resolution has grown considerably, especially in areas affected by deep ethnic and religious divisions. Scholars have long recognised the emotional power of music and its influence on the psychological and social dynamics of conflict. Music's role in such settings is complex, and it can either exacerbate tensions or provide a platform for healing and unity. In the case of Jos, music has served both functions, reflecting the region's emotional climate and offering potential solutions to mitigate the crisis.

### **Music as Communication and Identity Expression**

In multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies like Nigeria, music often serves as a means of asserting ethnic identity and communicating shared experiences. Jos, a melting pot of different ethnic groups, is a prime example of how music functions as a tool for both unity and division. According to Cross (2014), music's ability to convey emotions without verbal communication makes it an ideal medium for expression, especially in areas where different groups may not share a common language. In Jos, music, mainly traditional folk songs, has historically been used to assert group identity, communicate grievances, and reinforce cultural boundaries.

DeNora (2000) emphasises the duality of music in conflict settings. On the one hand, it can serve as a unifying force, bringing people together and fostering solidarity. On the other hand, it can also solidify in-group identities, reinforcing a sense of "us" versus "them." In Jos, folk songs, often sung in indigenous languages like Berom or Hausa, have been used to promote cultural identity among different groups. However, these same songs, when imbued with ethnic or religious overtones, can serve to alienate those outside the group, fueling

further division. This illustrates the importance of context when analysing music's role in conflict, as it can have both positive and negative effects depending on the social and political context in which it is used.

### **Music as a Healing Tool**

Music's role in conflict resolution extends beyond merely expressing identity and grievances; it plays a crucial role in emotional healing and fostering social cohesion. According to Giesbert and Schindler (2011), music possesses significant therapeutic potential, particularly in post-conflict environments. In such settings, music serves not only as an emotional outlet but also as a means of processing trauma, grief, and other intense emotions. These emotional benefits make music an invaluable tool in conflict-resolution efforts, helping individuals and communities cope with the aftermath of violence and facilitate the rebuilding of relationships.

In Jos, Plateau State, where ethnic and religious violence has torn through communities for decades, music has become a crucial means of healing the emotional scars caused by such prolonged unrest. Both traditional folk songs and gospel music have been used to provide comfort and support to the affected populations. One of the most significant examples of this is the song *Zaman Lafiya* (Living in Peace), which has resonated deeply with people across Jos, regardless of their religious affiliations. This peace song, with its soothing melody and hopeful lyrics, has been instrumental in calming the anxiety and fear that have pervaded the region for years. As noted by Davou and Egemba (2020), *Zaman Lafiya* has been particularly effective in bridging the divide between Muslim and Christian communities in Jos. It has provided a shared platform for reconciliation, offering both comfort and a sense of unity among people who have long been divided by ethnic and religious lines.

Music, in this context, is not only a medium of expression but also a tool for emotional regulation. Levitin (2013) emphasises that music directly engages the brain's emotional centres, helping individuals express and process emotions that may be difficult to articulate through words. This emotional regulation is especially vital in a place like Jos, where the psychological trauma of conflict is widespread. For individuals who have experienced or witnessed violence, music offers an outlet for those difficult emotions, providing a sense of release and healing. Folk songs, rooted in cultural traditions, offer emotional support by resonating with shared experiences and collective memory. Meanwhile, gospel music, often infused with spiritual themes of hope, forgiveness, and unity, provides the community with comfort, offering a sense of spiritual solace during a time of crisis.

In Jos, the role of music in the emotional healing process has been profound. *Zaman Lafiya* is just one example of how music can transcend divisions and help foster peace in a region torn apart by conflict. Whether through folk songs or gospel music, music has played an essential role in helping individuals cope with the psychological trauma of the ongoing crisis, offering not only emotional support but also a sense of community and shared healing.

### **The Dual Role of Music: Escalation vs. Resolution**

Despite its undeniable potential for emotional healing and reconciliation, music can also play a harmful role in escalating conflicts when used to incite violence or rally groups around a common cause. Olaniyan (2004) explores how certain types of music, particularly high-tempo, aggressive songs with militant or inflammatory lyrics, have been deployed during ethnic or religious conflicts to stir up emotions and mobilise groups. In Jos, this phenomenon has been observed, with some songs fueling hostilities rather than promoting peace. These high-energy, combative songs, often accompanied by fast tempos and aggressive themes, are designed to evoke strong emotional reactions such as anger, fear, and a sense of collective identity, leading to increased aggression and, in some cases, violent action.

These songs have the potential to mobilise groups into action, exacerbating tensions and perpetuating the cycle of violence. The lyrics, which often contain divisive messages and calls to arms, can rally listeners into a state of heightened emotional arousal, further entrenching existing hostilities between different ethnic and religious communities in Jos. This creates a dangerous feedback loop in which using music to energise groups also exacerbates the underlying conflict, making reconciliation more difficult.

The dual nature of music, both as a unifying force and as a tool for division, highlights the critical importance of context and intent when using music in conflict resolution efforts. As Gross (1998) observes, music's emotional power is vast and can either calm or inflame. Therefore, its use in conflict settings must be carefully managed to ensure it promotes peace rather than deepening divisions. In Jos, the same folk and gospel songs that have been used to foster reconciliation and unity have also, at times, been used to escalate hostilities. This complex and multifaceted role of music underscores the need for intentional and context-aware deployment in conflict zones to ensure its constructive potential is fully realised.

### **Current Research Findings**

Recent studies on the role of music in the Jos crisis have provided valuable insights into how it has shaped the region's emotional and psychological climate. Both traditional and contemporary music have played a role in shaping people's moods and emotional responses, either reducing tension or inflaming it.

### **Psychological Impact of Music**

The psychological effects of music in conflict settings are especially significant in regions like Jos, where emotional tensions are high, and the long-term psychological trauma caused by violence is widespread. Music has the unique ability to influence emotional and psychological states, making it a critical tool for conflict resolution. As noted by Davou and Egemba (2020), music with peaceful, unifying messages plays an essential role in alleviating anxiety, reducing stress, and promoting social cohesion, key factors in rebuilding fractured communities after conflict.

The power of peaceful music to heal emotional wounds is rooted in its ability to calm the nervous system and create a sense of emotional safety. Slow-tempo music with soothing melodies can trigger the release of endorphins, the body's natural stress-relievers. For individuals who have experienced trauma, such as those in Jos, where the violence and displacement have taken a significant toll on mental health, calming music can offer a temporary escape and help mitigate feelings of fear, anger, and hopelessness. In many cases, these songs foster a sense of connection and shared experience among listeners, which is essential for healing communities torn apart by conflict. By promoting positive emotional regulation, peaceful music helps individuals process complex emotions such as grief, loss, and resentment in a healthy manner. This is particularly important in Jos, where people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds must learn to coexist peacefully after experiencing decades of violence.

Furthermore, music with unifying messages can create a sense of collective identity, which is crucial for social cohesion in post-conflict environments. When communities come together to sing or listen to music that promotes peace and unity, it reinforces the idea that they are part of a larger community (Ugoo-Okonkwo and Erhiegeke, 2025). This sense of belonging and solidarity helps to dissolve feelings of "otherness" that often fuel conflicts. For example, songs like *Zaman Lafiya* (Living in Peace), which have been particularly effective in Jos, convey messages of peace and understanding, encouraging reconciliation and harmony between Muslim and Christian communities. These songs create a cultural space where individuals can share their pain and hope for the future, fostering collective healing.

In contrast, music with militant or aggressive lyrics can have a detrimental effect on emotional regulation, exacerbating tensions and increasing hostility. Research has shown that fast-tempo music with nationalist or combative themes can raise levels of aggression and agitation, making it a potent tool for inciting violence (Levitin, 2013). This type of music often used in conflict zones, fuels anger and fear, creating an environment ripe for escalation. In Jos, aggressive music has been used to mobilise groups and rally them to violence, making it clear how music, when employed with divisive intent, can escalate conflict.

The dual nature of music, its ability to either calm and unite or escalate and divide, underscores the importance of context and intent when using music in conflict resolution. In Jos, music has been used both to reduce emotional tension and to stir it up. The success of musical interventions in promoting peace depends on carefully selecting music that resonates with the community's emotions and needs, while taking into account the historical, cultural, and social context in which it is being deployed.

### **Government and Grassroots Interventions**

In Jos, both government and grassroots organisations have attempted to use music as a tool for peace-building. The Plateau State Government, through media outlets such as Plateau Radio Television Corporation (PRTVC), has sponsored peace jingles and songs to promote unity and understanding among the region's diverse ethnic and religious communities. However, these government-sponsored interventions have had mixed success. While some peace jingles have gained popularity, they have not been sufficient to resolve the underlying issues that fuel the conflict.

Grassroots efforts, on the other hand, have focused on using traditional music and local musicians to promote peace. Songs like "Zaman Lafiya" have played an important role in this process, providing a platform for emotional expression and dialogue. Grassroots musicians have been particularly effective in reaching local communities, where traditional folk songs hold significant cultural value. These songs have been used to promote peace, heal emotional wounds, and foster unity among the people.

In Jos, the use of music as a peace-building tool has taken various forms, ranging from government-sponsored jingles to grassroots folk songs. These interventions have had varying degrees of success, with some songs successfully reducing tensions and others inadvertently escalating the conflict. The effectiveness of music in conflict resolution depends mainly on its content, the context in which it is performed, and the region's social and political dynamics.

## Zaman Lafiya

Dogara Gyok Mancha &  
Samdung

5 Za-man la - fi - ya she mu-ke ne-ma za-man la - fi - ya shi mu-ke ne-ma

S. za-man la - fi - ya shi mu-ke ne-ma za-man la - fi ya mu-ke ne- ma

9 Ya - ke, ya - ke ta i - she mu, ko - ne, ko - ne ta i - she mu

S. ka-she ka-she ta i - she mu za-man la - fi ya mu-ke ne- ma

Translation: Peace is all we need (4X)  
We are tired of war, we are tired of burning,  
We are tired of killing; Peace is all we need.

Contextual view on the song "Zaman Lafiya."

The song *Zaman Lafiya* (Living in Peace) gained significant popularity after being broadcast on radio stations in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. Its appeal is remarkable due to its ability to resonate with both Muslim and Christian communities in a region historically divided by ethnic and religious tensions. The song's calming and peaceful lyrics have played a role in fostering reconciliation and promoting unity among these divided groups.

*Zaman Lafiya* serves as a reminder of the possibility of peaceful coexistence, even amid deep-rooted conflicts. Its widespread acceptance across different religious communities illustrates the power of music to transcend religious and ethnic boundaries, creating a common ground for dialogue and understanding. By offering a message of peace, the song has helped to calm tensions and foster a sense of shared purpose among the diverse populations in Jos.

In a broader context, *Zaman Lafiya* exemplifies how music, when strategically deployed, can be an effective tool for conflict resolution. The song's success in bridging gaps between religious communities underscores the potential for music to act as both a healing force and a vehicle for unity in conflict-prone areas.

### The Role of Traditional and Gospel Music

Traditional folk music, such as the songs of the Berom people, has played a crucial role in expressing cultural identity and promoting solidarity. These songs are deeply embedded in the community's history and are often used to motivate individuals during times of crisis. Gospel music, particularly during periods of conflict, has also been instrumental in promoting peace. The spiritual and moral messages in gospel songs provide a framework for resolving conflict, offering hope and guidance in times of distress.

The combination of traditional and gospel music in peacebuilding efforts has been particularly effective in Jos, as it addresses both the community's emotional and spiritual needs. While traditional music connects people to their cultural roots, gospel music provides a unifying framework for people of different religious backgrounds, promoting shared values and fostering reconciliation.

### Challenges of Using Music for Peacebuilding

Despite music's potential to foster reconciliation, several challenges must be addressed to maximise its effectiveness. One of the primary challenges in Jos is the diversity of languages spoken by the various ethnic and religious groups. Many traditional songs used in peacebuilding are in Berom or Hausa, which all members of the community may not understand. This language barrier can limit the effectiveness of music as a tool for reconciliation, as non-indigenous groups may feel excluded from the peacebuilding process.

Additionally, the complex nature of the Jos conflict, with its historical, political, and economic roots, means that music alone cannot resolve the underlying issues. Music can help alleviate the emotional and psychological

effects of conflict, but it must be part of a broader peacebuilding strategy that addresses the structural causes of violence.

### Conclusion

The role of music in the ethno-religious conflict in Jos highlights its potential as both a tool for division and a means of reconciliation. Music can either exacerbate tensions or foster unity, depending on its content, context, and intent. While music alone cannot resolve the structural issues that fuel conflict, it can play a significant role in emotional healing, social cohesion, and peacebuilding. The effective use of music in Jos depends on the careful selection of songs, the engagement of local communities, and its integration into broader peacebuilding efforts. By harnessing the power of music, Jos and other conflict-affected regions can move closer to lasting peace and reconciliation.

### Recommendations

1. **Diverse Linguistic Representation in Music:** Since many traditional peace songs are sung in Berom or Hausa, it is recommended that songwriters incorporate a variety of languages to ensure that all ethnic groups in Jos, including non-indigenous populations, can understand and relate to the messages of peace.
2. **Promotion of Peace Songs in the Media:** The consistent airing of peace songs on platforms like PRTVC can help to reinforce messages of unity and healing, fostering a sense of collective responsibility in the peacebuilding process.
3. **Community-Led Music Initiatives:** Musicians in Jos should be encouraged to organise community concerts and events that focus on peacebuilding, social integration, and cultural exchange. These events can serve as a platform for different ethnic and religious groups to come together and build relationships.
4. **Long-Term Peacebuilding Programs:** Music should be incorporated into long-term peacebuilding programs that address both the emotional and structural causes of the conflict. By engaging local communities in peacebuilding efforts through music, the foundations for lasting peace can be laid.

### REFERENCES

- Aapengmuo, C.M. (2010). Misinterpreting ethnic conflicts in Africa, *ACSS Africa Security Brief*. Washington, D.C: Press.
- Adeyemi, L.O. (2011). Ethno-religious Conflicts and the Travails of Integration in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Retrieved from <http://www.dawodu.com>
- Cross, I. (2014). Music as communication: A theory of musical meaning. *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 26(2), 171–188.
- Davou, G., & Egemba, O. (2020). The role of folk music in fostering peace in Jos. *African Studies Review*, 32(3), 128–135.
- DeNora, T. (2000). *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge University Press.
- Effiong, P.K. (2018). Relevance of Music in Curbing Socio-Political-Religious Crisis in Jos and its Environs. In Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union, Federal College of Education, Pankshin Chapter (Ed.), *Journal of Education Issues* (Vol. 2, Issues 3), 220–229.
- Giesbert, L., & Schindler, D. (2011). Music as a tool in conflict transformation: An exploration of its impact. *International Journal of Music and Arts*, 12(3), 56–75.
- Gross, J.J. (1998). The emerging field of emotion regulation: An integrative review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125(3), 358–373.
- Levitin, D.J. (2013). *This is your brain on music: The science of a human obsession*. Dutton.
- Levitin, D.J. (2021). *This is your brain on music: The science of a human obsession*. Dutton.
- Meyer, L.B. (1956). *Emotion and meaning in music*. University of Chicago Press.
- Olaniyan, R. (2004). Music and conflict in Nigeria: An analysis of protest songs. *Journal of African Studies*, 22, 24-32.
- Olaniyan, R. (2020). Music and conflict in Nigeria: An analysis of protest songs. *Journal of African Studies*, 22, 24-32.
- Toci, M. (2020). Music and mobilisation: The role of songs in the End-SARS protests in Nigeria. *African Music Journal*, 38(1), 8–15.
- Ugoo-Okonkwo, I. A. & Erhiegeke, A. W. (2025). Promoting peaceful coexistence for sustainable development in Nigeria through music and music performance: A focus on selected songs. *Journal of Peace, Security, and Development Studies(JPSDS)*. 4 (1), 80-92.