

# CONFLICT RESOLUTION FROM THE SUBALTERN: NIGERIAN PLAYWRIGHTS AND THE RE-VISIONING OF JUSTICE IN POSTCOLONIAL NIGERIA

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## Abstract

Conflict resolution and peace building in contemporary Nigeria are largely centred on the state and its agencies to the exclusion of the ordinary people. In many dialogues on peace, the marginalisation of the subalterns is a recurring practice. This study, however, engages how Esiaba Irobi (2011) and Ojo Rasaki-Bakare (2004) deploy the element of character in *Hangmen Also Die* and *Drums of War* respectively to propose alternative conflict resolution strategies that empower the common people to participate in peace dialogues and actions. Using the Zulu philosophy of *Ubuntu* and Gayatri Spivak's idea of subaltern as the theoretical framework, the study contends that Irobi and Bakare interrogate and destabilise the dominant practice that often privileges the ruling elite as the final arbiter in communal dispute adjudications. The two Nigerian playwrights show that, apart from the exclusion of the ordinary people from their immediate communal/cultural matters, they are often misrepresented in resource distribution by state actors who often claim to speak and act on their behalf. Thus, Irobi and Bakare repudiate a unicentric proxy conflict resolution model that often undermines the common people's voices. As depicted in the two plays, inclusive representations and equitable wealth distribution, among other solutions, are the prerequisites for effective conflict resolution and positive peace building in the post colony. In its conclusion, the study submits that the insights that the two Nigerian playwrights offer on conflict resolution call for broad-based governance and restorative justice as means of resolving the recurring socio-political discontents in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Conflict Resolution, Justice, Nigerian Playwrights, Postcolonial Nigeria, Subalternity

## Introduction

The myriad of violent conflicts in many countries in contemporary Africa, including Nigeria, call for dynamic and multidisciplinary approaches to their genuine resolutions. However, various strategies often adopted to forestall conflicts or resolve them have remained predominately ensconced in colonial and neo-colonial state apparatuses. Indeed, since the colonial period to the eras of independence and post-independence, there has been the recurring exclusion of the common people from the discourse of dispute adjudication. Even when the common people are enlisted in peace dialogue, it is either they are manipulated to concede to hegemonic voices or are simply conditioned to maintain (non-consensual) silence. Thus, the essentially state-centred dispute resolution model that is often adopted in addressing various crises in postcolonial Africa can be linked to the authoritarian nature of African politics. Underscoring this point, Adeoti (2015) explains:

Over the years, politics in Africa is one intriguing arena where few people with the razor blade of power have been shaving the heads of the majority in their absence. Whether as monarchs, colonial administrators, their civilian successors or military rulers (...), they appropriate the citizens' right to decide. They decide for them what they think is right and act to implement such decisions, regardless of what the generality of the people feel. (p.5)

In a similar vein, Ake (1996) remarks that, just like the colonial masters, the postcolonial African ruling class, in order to protect their interests, often resort to using coercion to deal with dissenting voices and to impose conformity. He further states:

State power remained essentially the same: immense, arbitrary, often violent, always threatening. Except for a few countries such as Botswana, politics remained a zero-sum game; power was sought by all means and maintained by all means. Colonial rule left most of Africa a legacy of intense and lawless political competition amidst an ideological void and a rising tide of disenchantment with the expectation of a better life. (Ake, 1996, p.6)

In the particular case of Nigeria, the arbitrary and absolutist character of the Nigerian state has continued to impact on the polity in a manner that hinders genuine dispute adjudication, national cohesion, institutionalisation of justice and peace building. Although the Nigerian state, like many countries in Africa, makes “laws and rules profusely and propagates values” (Ake, 1996, p.3), it is continually hobbled by many unresolved conflicts. Thus, since its attainment of independence on October 1st, 1960, Nigeria has been oscillating in a giddy motion of violent conflicts. The Western Region crisis of 1962; the military coup and counter-coup of 15th January and 29th July, 1966, respectively; the pogrom of 1966 in the northern parts of Nigeria; the Nigerian-Biafra Civil War (1967-1970); the annulment of presidential election results of June 12th, 1993, and its attendant unrest; the Niger Delta militancy and the terrorism occasioned by sectarian fundamentalism in northern Nigeria are instances of violent conflicts that constitute threats to the peaceful coexistence of Nigerians. In spite of this cycle of conflicts and the perennial crises of legitimacy that characterise the Nigerian state, the popular assumption that peace building and justice can be exclusively achieved by a direct command method continues to dominate the tone and tenor of peace discourse. Akinwale (2010) notes that

the Nigerian government’s major official strategies for managing violent conflict include state creation and the use of the Nigerian mobile police, the Nigerian military, curfew, propaganda, judicial panel, compensations and punishment. These official strategies have, however, not yielded adequate results since the 1960s. (p. 131)

This study discusses how two Nigerian playwrights, Irobi and Bakare, deploy the element of character in *Hangmen Also Die* (2011) and *Drums of War* (2004) respectively to deconstruct the state-centred idea of justice and conflict resolution model. It demonstrates that the two playwrights, through their works, canvass alternative dispute resolution strategies that allow the ordinary people to actively participate in

conflict resolution, peace dialogues and actions. The study is premised on the notion that Nigerian drama, as a protean art, is capable of providing alternative insights through which the issues of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, peace building and justice can be critically addressed.

Indeed, conflict is the soul of drama. Jeyifo (1985) notes that “drama deals at a highly concentrated, more intense level with contradictions of social existence” (p.7). He asserts further that “drama does not merely subsume conflicts as its organising structural motifs ; beyond this, drama also axiomatically attempts a resolution of sorts, a provisional synthesis in the conflicting pulls within its constitutive actions, thereby approaching the limit of the dialectical image potentially realizable in art” (p.7). According to Diamond (1989), “the literature of a society tells us much about its culture, social structure and even politics” (p.435). Adebani (2014) also remarks: “in their fiction, drama, poetry and essays, they (African writers, including Nigerian playwrights) have produced, and continue to produce, works which constitute an essential fabric of social thought and social theorising in and beyond Africa” (p. 409). The views of Jeyifo, Diamond and Adebani suggest that Nigerian (African) drama and other genres of literature constitute important epistemological sources that can yield deeper perspectives into various forms of conflicts challenging Nigeria’s existence.

As used in this study, conflict resolution implies a variety of pragmatic strategies used to bring an end to conflicts by permanently resolving/solving the core issues that often engender conflicts in a community. ‘Conflict resolution from the subalterns,’ in the context of this study, implies the genuine inclusion of ordinary people in the processes of resolving all fundamental issues that usually provoke conflicts in a community. Re-visioning of justice implies the shifting of the notion and practice of justice from a retributive system to a restorative method in order to ensure genuine peace building. Peace building signifies a situation where all contending parties are willing and ready to sheathe their swords in order to live in permanent peace.

What are the links between economic injustice, leadership corruption and violent conflicts? Why have the state-centred models of conflict resolution succeeded so little in resolving disputes among the contending forces in contemporary Nigeria? How would communitarian principles, in both wealth distribution and dispute resolution, mitigate violent conflict and promote peaceful coexistence among Nigerians? While recognising that various scholars in social science and law can indisputably provide, and have continued to offer, useful rational answers to the foregoing questions, this study contends that the discourse of conflict resolution and peace building is not limited to the experts in these fields. Creative artists, through their works, dissect the issues of conflict and peace in ways that will reveal how a people can “straighten the crooked ribs of (their) a society” (Adeoti, 2015, p. 3). Through close reading of Irobi’s *Hangmen Also Die* (2011) and Bakare’s *Drums of War* (2004), the study offers answers to the foregoing questions.

### **Theoretical Insights**

The study deploys the Zulu philosophy of *Ubuntu* as an interpretative paradigm. *Ubuntu* is an indigenous African philosophy which implies that a person exists and survives through the existence and survival of the other person. The *Ubuntu* philosophy is “an alternative to individualistic and utilitarian philosophies that tend to dominate in the West. Its sense, however, is perhaps best conveyed by the Nguni expression ‘*umuntungumuntungabantu*’, which means ‘a person is a person through other people’ ” (*The Sage Encyclopaedia of Action Research*, 2014, p.799). As a social philosophy that is grounded in “the principles of care and community, harmony and hospitality, respect, responsiveness” and “the fundamental interconnectedness of human existence” (p.799), *Ubuntu* is central to mutual understanding, love and peaceful coexistence among human beings. Gianan (2011) alludes to this point that

the African word *Ubuntu* literally means humanity to others. This African meaning is valuable in mainstream philosophical thinking, for it entails the comprehension of the human individual or the human person as an existential and simultaneously ethical being. (p.63)

Thus, *Ubuntu* is a philosophy of peace and restorative justice because it promotes harmonious, communal relationships among people by de-emphasising the idea of superiority of one tribe, religion, creed or race over others. It is, perhaps, for this reason that “Archbishop Desmond Tutu has called *Ubuntu* ‘the gift that Africa will give the world’ and, along with others, has called for its wider application well beyond Africa” (*The Sage Encyclopaedia of Action Research*, 2014, p.799).

The notion of *Ubuntu* is rooted in the indigenous communitarian/collectivist and inter-subjectivist character of the African world-view. Agulanna (2010) emphasises this point that

Africans believe that it is only in the community where the life of the individual acquires true meaning. In other words, it is not in living as an isolated being but in mutually interacting with other members of the community that the individual can ever hope to realize his social aspirations in life. (p. 228)

The *Ubuntu* philosophy rests on three major assumptions, which are interdependence, inclusivity and inter-subjectivity (*The Sage Encyclopaedia of Action Research*, 2014, p. 800). In terms of interdependence, *Ubuntu* reiterates mutual relation among human beings. It insists that the existence and well-being of a person depends on the existence and well-being of others. Rather than being an isolated individual, every person is an integral part of the whole, which is why *Ubuntu* emphasises the maxim “a person is a person through other persons”. Inclusivity, as embedded in *Ubuntu*, means cooperation, collaboration and communal-spirit. Therefore, *Ubuntu* promotes team

spirit, mutual respect and communal support and dignity for one another, even in the period of crises. To this end, *Ubuntu* asserts that every person is an important element of the community and, as such, should be treated with dignity and accorded due support. The inter-subjective notion of *Ubuntu* means the healthy relationship between the individual and the community. In spite of its emphasis on the collective, *Ubuntu* does not undermine an individual's well-being and dignity. It encourages a balanced interconnection between the human person and the community.

Through the examination of Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* (2011) and Bakare's *Drums of War* (2004), the study shows that the prevalent injustice, hostility and fractured peace in the post colony are due to a shared negation of, and violence against, the indigenous humanistic philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which emphasises interdependence, inclusivity and inter-subjectivity as ethical strategies for restorative justice, genuine peace building and collective survival. Irobi and Bakare consider as flawed a direct command method (univocal state-centred strategy engendered by neoliberal capitalism) of resource distribution, justice dispensation and dispute adjudication. While repudiating the survival-of the fittest principle that characterises the Nigerian State, the playwrights advocate infusion of the *Ubuntu* philosophy in wealth distribution, justice administration and dispute adjudication in order to institute genuine peace in the polity.

Another theoretical insight that is relevant to this study is Gayatri Spivak's idea of subalternity. The term 'subaltern' was originally used and popularised by the Italian political philosopher, Antonio Gramsci. In the Gramscian perspective, a subaltern is a junior military officer who is deprived of a voice to speak for himself/herself. Subaltern can also be used as a synonym for the downtrodden or working class people. Subalternity is a location of voicelessness, not because the subaltern is unwilling to speak, but because his/her voice is always mediated by the dominant systems of representation which condition him/her to the state of silence.

In interrogating the Western intellectuals' narratives of gender, identity and history, Spivak (1988) explains that the radical criticism of Western intellectuals is meant to protect the interest of the Western powers even though 'this concealed Subject pretends it has "no geopolitical determinations' "' (Spivak, 1988, pp. 271-272). She also asserts that "this subject, curiously sewn together into a transparency by denegations, belongs to the exploiters' side of the international division of labour. It is impossible for contemporary French intellectuals to imagine the kind of power and desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other of Europe" (Spivak, 1988, p. 280). Challenging the writings of Western theorists such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, Spivak contends that these Western intellectuals fail to abide by their intellectual dispositions which make them blind to the role of ideology in reproducing oppressive and hegemonic social relations of production between the West and the rest of the world. She interrogates their deployment of homogeneous/universalist terms to represent the subalterns.

Spivak notes further that the responsibility Western thinkers assume in representing the subaltern is meant to only (re)present the images of the subaltern they construct for themselves. Thus, the Western scholars' idea of investigating heterogeneous cultures/people with a Universalist template is mainly to advance their socio-economic and political interests. Similarly, Spivak interrogates the works of local (Indian) intellectuals – Subaltern Studies Collective – that study the colonised subjects. She states that "certain varieties of the Indian elite are at best native informants for first world intellectuals interested in the voice of the other" (p.284). Just like the Western intellectuals, the members of the Subaltern Studies Collective undermine the heterogeneity of the subaltern when they attempt to describe the subaltern consciousness in monolithic terms. Spivak asserts that the subaltern (that is, 'women') are lacking in a voice in which to articulate themselves or their identity inasmuch as they always remain the subjects of others' representations. Beyond the idea of women, subaltern, in this study, is used to signify every voiceless individual, whether male or female.



Spivak's idea of subaltern/ity is relevant to conflict resolution, social justice and peace building in postcolonial Nigeria. In Nigeria, apart from the fact that the subalterns are often excluded from wealth distribution, they are also usually misrepresented by the ruling hegemonies that always claim to represent them during dispute resolution and peace dialogue. In addition, the gruesome experiences of military coups, the Nigerian-Biafra Civil War, the Niger-Delta oil crises and other violent crises in Nigeria have shown that the subalterns are always the direct victims of the recurring intra-class wars by the Nigerian ruling class. Thus, the subalterns remain perpetually victimised people who are conditioned to remain in silence. Nonetheless, Irobi and Bakare, in their respective plays, empower the subaltern to speak for themselves in ways that challenge the hegemony on the issues of resource distribution, conflict resolution and peace building in Nigeria. Advocating as an alternative peace building model of 'conflict resolution from below', the two playwrights support mutual interdependence and equitable wealth distribution as the prerequisite for the enthronement of peace in the country. This is evident in our analysis of the two plays.

### **Conflict Resolution, Subalternity and Re-visioning Justice in Contemporary Nigeria: A Postcolonial Reading of Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* and Bakare's *Drums of War***

Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* (2011) is set in Izon State in the Niger Delta region. The temporal setting is the post-independence era during a military regime. In the play, Chief Isokipiri Erekosima, the Commissioner for Local Government, Rural Development and Chieftaincy Affairs, in a conspiratorial alliance with his Councillors and Local Government Chairmen, embezzles the three million naira compensation fund given by the Federal Government to the citizens of Izon State for the oil spillage which has destroyed their environment. While university graduates such as Tarila, Waritimi, Atiemie, Labomie, Tekena, Konji, Amakarama and Fubara live in poverty owing to unemployment, Isokipiri Erekosima uses the people's fund to purchase

a chieftaincy title (the Amatameso 1 of Kalabari), build himself a beautiful palace and organise an elaborate coronation ceremony. Disillusioned, the unemployed graduates, constituting themselves into a Suicide Squad, not only engage in robbery to make ends meet, they also kill Isokipiri Erekosima whom they consider responsible for their plight.

As evident from the play's synopsis, Irobi shows that the misrepresentation and outright marginalisation of the ordinary people from wealth distribution by the ruling class provoke incessant conflicts in the Niger-Delta region. The selfish and predatory attitudes of members of the ruling elite, represented by Chief Isokipiri Erekosima, Councillors and Local Government Chairmen, in Izon State serve to undermine the interest of the subaltern in wealth distribution. Isokipiri Erekosima's embezzlement of the people's fund and the sharing of same between himself and other government officials in Izon State negate the communistic ethos of *Ubuntu* which promotes mutual interdependence, inclusivity and collective happiness and survival. Thus, the denial of the subaltern's voice, especially on resource allocation and distribution, and the anti-*Ubuntu* posture of the ruling elite in Izon State continue to induce violent conflicts in the region and the country in general. Contrary to the individualistic philosophy of Erekosima and his cohorts, the ruling elite and the ordinary people need each other for collective survival and peace.

*Hangmen Also Die* (2011) also depicts the violence and the counter-violence that are recurrent in the oil region. The unemployed youths (Tarila, Waritimi, Atiemie, Labomie, Tekena, Konji, Amakarama and Fubara) who are also the members of the Suicide Squad resort to acts of jungle justice as means of survival as well as registering their animosity against their perceived oppressors. For instance, they engage in armed robbery. They also murder Isokipiri Erekosima for embezzling the people's compensation fund. The ruling class, represented by the Governor of Izon State, Colonel S.T. Wahab, and Justice Amakiri of the Port Harcourt High Court, also use a retributive method to pursue their individual and class interests. For

killing Isokipiri Erekosima, the violent youths are not only sentenced to death by hanging by Justice Amakiri, their death warrant is hastily signed by the Governor of Izon State, Colonel S.T. Wahab, without giving them an opportunity to appeal Justice Amakiri's judgement. Indeed, the death sentence handed down to the unemployed youths and the hanging yard of a Nigerian prison represent the absolutist and the authoritarian character of the Nigerian State.

However, the play reveals that neither the youths' deployment of jungle justice nor the ruling class' use of retributive justice is capable of resolving the violent conflicts in the Niger-Delta region and Nigeria in general. Apart from negating restorative justice (a system which enables the victim to meet with the offender in order to arrive at a genuine reconciliation), the violent methods used by the conflicting groups cannot lead to peace building. The two violent methods are based on the survival-of the fittest principles which can neither guarantee collective, beneficial justice nor lead to peace.

Irobi gives agency to the ordinary people to speak for themselves on how the crises in the Niger Delta region can be better resolved. For example, Yekinni, a poor prison worker who had hitherto been manipulated by the ruling class to do their bidding, becomes conscious and repudiates the oppressive system. Contrary to the expectation of his bosses in the prison, Yekinni refuses to hang the unemployed youths. He notes that the unemployed youth's cruel behaviour is induced by the state violence and its operators. This violence manifests itself in leadership betrayal, greed, egoism, embezzlement of public fund, nepotism and other forms of abuse of power that characterise Izon State and the country in general. Thus, Yekinni calls for a review of Justice Amakiri's death sentence passed on the youths.

Apart from being a subaltern, Yekinni is also a believer in, and propagator of, the *Ubuntu* philosophy. Despite the fact that he works for the state, he believes that his survival depends on the survival of the condemned youths. Just like the youths, he is a victim of the structural violence often promoted by the state and its ruling class. This is evident in his questions to Prison Doctor: "Why hasn't the government

protected me from poverty all these years? Why has it not promoted me from Hangmen to Chief Warden so that I can have an office with a table and a fan...?" (Irobi, 2011, p.27). Yekinni also interrogates Prison Doctor for using his medical knowledge to promote violence. He, subsequently, disengages himself from prison service and returns to the sea to take up his former profession of fishing. Yekinni's refusal to hang the youths, his condemnation of an oppressive socioeconomic system that forces the youths to violence and his eventual disengagement from prison service are all symbolic acts which call for inclusive representations, equitable distribution of wealth, accountable leadership, mutual inter-dependence, communal spirit and restorative justice as alternative means of resolving conflicts in the Niger Delta region and in Nigeria in general.

Tamara and Ibiaye are also subalterns who are given voices to provide alternative perspectives. Although Tamara, a poor widow, condemns Isokipiri Erekosima's corrupt act and invites the youths – the members of Suicide Squad – to help the community retrieve the money from him, she does not support the murder of Isokipiri Erekosima by the youths. For example, when Erekosima confesses to embezzling and frittering away the compensation fund, she persuades the youths not to kill him. She appeals to them thus: "Please untie him. He has already squandered all the money. There is nothing we can get back from him. Not even a kobo! God will judge him" (Irobi, 2011, p. 118). In another instance, she declares: "Please, young men, you cannot take his life. You cannot take human life" (Irobi, 2011, p.120). Tamara's invocation of God is a rhetorical strategy to dissuade the disgruntled youths from killing Isokipiri Erekosima. She does not believe that Erekosima's murder by the youths can end Erekosima's corruption and the people's suffering. Similarly, her insistence that the youths cannot kill Erekosima because of material wealth shows that she values Erekosima's life as she values hers. Her statements validate the communal spirit of the *Ubuntu* philosophy. They show that even offenders cannot be denied their humanity. Both the offenders and the victims are part and parcel of the community. Vindictive methods of

inflicting pains, including torture and murder, on the offenders cannot lead to genuine conflict resolution and peace building. Thus, despite their claim to victimhood, the disgruntled youths are also guilty of promoting violence by committing murder and armed robbery.

By enumerating the incalculable destruction that the activities of the multi-national oil companies in the Niger Delta often inflict on the environment and the ordinary people in the region, Ibiaye, an old blind man, reveals that no amount of compensation fund by the multinational oil companies and the Federal Government could remedy the effects of the environmental violence on the region. For instance, Ibiaye, an erstwhile fisherman, discloses that he lost his farmland and fishing profession to oil spillage and gas flaring. In addition to losing his eyes when his boat capsized in a sea poisoned by crude oil, his two sons were also killed while working for the multinational oil companies in the region. Ibiaye's accounts call for sincere, concerted efforts among all the stakeholders in order to prevent environmental degradation in the region. Similarly, even distribution of resources and provision of social amenities including well-equipped and functional hospitals to the people are other ways of mitigating conflicts in the region. That Ibiaye, after the boat mishap, eventually loses his eyes because his village in the creeks lacks a medical facility shows the necessity for providing social amenities in every part of the region.

Furthermore, Irobi shows that Nigerian academics and political elites' blind recuperation of Western socio-economic and political thoughts and the teaching of same in Nigerian (African) universities and the larger society undermine communal harmony and genuine peace building. Contrary to the ethos of communal/collective survival espoused by the *Ubuntu* philosophy, Erekosima believes in using the Machiavellian principle to achieve his personal goals. Because Erekosima believes that politics is an art of personal survival, rather than service to the community, he valorises violence and other unwholesome methods of acquiring wealth and political power. Similarly, Dr Ahitophel Ogbansiegbe, a university don, promotes

thuggery and terrorism. Through the pretensions to Marxism, he exploits the youths' ignorance and initiates them into violence in order to hit back at his political opponents who allegedly rig him out of the governorship election. However, both Erekosima and Ogbansiegbe are eventually consumed by the violent ideology they practise. Erekosima and Ogbansiegbe's violent deaths call for non-violent, indigenous socio-political philosophies such as *Ubuntu* and *Omoluabi* as alternative paradigms of dispute adjudication and peace building.

Just like *Hangmen Also Die* (2011), Bakare's *Drums of War* (2004) portrays the negative consequences of using violent methods to impose social order on the polity. Divided into four movements and a prologue, *Drums of War* is set in Abakpa community. In the play, the youths and women of Abakpa do not support King Onome's hostility against Ibuji community. However, King Onome's refusal to heed the people's entreaty boomerangs on him and his entire family as his only son, Arighoye, is killed at the war front. Shattered by Arighoye's death, Arighoye's mother, Queen Otubu, and King Onome commit suicide. The play shows that persistent hostilities, violence and wars in the polity are caused by members of the ruling class in order to boost their economic and political interests.

In *Drums of War*, Bakare rejects the tyrannical and absolutist character of postcolonial African rulers. This is underscored through King Onome's character. In order to dominate and expropriate Ibuji, its people and resources, King Onome resorts to warfare. Bakare depicts King Onome as a megalomaniac ruler who believes that he is naturally superior to every other human being. This is one reason he desires to fight "Ibuji people to submission" (Bakare, 2004, p. 25). For example, when Chief Beleku canvasses an end to the war, King Onome, through his aides, gets him arrested and sends him to the gallows. Similarly, Akogun's appeal to King Onome that he should call off the war against Ibuji land falls on deaf ears. In frustration, Akogun tenders his resignation. However, King Onome accepts his resignation, strips him of his titles and banishes him from Abakpa community. To King

Onome, his survival as a maximum ruler depends on the destruction of Ibuji community and its people:

**Akogun:** But why must we continue instigating our people against our neighbours? Why must leaders always use their followers as cannon fodder for their own ambitions?

**King:** Why? Let me tell you. We must guarantee our security by annihilating all our enemies. Because, in this world, there is no room for the weak. We need to be strong and powerful. We need to be respected and feared. And one more thing. You seem to be forgetting that the Ibuji people have refused to bow to our deity. Instead, they worship Agbeni. They must be converted by force, if necessary. (Bakare, 2004, p. 25)

In the foregoing excerpt, it is evident that King Onome is an authoritarian ruler. The excerpt also reveals that he does not believe in the *Ubuntu* philosophy which supports mutual cooperation and collaboration among human beings. The tyrannical and superiority orientations that King Onome displays are among the major causes of colonialism, genocide, ethnic cleansing and full scale war of global proportion in the world today.

Just like Chief Erekosima in Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*, King Onome is hostile to the ordinary people in his community, Abakpa. He believes that the common people are not expected to be involved in the socio-political affairs of Abakpa community. To him, the people are just "common, poverty stricken rabble who do not know the left from their right hands" (Bakare, 2004, p.25). By labelling the common people in Abakpa community as an ignorant mob, King Onome, just like the colonialists, shows himself as an anti-subaltern figure. Despite the cautionary advice offered him by his daughter, Omowale, and by Chiefs Beleku and Akogun, King Onome's ambition is to keep shaving the

heads of Abakpa people in their absence in order to maintain his hold on power without checks and balances from any quarters.

However, Bakare demonstrates that authentic conflict resolution, peaceful coexistence and good governance cannot be achieved when rulers insist on coercive methods and repress the ordinary people from making inputs to government policies and actions. Indeed, the legitimacy of a government and its operators largely depends on the support they derive from the ordinary citizens. However, this support is not unconditional because a tyrannical and anti-people government would, quite often, be confronted with a legitimacy crisis from the citizenry. Thus, in Abakpa, the people's rejection of King Onome's autocracy and his war-mongering policy leads to a tragedy that consumes him, his wife, Queen Otubu, and his son, Prince Arighoye. By repudiating King Onome's war against Ibuji and withdrawing their support from him as their king, Abakpa people show that genuine conflict resolution and peace building do not exclusively belong to the province of the ruling class. Contrary to King Onome's view that autocracy and repressive forces are effective means of imposing obedience, cohesion and peace, Abakpa people show that inclusive governance, mutual cooperation, collaboration, tolerance, empathy and love constitute the potent means of conflict resolution and peace building in the post colony. They show that differences in race, culture, religion and worldview are mere artificial gulfs which should not cause acrimonies among peoples. Just like diverse colours of the rainbow, every race, religion, culture and worldview contributes in a profound way to the growth and beauty of our collective humanity.

## Conclusion

As evident from the analyses of the plays of Irobi and Bakare, Nigerian playwrights offer rewarding insights on dispute adjudication and peace building in the post colony. Through the deployment of the *Ubuntu* philosophy and subaltern theory in the interpretation of *Hangmen Also Die* and *Drums of War*, the study has shown that Irobi and Bakare deconstruct the assumption that conflict resolution can be



achieved through direct command or coercive methods superintended by the state or its agents. While Irobi, in *Hangmen Also Die*, reveals that the perennial violent resource conflicts in the Nigeria Delta region are provoked by the ruling elite's corruption, duplicity and the marginalisation of the ordinary people from wealth distribution, Bakare's *Drums of War* shows that the anti-subaltern and despotic stance of some postcolonial Nigerian leaders generate intra and inter-communal wars in the country. The study has shown that Irobi and Bakare canvass communitarian ethos of inclusive governance, equitable wealth distribution, mutual collaboration and restorative justice as important methods of conflict resolution and securing peace in Nigeria. Thus, contrary to the hegemonic method of dispute resolution strategies, the alternative perspectives offered by Irobi and Bakare in their works underscore the significant contributions of Nigerian playwrights (and Nigerian writers in general) to peace and conflict studies.

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