

## **Performing Resilience and Artistic Agency: Music, Dance, and Embodied Resistance Among Benue's Yelewata Idps**

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### **Abstract**

Conflict is a pervasive challenge in societies worldwide, and artistic expression, through music, dance, theatre, and visual arts, plays a crucial role in resilience and resistance. In the aftermath of the devastating attack on Yelewata community in Benue State, which resulted in over 200 fatalities, mass injuries, and forced displacement, survivors at the Makurdi International Market IDP camp turned to music and dance as an immediate coping mechanism. This study examines how artistic expression became a survival strategy for trauma recovery and communal resilience. The research explores the therapeutic and sociocultural roles of music and dance among Yelewata's displaced population, focusing on how these practices alleviate emotional distress, foster solidarity, and preserve identity in conditions of precarity. Employing an ethnographic approach, data was collected through participant observation, interviews with some IDPs, (young and old) and camp support personnel, and analysis of video recordings of camp performances. The study revealed that artistic expression emerged organically within 48 hours of the attack, serving as a critical emotional outlet. Drumming, communal singing, and dance enabled survivors to externalize grief, reclaim agency, and resist erasure. Organized performances by Benue artists and other performance groups further institutionalized these practices, reinforcing their role in trauma mitigation. Music and dance functioned as both rapid recourse and sustained resistance for Yelewata's IDPs, underscoring the centrality of cultural expression in survival strategies. The study advocates for the intentional integration of arts-based interventions in humanitarian responses to displacement crises.

**Keywords:** Displacement; Trauma; Performance; Conflict; & Benue State.