Intercultural Mediation and Sundry Obstacles in African Theatre: Sunnie Ododo's *Hard Choice* as a Paradigm

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This paper contributes to the debate on the significant roles that intercultural mediation can play in mitigating the incessant conflicts often ignited by cultural differences. From the perspective of theatrical narratives, the present article examines the problematic aspects of intercultural mediation in African theatre, using Sunnie Ododo's *Hard Choice* as a paradigm. The paper adopts descriptive and content analysis methodologies to analyse a selection of published books, journal articles, and internet materials. This critical endeavour aims to prove that while intercultural conflicts occur in many regions of the world, they are particularly intensive in countries that have experienced colonial subjugation. Several factors have been found to account for conflicts in multicultural societies, particularly in Africa. These include the inability to manage cultural differences, undercover activities of individuals and groups, particularly the political elite, to satisfy selfish interests, and the egocentric inclination of some cultures to attempt to subsume others. The article concludes that although African theatre has achieved great success in the advancement of diverse ethnic cultures, not much has been done in the area of intercultural mediation and the peaceful negotiation of cultural conflicts. It is suggested that African playwrights need to do more by creating works that advocate peaceful cohabitation of cultures, emphasize circumspection of African leaders in handling sensitive socio-political and cultural issues, and stress the need for selfless national and regional leaders.
Keywords: African theatre, cultural difference, intercultural conflict, intercultural mediation, Sunnie Ododo.

This article examines the role of dramatists as intercultural mediators and drama and theatre as instruments of intercultural mediation. Multiculturalism is a common feature of many societies globally, particularly in the countries of Africa, Southeast Asia, Australia, and Canada, to mention just a few. Western Europe, whose societies were relatively homogeneous around a century ago, has gradually seen demographic upheavals during the last five decades. These transformations, which have largely been precipitated by the admission of immigrants from other cultures, have also enhanced this region's steady progress toward multiculturalism. The ensuing demographic complexity makes intercultural conflicts practically inevitable, thus necessitating ingenious
counter-strategies of intercultural mediation. Out of these societies, Africa appears a complex case due to its specific colonial experience and subsequent national self-assertion in which multiple nationalities emerged as single nations.

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The present article discusses the role of literature and drama, in particular, as a form of social response to these problems. From the Greek classical period until today, drama has never ceased to play prominent roles, not just in the dramatization of societal upheavals and threats to peace, but also in the interventionist peace-building and problem-solving praxis of addressing social-cultural and political differences within cultures. From Aeschylus to Euripedes, and other classical playwrights, such as Sophocles and Aristophanes, up until the Elizabethan era, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and even in the last two decades of the twenty-first century, drama and theatre have proved to be important tools for cultural advancement. However, the extent to which the dramatic genre has striven to unleash its mediatory potential, remains debatable.

The reality of globalization and its consequences is not without negative societal consequences. For instance, Crawford (1), observes that despite the touted integrating capacity of globalization, "cultural conflict has become the most rampant form of international violence" (1), even in the twenty-first century. The challenges created by this evolution for both trans- and intercultural relations necessitate concerted efforts to promote intercultural conversation and mediation.

When viewed against the backdrop of inter-tribal and inter-ethnic warfare, as well as other types of violence and bloodletting that have recently become common in Africa, the concern of drama and theatre for intercultural mediation has been more visible than ever before. Examples here include the conflicts between the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda, and the accompanying genocide in 1994, that of Sudan and South Sudan in 2012, also that of the northern region of Tigray and the Ethiopian government, which started in November, 2020, and several inter-ethnic and religious conflicts in Nigeria, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

In light of the aforementioned events, which appear to pose a threat to global, regional, and national peace, the need for intercultural mediation is more pressing than ever, as previously indicated. Drama, with its primary focus on entertainment, pedagogy, knowledge, and moral awareness, is meant to work towards the goal of creating a peaceful and equitable society that is open to tolerance and national progress. Against this backdrop, this research analyses intercultural disputes and investigates the function of theatre in intercultural mediation.

The article aims to achieve the following objectives: (i) to precisely define intercultural mediation; (ii) to identify examples of intercultural conflict and its severe negative impact on both national and international peace and development; (iii) to evaluate the extent of theatre's role in intercultural mediation; (iv) to analyse our exemplary play-text through the lens of interculturalism; (v) to determine the effectiveness of the discussed works/playwrights in addressing the intercultural conflicts within their societies; and (vi) to suggest alternative and innovative methods within the genre for managing intercultural conflicts.

Critical Views on Multiculturalism, Intercultural Conflict, and Intercultural Dialogue/ Mediation

Definition and Mission

In its White Paper (consultation document) on "Living Together as Equals in Dignity" (17), the Council of Europe (CoE) provisionally defines intercultural dialogue as "a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect." O'Sullivan has also described intercultural mediation as "cross-cultural dispute resolution," noting that it "involves having a neutral facilitator assist parties in resolving disputes impacted by cultural misunderstanding" (para 2). He observes that "an intercultural facilitator is adept at helping to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps, and often works with migrants and refugees" (para 2).

Although the idea of interculturality is said to have been operational unofficially for several decades in Europe and America, intercultural mediation became consciously and continentally advocated and promoted after the unfortunate events of 11 September 2001 (popularly known as 9/11) (Grillo).

This idea was initiated in 2003 with Reding's argument, as cited in Grillo (11) that, "intercultural dialogue, exchange projects, meeting and working together, actions to promote tolerance, understanding and respect for others, and projects to combat racism and xenophobia" were necessary. This was accentuated a year later, when Figel, also cited in Grillo (11), in a speech, "Sharpening Our Vision" (2004), proclaimed that intercultural dialogue was "the linchpin of fair, sustainable and peaceful world orders," and affirmed his belief that "we should throw our political weight behind this insight."

Meer and Modood have observed that the appeal of multiculturalism as a public policy has suffered considerable political damage (176). They contend that the argument for multiculturalism as a useful tool for "remaking of public identities in order to achieve an equality of citizenship that is neither merely individualistic nor premised on assimilation" that Modood made in 2005 is no longer relevant. Furthermore, according to Meer and Modood, critics of multiculturalism tend to point to its failure to deal with the processes of social fragmentation and entrenching social divisions, which distract attention away from socioeconomic disparities, encourage moral hesitancy among "native" populations, and lead to international terrorism.

Zapata-Barrero makes similar observations about the liberal critique of multiculturalism by interculturalists: "Its point of departure is the diagnosis that multicultural policies in the past have missed an important point: interaction between people from different cultures and national backgrounds" (4). He further maintains that

> this liberal criticism of multiculturalism is carried out with two foundational "weapons": that the individual prevails over group, and that culture cannot be an "iron cage" – for either the freedom of people who do not want to be typified by origin, or for institutions that cannot ensure the system of rights/duties, distribute goods and services, or incorporate origin/nationality as a criterion. (Zapata-Barrero 5)

This means that interculturalism challenges multiculturalism's propensity to always categorize people through origin and nationality, which predetermine certain behaviours and beliefs. Interculturalists, therefore, reject the multicultural assumption that "diversity must be interpreted only in terms of origin, nationality and culture" (Zapata-Barrero, 5).

Following the description of intercultural mediation by O'Sullivan, as "cross-cultural dispute resolution," the French scholar, J.F. Six describes it with four adjectives that underline its fundamental characteristics:

> first of all, mediation " is creative in the sense that one of its purposes is to create new connections, which did not exist before, between people or groups, from which both parties benefit"; secondly, mediation "is renewing to the extent that it allows to improve the existing connections between the mediated parties, connections that had been deteriorated or loosened before the conflict"; moreover, the mediation "is preventive in the sense that it foresees and prevents the conflicts that might occur between people or groups"; lastly, mediation "is therapeutic every time that a mediator comes into play when the conflict is already existing and has to assist and help the people and the groups to find solutions, and to choose ways out of the conflict. (quoted in Sani 2583)

In Sani's opinion, intercultural mediators are bridge builders between different cultures, through quality and problem-solving communication methods. It follows, then, that intercultural mediation brings about rapprochement between cultures. This, however, presupposes that the contact of cultures has the propensity to generate conflicts, and there is a constant need to mitigate such conflicts, or even prevent them. What, then, are the causes of conflicts between cultures, particularly in Africa? We believe that they can rightly be referred to as "intercultural conflicts."

Causes of Intercultural Conflicts

Intercultural conflicts may stem from numerous causes, with each society playing a role to some extent, though the level of contribution differs from country to country. Before delving into the topic of intercultural conflicts, it is important to mention Parekh's insights on the inherent difficulties and formidable responsibilities that multicultural societies must confront:

> Multicultural societies throw up problems that have no parallel in history. They need to find ways of reconciling the legitimate demands of unity and diversity, achieving political unity without cultural uniformity, being inclusive without being assimilationist, cultivating among their citizens a common sense of belonging while respecting their legitimate cultural differences, and cherishing plural cultural identities without weakening the shared and precious identity of shared citizenship. This is a formidable political task and no multicultural society so far has succeeded in tackling it. (Parekh, quoted in Grillo 34)

The above quote by Parekh, as cited in Grillo, problematizes the challenges faced by nearly all multicultural societies globally, which manifest themselves in form of conflict of cultures. Several factors have been advanced by scholars as precipitating these conflicts, particularly in Africa. While sparse allusion will be made to other parts of the world here, more attention will be focused on Nigeria. In the case of Nigeria, multiculturalism has always been a defining feature in the demographic composition of the country. This fact explains the high degree of latent cultural misunderstandings which, when poorly managed, can lead to cultural clashes. For instance, a publication in the African press mentioned the war that was fought in the 1990s between Croats and the Serbs in the former Yugoslavia and noted that "the war between Croats and Serbs was ignited by poorly managed intercultural conflicts, which invariably became irreconcilable. It led to the split of Yugoslavia into two independent nations" (www.yahoo.com/news).

Poorly managed intercultural conflicts have resulted in the breakdown of peace that had assumed a frightening violent dimension in many African countries. This includes Libya, Ethiopia, Sudan, Rwanda, and Nigeria, to mention just a few. In some cases, it has even torn apart some of the nations and fragmented them. Sudan is a typical example here, just like the former Yugoslavia.

In Nigeria, as well as in numerous other African nations, intercultural conflicts have arisen as a result of colonialism, religious intolerance, ethnic prejudice, poverty, and ineffective governance. The thirty-month civil war waged by Nigeria was triggered by the breakdown of communication and the unwillingness of the parties concerned to engage in substantive discourse on critical and sensitive national matters. Failure to continue the debate to a reasonable and peaceful resolution worsened the situation. While dialogue may provide challenges, particularly when leaders prioritize their own egos, discussions are crucial for achieving peace and progress.

The thirty-month civil war fought by Nigeria was precipitated by the breakdown of communication and the unreadiness of actors involved to engage in meaningful dialogue over burning and delicate national issues. When dialogue was finally initiated, failure to pursue it to a logical healthy (peaceful) end aggravated the conflict. Although dialogue may not be totally easy, especially where ego takes over the leaders of the people, negotiations are badly needed if peace and development are to be attained. Khan points out that the lack of dialogue is one of the most serious reasons for intercultural conflicts:

> Dialogue is never totally easy, but there is no substitute for it, nor a better baseline for engendering creativity. Patience, commitment, courage, humility, imagination, humour – qualities that create it. But above all a vision of society that recognises the proven value of difference, rather than dwells on its difficulty. (43)

Fayeye posits that the preponderance of the causative factors of aggression is largely and empirically rooted in inter-religious activities in Nigeria (83-84). Fayeye's review of the major religious crises in the country reveals that between 1980 and 2004, Nigeria had recorded twenty major violent crises, the majority of which occurred in the northern part of the country. According to him, a minimum

of two thousand nine hundred and eighty-three (2,983) lives were reported lost and there was wanton destruction of private and public property within those years (76-83). Painting a grim picture of losses that accompany one such riot, Agboola observes, "The string of killing, maiming and destruction of property can least be described as alarming and outrageous" (57).

The political class in many African nations is known to often exploit the pluralist attitudes of the society for political gains, thus setting up one ethnic group against another (see Sklar; Osaghae; Obadiegwu). This observation seems perfectly congruous with Nigeria's situation. The emergence of socio-cultural groups with strong political leanings in the different regions of the country such as Ohanaze Ndigbo in the eastern part of the country, Afenifere in the south west, and Arewa Consultative Council (ACF) in the north obviously lends credence to the views expressed above. These supposed "socio-cultural groups" are, more or less, political movements in disguise. They consistently lead in political mobilization and decision-making in the country, prioritizing and safeguarding their own fundamental interests rather than the broader national interest.

Nnoli observes that the colonial policy of divide and rule, the emergence of colonial urban settings, and resource competition are some of the factors that are responsible for contemporary ethnic radicalism (35-106), and the consequent violent conflicts in Nigeria.

Recently, xenophobia, the inability to tolerate the presence of others, due to some fear of disadvantage have risen in Africa, specifically in South Africa, in 2008, 2009, and 2019. The conflicts generated by these violent acts of South Africans against their fellow Africans, and some locals, resulted in the loss of many lives and the vandalization and theft of many properties of non-indigenes in the country. These developments require the urgent necessity of intercultural dialogue and mediation. Nell advances three possible reasons for such condemnable acts: interactive factors related to the amount of exposure the inhabitants have to strangers, cultural factors, which include identity and nationalism, and material or economic factors related to employment opportunities, and available resources (234).

Instances of Intercultural Conflicts Globally

Conflicts have been with us in our daily lives since the beginning of human history. Intercultural conflicts, however, can be highly sensitive and dangerous, with the potential to escalate to the point of claiming a large number of lives, if not timely and properly checked. Marshall observes that,

> of the 36 conflicts raging around the world in 2003, the Iraq invasion was the sole international war. The remaining 35 were internal wars within the territory of 28 countries, and all but four of these were communal conflicts, inspired by ethnic, sectarian, or religious grievances. (quoted in Crawford 2)

Notable intercultural conflicts include those in the former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), which occurred between 1991 and 2006 and resulted in the country's ethnic separation into Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and the Republic of North Macedonia. By 2008, Kosovo had also declared its independence from Serbia. A lamentable aspect of the violent fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia was the loss of so many lives in the conflicts that accompanied the declaration of independence by the cultural entities that made up the Republic. However, as noted by the United Nations (UN),

> in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the conflict was to be the deadliest of all in the disintegrating Yugoslav Federation. … It is estimated that more than 100,000 people were killed and two million people, more than half the population, were forced to flee their homes as a result of the war that raged from April 1992 through to November 1995 when a peace deal was initialled in Dayton. Thousands of Bosnian women were systematically raped. … The single worst atrocity of the war occurred in the summer of 1995 when the Bosnian town of Srebrenica, a UN-declared safe area, came under attack by forces led by the Bosnian Serb commander Ratko Mladić. During a few

days in early July, more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were executed by Serb forces in an act of genocide.

In Africa, the Rwanda war of 1994 clearly demonstrated a cultural divide. The war of attrition between the Hutus and the Tutsi was horrendous, as it was acknowledged by the international community to possess all traits of ethnic cleansing. By the time the dust was settled, over 800,000 Tutsi were believed to have been murdered by their hitherto Hutus "neighbours." As noted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), "in just 100 days in 1994, about 800,000 people were slaughtered in Rwanda by ethnic Hutu extremists. They were targeting members of the minority Tutsi community, as well as their political opponents, irrespective of their ethnic origin."

The steadily increasing migrant population in western Europe and North America has inevitably contributed to the spectacular cultural diversity of these lands, but occasionally such demographic expansion may provoke tension between the indigenous population and the settlers. As rightly noted by Brown, "the problem of dealing with conflicting cultural groups has always been at the core of U.S. society" (277). One of the most unfortunate occurrences of intercultural conflict was witnessed in the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Organization Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC and in the former incident, an estimated 3000 people lost their lives. The attack that was masterminded by the Al-Qaeda terrorist group was claimed by the organization as a vengeful act against attitudes of inequality and hatred for non-western cultures in the west.

In South Africa, recent xenophobic attacks that were targeted at non-South African migrants, particularly Africans, are indicators of intolerance of people of other cultures. Though induced by economic problems in the context of globalization, lives were lost and economic losses emanating from looting, vandalization and arson were suffered by the foreigners who were victims of the attacks. According to Human Rights Watch,

> Xenophobic harassment and violence against African and Asian foreigners living in South Africa are routine and sometimes lethal, … Non-South African nationals have suffered wave after wave of xenophobic violence and live in constant fear of being targeted solely for not being South African …. Foreigners are scapegoated and blamed for economic insecurity, crimes, and government failures to deliver services and have been targets of nationwide protests and shutdowns characterized by mob violence, looting, and torching of their businesses. In early September 2019, mobs wielding weapons and chanting anti-foreigner slogans attacked and forcibly displaced non-nationals, destroying thousands of their business and homes. (para. 1, 3, 5)

Other hotbeds of cultural conflict include Sudan, which experienced a long conflict (1983-2005) and eventually split into two culturally different countries in July 2011, and South Sudan, with its post-independence civil war. Apart from Sudan and South Sudan, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) observes more countries with active armed conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa in 2019: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, and so on. SIPRI further notes that "eight were low-intensity, subnational armed conflicts, and seven were high-intensity armed conflicts (Nigeria, Somalia, the DRC, Burkina Faso, Mali, South Sudan and Cameroon)" (para. 1).

African Theatre and Intercultural Mediation

Although some African plays are thematically concerned with intercultural conflict, a brief evaluation shows that their response to the issue tends to be sporadic. Hubert Ogunde, regarded as the father of Nigerian theatre, staged many plays, but very few of them bring forth the problem of intercultural mediation. Before African independence, the primary focus was on the repressive characteristics of colonial rule and the strong desire for the country's independence. Examples include *Tiger's Empire* (1946), *Towards Liberty* (1947), *Strike and Hunger* (1946), and *Bread and Bullet* (1950). The majority of Ogunde's

plays performed around this time were nationalist in content, with a focus on agitation for the independence of Nigeria from colonial rule (Clark xvii-xviii). His *Yoruba, Ronu* (1962) addresses intra-cultural conflict as he appeals passionately to the Yoruba nation, cautioning it against political carelessness and recklessness. Since the beginning of Nigeria's independence in 1960, the theatrical oeuvre of Nigerian dramatists, like other African dramatists, has displayed a wide range of cultural themes, mostly promoting the cultures of the playwrights.

The reason for this is not hard to guess. The years of colonialization had subjected the indigenous cultures to a lot of attack and debilitation, therefore, the need to revitalize, reintroduce, and promote the already battered cultures was strong. Such postcolonial works, for example, include Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed* and *Death and the King's Horseman*, *The Gods are not to Blame* and *Kurunmi* (1971), by Ola Rotimi, *Wedlock of the Gods* and *King Emene*, by Zulu Sofola, *Ozidi*, by then J.P. Clark (now Bekederemo-Clark), *Marriage of Anansewa* and *Edufa* (1967), by Efua Sutherland of Ghana, and *I will Marry When I Want* and *The Black Hermit*, by Ngugi Wa Thiongw'o of Kenya. The angst about the "injuries" and "injustices" of colonialization was the impetus or momentum that produced these plays.

It is noteworthy that African dramatists, especially Nigerians, have recently become more interested in creating works that explore international conflict and intercultural mediation, due to two alarming trends. There has been a significant increase in acts of terrorism and banditry, particularly over the past twenty years. Such plays include *Hard Choice,* by Sunnie Ododo (2011), *Citizens or Strangers* (2015), by Abdullahi Abubakar, and *Hotome N Hotoho* (2020), by Ayobami Aponmade.

The collaborative efforts of the Association Théâtre Mayton Promo and the International Federation of Cultural Associations and Networks for the Living, Visual and Fine Arts and Literature, which were aimed at developing a series of hybrid and culturally diverse works in 2022, in the context of the International Itinerant Festival of Theatre of the Lycées and Collèges of Benin (also known as FITHEL-YCOB) and of the ADJROU festival, also constitute an example of intercultural mediation (see *Culture at Work in Africa* 18). The project utilized the collaboration "to promote intercultural dialogue for social cohesion and transborder peaceful relations as well as fostering the sharing of cultures and knowledge between culturally diverse communities and different social groups" (Culture at Work Africa 19).

Explaining the relevance of the initiative, Culture at Work Africa states that,

> The final creations, that included theatre plays, musical performances, dance performances, tales and storytelling, … have also travelled to several secondary schools and high schools from eight cities and towns of Benin. This tour of schools opened up paths for intercultural dialogue as well as debates on local and national identity, customs and traditions, tangible and intangible heritage, religious and personal believes, and more. These debates all had at their heart one common element: culture. (19)

The preponderance of conflicts in Africa is not an indication that the various governments have been negligent in making efforts to curb the menace, but the question is whether those efforts have been far-reaching enough. For instance, some of the government measures designed to manage the problem of cultural diversity in Nigeria include the promulgation of decree 24 of 1973, which established the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme. This was motivated by the civil war that almost tore the country apart along ethnic lines. The NYSC scheme made it mandatory for recent graduates of Nigeria's higher institutions to serve their country for one year in a state other than their own. Aimed at national integration and unity, similar measures taken to manage cultural plurality and limit ethnic disputes in Nigeria, are the Federal Character law, which seeks to guarantee the even distribution of resources and positions, as well as laws aimed at the protection of the educationally disadvantaged population.

Intercultural Mediation in *Hard Choice*, by Sunnie Ododo

Synopsis of the Play

A wedding ceremony is about to take place between Princess Azingae, daughter of Eze Okiakor, King of the Emepiri kingdom, and Prince Oki, the son of King Iginla I of the Igedu kingdom, but the wedding is disrupted by some gun-wielding young men who abduct the crown of King Iginla I and disappear with it, an act that is considered abominable by both cultures, Igbo and Yoruba. The expected confusion and distrust created by this ignoble act threatens the life of King Iginla I who must die if the crown is not returned within seven days and the Emepiri kingdom is threatened with annihilation as the superior army of Igedu land intends to attack Emepiri. The situation is complicated by various attempts to end the conflict between the two cultures, which is finally resolved by King Okiakor's noble and tolerant behaviour and Princess Azingae's sacrificial disposition.

Analysis

Hard Choice is a socio-political satire that dramatizes the notorious problem of ethnic bigotry and the counter measures taken to nip it in the bud. The play is set in Nigeria, with a cross-cultural setting where the eastern and western regions interact. It is important to note that Emepiri and Igedu are two tribes within the same nation, which makes them two constituent/co-cultures. The decision of both kings, Okiakor and Iginla I, to allow a royal wedding between their children can be interpreted as a strategy taken by the leaders in a multicultural society in their attempts to reach intercultural dialogue cum mediation. The statement Angus, representative of the bride's family, makes, points to this: "I also welcome you once more to our land and family. As our guests, you are entitled to limitless dosage of our hospitality" (12). In the same manner, Eze Okiakor's prayer for the bride and the groom during the wedding also shows that through deliberate moves, the two kingdoms are getting closer and more intimate: "The sweet soothing spirit of our ancestors will forever abide you two. God himself shall be your guide. Like the butterfly and flower, so shall the fragrance of your romance attract peace to our different kingdoms" (12).

Unfortunately, the plans for peaceful cohabitation of the people of the two kingdoms may collapse as this fragile equilibrium can easily be destroyed by subversive movements. The attack on King Iginla I, the political head of another tribe, obviously constitutes a break in the quest for peace and harmony. The authoritative manner in which the operation is carried out, as the stage directions suggest, is enough to cast doubt on the genuineness and sincerity of Eze Okiakor as a loyal and trustworthy friend to King Iginla: "thereafter, merrymaking continues with bridal dance. Suddenly, there are gunshots in the air; commotion ensues, three young men in masks rush in and seize the crown of King Iginla and leave" (12).

The play proceeds to explore the spectrum of attitudes within this multi-ethnic society, from vocal conservatism to more progressive and tolerant stances. Being conservative in outlook, Chief Ubanga does not think that reforms are necessary. It appears odd to him that Princess Azingae, who is from his own culture, will be married to someone from outside of it. At first sight, this is an act of intolerance, but there is more to it than meets the eye. The following conversation betrays his conservatism:

Egbesu:	What is next, High Chief?
Chief Ubanga:	For now, retreat into hiding and wait for further instructions. (Laughs cynically.) I now wait to see how the princess will be betrothed to a Yoruba prince.
Jasper:	Never! Is my chief not good enough for her?
Chief Ubanga:	Ask me again. The princess thinks otherwise. More importantly, Eze doesn't see anything wrong in marrying his only child to a Yoruba prince, simply because he wants to strengthen friendship ties with King Iginla. (15)

The above conversation also reveals a number of occurrences that border on intercultural conflict and demand intercultural mediation. While Chief Ubanga and his group stir an intercultural conflict out of selfishness, Eze Okiakor attempts to reverse it. The gesture of Eze Okiakor (an Igbo, by tribe) to give his daughter's hand in marriage to a Yoruba prince constitutes an act of intercultural mediation. Significantly, the phrase "because he wants to strengthen ties with King Iginla" (15) points to reconciliation and equal treatment.

Since the Queen is aware of Chief Ubanga's desire, she finds him a ready tool to be used to stop the princess from marrying the Yoruba prince Oki, whom she considers to be a stranger, coming from another culture different from her own. The prejudice shared by these two characters is reflected in Chief Ubanga's words during his conversation with his followers: "That's the point, Egbesu. As the only child and being a woman, her son automatically becomes the heir apparent to the throne of Emepiri Kingdom. Should such an opportunity be dubiously given to an outsider just like that?" (15).

The duo and their followers elaborate their plans regardless of the expected consequences. The Queen masterminds the snatching of King Iginla's crown and, by that, exposes his tribe to danger. The three-day ultimatum the people of Igedu give Emepri is an expected response to ensure the recovery of their king's crown and to save him and the people of Igedu from further ridicule and unnecessary embarrassment. The people of Igedu can thus be seen as victims of egocentric tribalism, or violent tribal self-assertion which either attempts to emasculate or to subsume other, "inferior" cultures. Interestingly, we can draw parallels between King Iginla's people, who are separated from their homeland in a foreign place, and the troublesome situation of immigrants who are treated poorly overseas, with little regard for their rights.

In *Hard Choice*, four characters stand out for their efforts at intercultural mediation. They are Eze Okiakor, King Iginla, Princess Azingae, and, to a large extent, Bashorun. In spite of their firm stance, they are willing to give peace a chance, even in the face of provocation. The actions and utterances of these characters attest to this at different times. Eze Okiakor and King Iginla, for example, use the language of mediation in their conversation, when the former comes to see the latter after the crown is abducted:

Eze Okiakor:	I am here to see my friend, King Iginla.
Guard I:	Your friend indeed, you surely have a bizarre sense of friendship.
Guard II:	Shut up… I apologise, Your Highness. You came without warning, I don't know how our Oba will take your visit…. The two kings face each other with dramatic silence.)
Eze Okiakor:	I have come to personally take responsibility for all that has happened and to also brief you on what our search for the crown has yielded.
King Iginla:	I trusted you.
Eze Okiakor:	And that trust is not misplaced. I can assure you that everything practicable is being done to recover your crown. (18)

Although only a few uncomplimentary words are exchanged in this conversation, they are not harmful words that could derail the rapprochement initiated by Eze Okiakor. This dialogue eventually leads to their united efforts in search of the crown.

It is important to note that Eze Okiakor's condescension here for the sake of reconciliation does not benefit him alone but the entire people of Emepiri land. He, therefore, plays the role of a typical mediator between cultures who facilitates the resolution of the conflict.

In a similar way, Bashorun, who is commander-in-chief of the army of Igedu land, though fierce, as expected of a person of his office, is eager to look for peace, as his statement suggests: "my war commanders are already on the alert. They are preparing our warriors for the ultimate; war, if it comes to that. In the meantime, I have sought audience with the Eze later in the day on the missing crown." (18)

A significant point to make here is his readiness to negotiate the matter with Eze Okikaor, rather than embark on violent military actions.

Azingae's display of intercultural mediatory excellence arises from her strategic role in the resolution of the conflict. The Queen, who had taken the stolen crown, intended to deposit it at the shrine of Oguguru, the god of the land. Her purpose was to exchange King Iginla's life for her daughter's. She is now hesitant to fulfil her vow of handing her daughter over to Ogururu, who had assisted her husband in becoming the king at her request. When she realizes that for King Iginla to live, the crown must be recovered, and that if Oguguru releases the crown, her mother must fulfil her vow to the god, the princess volunteers to surrender her life. The evidence of her heroic intervention is encapsulated in the final stage direction provided by the playwright:

> The two kings come together, backed by their people in solemn ritual dance of accord and unity with PRINCE OKI at the apex as a torch bearer for the future – the envisioned unification of the two kingdoms; the people of the two kingdoms now mingle with one another. (49)

The solution to the problem brings the intercultural conflict to a close, because the crown is recovered and peace is restored between the two cultures. This peaceful conclusion is endorsed by the self-sacrifice of the princess, laying down her life for the sake of peace. With all possible interpretations of the princess's decision, her act is inspiring as it symbolizes the sacrifices that leaders need to make for conflicts to be resolved and for peace to reign. The same reason accounts for the actions of King Okiakor, Oba Emepiri, and Bashorun. Through these characters, the author demonstrates how the parties concerned must make compromise to resolve conflicts peacefully.

Conclusion

A closer examination of the intercultural conflicts discussed reveals that in most cases, conflicts that involve tribal hostilities are triggered by the following factors: postcolonial relations (neo-colonialism, arbitrariness, dictatorship), tribal sentiments, religious intolerance, poverty, bad leadership, the unbridled greed and other selfish activities of the political elite, lack of patience and commitment to pursue dialogue to a logical conclusion, the exploitation of an already aggravated situation for political gains, intolerance of other cultures, and so on, and they constitute threats to the management of diversity and differences in a pluralist society.

Similar hostilities that grow into cultural conflicts have threatened both national and global peace on many occasions, both in Africa and in other regions of the world. The list is long and includes Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, the United States, as evidenced in the 9/11 twin tower attack, and at present the war of Russia on Ukraine. It has also been observed that though postcolonial African drama and theatre contribute a lot to the advancement of African cultures, not much has been done to analyse the effects of intercultural mediation in this process.

In most countries, particularly in Africa, the twentieth century was the time when colonialism began to exhaust its mechanisms of rule, and literature, particularly drama, produced in this region, did not remain indifferent to this process. Recently, however, the upsurge of intercultural conflicts, instigated by postcolonial concerns, migration, and globalization have informed dramatic and theatrical activities about the necessity to present and discuss intercultural mediation, even if the latter is still in the process of development.

While drama and theatre do provide entertainment, they also serve didactic purposes. The genre's strong social engagement enables it to actively participate in resolving cultural tensions and conflicts through the suggestive power of theatrical performances. In spite of the threat posed by cultural conflicts to the management of diversity and differences in pluralist societies, it is also our conclusion that intercultural conflicts could be managed and resolved through meaningful dialogue and mediatory efforts.

It is our suggestion that more than ever before, it is auspicious for the theatre to intensify its mediatory competence in the face of the growing differences in the pluralist societies that many African nations have become. The theatrical performance effectively conveys its message through impressionistic, demonstrative, visual, and practical storytelling and enactment, captivating and entertaining the audience.

Consequently, intercultural mediation through the age-old medium of the theatre is not only possible, but is equally a required tool in this period when globalization has shaped national and regional boundaries. Therefore, the need to stress the inevitability of dialogue and respect for the value of difference rather than its difficulty is an onerous call upon African theatre to propagate. Emphasis must be placed on the circumspection of the political elite in handling sensitive cross-cultural matters with a view to nipping potential conflicts in the bud.

The following recommendations may streamline the role of the theatre in intercultural mediation:

(i)   greater involvement of the grassroot population (they are the custodians of culture) in collaboration with theatre professionals through a form of Community Theatre Programme;

(ii)   Rather than rely heavily on government funding, the project should look elsewhere (multinational institutions, international organizations, and blue-chip companies) for grants and sponsorship. This is to ensure that it will be strictly consistent, transparent, and apolitical, so that it can achieve its goals; and

(iii)   importantly, the process should take advantage of information technology, and incorporate both the traditional and new media outlet to popularize its message and to make sure that it will reach enough people to be able to raise public awareness and provide information and persuasion, all disseminated through the instrumentality of entertainment, which is the primary and traditional mission of the theatre.

When this is done, it is our belief that the suggestive power of the performance will complement the efforts of the government and other entities that are involved in conflict resolution, peace-building, national integration, and global order.

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