



## Dynamics of Conflict and Peacebuilding in Bole Butake's *Family Saga*, Francis Ateh's *Seat of Thorns* and Kelvin Ngong Toh's *Symphonic Shades*

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**Abstract:** Conflict is an ever-present phenomenon in the human society; it is omnipresent and ubiquitous; it operates at various levels, namely, social, economic, political, cultural and religious. A critical reading of the three texts under study revealed that what mostly triggers conflict is the hegemonic dominance of the Centre's monopolisation of power. Whether it is at the micro or macro level, the centre that wields power and calls the shots is squarely responsible for the conflictual situations in the society. The fundamental question addressed in this paper is: For what reason is power acquired? The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that literature is a veritable weapon that can be used to resolve conflict, thus, it examines how conflict is represented in Bole Butake's *Family Saga*, Francis Ateh's *Seat of Thorns* and Kelvin Ngong Toh's *Symphonic Shades* in the multicultural Cameroonian society. Using new historicism and Social conflict theory to analyse these three narratives, the study revealed that the failure of leadership in African contemporary society has provided a platform for conflicts. The paper recommends that, for peace building and sustainable development to be attained, leaders need to change their dynamics, re-strategise and rise up to the aspiration and expectations of the ruled. Literature is therefore perceived in this study as an instrument that can be used to resolve conflicts in the society.

**Key words:** Conflict, Dynamics and Peacebuilding.

### Introduction

The human society is inevitably caught up in numerous challenges which makes it a very complex one. This complexity is informed by its multicultural nature which is characterised by opposing attitudes, belief systems, values and ideologies. All of these are potential factors that breed conflict, be it at the micro or macro level. Given the multifaceted nature of the human society, conflicts are bound to occur at every stage in human civilisation (Bernie Mayer, 2000; John Paul Laderach, 2003, Samuel Kale Ewusi 2012, and Kashim Ibrahim Tala, 2019). Miriam Ikejiani Clark (2009) asserts that, conflict arises because people are bound to communicate with fellow man, and this inter and intra cultural communication can occur between people who share the same values, custom and belief system, and even across cultures and conflicts occur in every given stage of communication. As such, conflicts can stem from some disagreement which in most cases results from differences in interest and values. It is important to note that these differences are commonplace in a multicultural setting where people of different cultural backgrounds are condemned to communicate and interact because people cannot live in isolation. Debraj Ray and Joan Esteban, (2017) buttress this viewpoint when they contend that, "we appear to live in an incredibly violent world. Not a day appears to go by when we do not hear of some new atrocity: individuals beheaded, planes shot from the sky, suicide

bombings of all descriptions, mass killings, and calls to even more escalated violence” (265). This implies that conflict is an ever-present phenomenon in human society, which cannot be avoided but can only be managed. To support this view, Aloysius Michael Okolie (2009) also talks about the inevitability of conflict. As such, it is an unavoidable aspect in human interaction.

As Kingsley L. Ngange, Vera T. Fonkem and Stephen N. Nnode (2019) cite Scott Gates, Havard Hegre, Havard Mokleiv Nygard, and Havard Strand, (2012), conflict is a human process and as such provides human beings with the opportunity to constantly (re) think and (re) define their social human interaction through habit and ideological transformation. Godwin Onu (2009) reinforces this point when he asserts that, “conflict could be regulated, resolved or transformed” (85). He gives factors which can be used to regulate conflict situations such as; “national constitutions and laws, family and clan structure, court systems, religious codes, habits of decorum and debate and discourse” (85). It is easier to handle conflict based on its context of occurrence, identifying the group concerned than handling a conflict whose origin and group is unknown. Ikejiani Miriam Clark and Ani Casmir (2009) argue that, “conflict does not affect the whole society or all spheres of society at the same time and always” (50). This is to say that it can be addressed by targeting the people, community or group concerned in order to resolve or prevent further conflicts in a given society. It is important to note that, conflict varies from society to society, and even from group to group, for it to be resolved, it is important to consider its dynamics. Ifesinachi Ken (2009) proclaims that, “conflict resolution varies according to the nature of conflict, the context of the conflict, history and culture within which conflict takes place” (89). Thus, handling conflict toward peacebuilding requires an understanding of the conflict for people to co-exist in a peaceful environment.

Thus, for peacebuilding to be effective in Africa, their leaders and individuals need to be determined to create ways and always be ready to learn new strategies in which conflict can be managed and mitigated. Clark and Casmir assert that, “the most successful leader continues to learn throughout their career” (.3). This, therefore, implies that leaders are born learners and learning never ends as far as we live because leaders look toward leadership development. It should be noted that conflict cannot be wiped out from the society; it is not only detrimental in some cases, but also a necessity in the society especially in a dialectical discourse, because it brings in social change in the spirit of the Hegelian concept of dialectics. This, therefore, means that conflict is an inevitable phenomenon.

### **Research Problem**

Conflict remains one of the greatest challenges the world is facing today especially in the African continent. The biblical history of Cain and Abel seems to be the genesis of conflict in the human society. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century when some European countries gathered in Berlin to partition Africa, a potential seed of conflict was sown. Imperialism and colonialism nurtured this seed as the African leaders who were groomed by the colonial leaders became a disappointment. Butake, Ateh and Toh in their respective narratives attempt to demonstrate that the failure of nationalism and the triumph of neo-colonialism have bred conflict in the continent. Given that these conflicts are inevitable, scholars and creative writers have addressed it from different perspectives, proposing different peacebuilding methods and strategies. Despite their contributions, conflict is still persisting in Africa. Some of the fundamental questions raised in this study are: What is the cause of these conflicts? Why is conflict rampant in a continent blessed with natural resources? What strategies do these authors use to mitigate conflict and promote peaceful coexistence and sustainable development? What are the different causes of conflicts portrayed in the texts? What are the different conflicts representations deconstructed in the texts under study?

In view of the above, this paper sets out to analyse some selected Cameroonian texts namely: Bole Butake’s *Family Saga*, Francis Atah’s *Seat of Thorns* and Kelvin Ngong Toh’s *Symphonic Shades* within the context of sustainable peace and harmonious existence.

### **Theoretical consideration**

This work is guided by two theories, namely, New historicism and Social Conflict theory. These theories are relevant to this study in that New Historicism examines the socio-political and cultural circumstances which influenced the ideological inclinations of the authors as expressed in the texts.

The social conflict theory brings out the social inequality and how social order or equity can be maintained in the society. New Historicism, was developed in the 1960s and 1970s as a complementary approach to old historicism, and as a counter discourse to the American text-based. Kumar, Kerala and Nair (2015) assert that, New Historicism gained its roots in Renaissance scholarship. Xiaotang Lyu (2012) argues that, “New Historicism appeared as a mode of literary practice since the early 1980s” (1075). He also avers that, the theory is a response to old historicism. The flag bearer of this theory is Stephen Greenblatt. Some of the proponents who were inspired by Greenblatt are Louis A. Montrose, Walter Benn Michaels, and Catherine Gallagher. Lyu argues that, the theory emphasises the centrality of the social, historical, political as well as economic circumstances which contributed in shaping writers’ perceptions and ideologies revealed through their works. He demonstrates a somewhat symbiotic relationship between the authors’ history and their texts, which gives this study the ability to contextualise the society in the text and the real world. He further asserts that, history plays a vital role in textual documentation. From the above text, one can affirm that texts depend on historical facts through a concrete representation, and history also depends on texts for the story to be told. This is portrayed in the texts as writers represent the historical facts which are answerable to the conflicts in the text.

Rajani Sharma (2014) adds that, New Historicism is a school of literary criticism that is concerned with the historical, social and cultural contexts of the author in the period of time his literary work is produced” (1). He shares the same view point like Kumar et al add that a literary work is produced from three periodic stand points, namely, time, place and historical circumstances of the author. As such, for one to properly interpret or get the intended meaning of a literary work, the historical background, time and place are needed for the interpretation of the work.

In the same light, Merlin X, Pil M and Helen Unius Backiavathy (2017) argue that, “New historicism is a literary theory based on the view that literature should be studied, designed and understood within the discourse of both the chronicles of the author and the history of the critic” (183). With this, Merlin, Pil and Helen imply that new historicism is not only looked at the level of the text influencing the author’s background, but the critic’s environment, notion and preconceptions are also taken into consideration for the interpretation of a text. Tiwari Narendra and Chandra N (2014) also state that, “New Historicism provides a critical method of interpretation of a literary work. which came into being as a reaction against New Criticism just as New Criticism came into being as a reaction to historical and biographical methods of literary criticism” (79). They also assert that, when it comes to interpretation, New Historicism actually situates literary texts in its context. Amanda Knapp and Audrey Farley identify some of the tenets which include; Political and social situations, the author’s background, Power structure and Circulation.

Social Conflict Theory is a branch of Conflict Theory by Karl Max. The main proponent of the theory is Karl Marx. This theory is an extension of Karl Marx’s continuous philosophy on the competitive and unequal aspect of social life to generate social change. Kimberly Moffitt and Perry Jeffrey (2023) distinguish between the Social Conflict Theory and the conflict theory. According to them, social conflict theory focuses on the distribution of resources, power, and inequality and sees social life as a competition, while other theories of conflict study the society as an arena of inequality that generates social conflict and social change as well. They argue that, social conflict theory is a macro-oriented paradigm in sociology which looks at the society as an arena of inequality, and this causes conflict and social change in human society. They further contend that the society is structured in a manner that just a few people benefit from social amenities and they attribute aspects like sex, age, race and class are closely linked with inequality, while others are seen as the minority who may not even benefit from the social amenities. Edlyne Eze Anugwom (2009) declares that, the social conflict theory presents a different form of explaining and understanding the social reality, which is what Moffitt and Perry describe as inequality in the context of social change. He equally examines how distribution of resources can be divided in the society. Anugwom presents conflict or war to be a solution to social change, in which people should involve to nonviolent conflict. He affirms that, “if you want peace then prepare for war” (48). This means that conflict is a natural or unavoidable in human society since there is social inequality between two distinct classes of people, and as such, nonviolent conflicts are a necessity for social change.

Alexandre Yurevich Petukhov (2022) identifies some of the tenets which include: revolution, competition, structural inequality and war. In similar ways, Anugwom reiterates that, “the advent of capitalism...creates a situation where society can be divided into two classes: those with access to or in control of the production and those without...submit their labour power to the former in order to earn a living in the new social order” (.42). The latter category of people suffers in the hands of the former, as they are the ones in control and determine how the resources are distributed, and the latter are marginalised by the capitalists. This has been the main causes of conflict in most African states. This discussion is done under three thematic clusters, namely, the colonial factor, the failure of leadership,

Conflict remains one of the timeless and inevitable aspects in the human society. Ntahombaye Philippe and Nduwayo Gaspard (2007) and Tsega Etefa (2019) all hold that conflict in the contemporary society has its roots in imperialism and colonialism. According to Aja Akpuru Aja (2009), conflict in contemporary Africa has its origins in class, sex, religion, nationalism or resource control. While attributing conflict to colonisation and the failure of post-independent leaders. Victor Ikechukwu Ogharanduku and Adekunle Theophilus Theophilus (2020) hold that conflicts in multicultural societies are as a result of differences in belief systems, visions, cultural beliefs, philosophy and perception. Flora Maria Avila Mark Chingono, Maria Sultan, Qodir Djuraev (2000), accuse the media of promoting escalating conflict. However, Leader Jonathan Maynard on the contrary advocates differences in ideology to the escalation of conflict. The main thrust of this paper is that the persistence of conflict as represented in Butake, Ateh and Toh’s in their creative works reveals that failed leadership is at the centre of conflict. Therefore, this paper addresses how Butake (2005), Toh (2020) and Ateh (2018) represent poor leadership as the cause of conflict as well as their ideological position.

### Failed Leadership

In *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983), Chinua Achebe argues that, the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely the failure of leadership. It is the leader’s inability to rise to their responsibility. (1) The Nigerian experience clearly fits in the discussion in this paper. The failure of leadership is depicted as one of the cardinal causes of conflicts in African states. There seems to be a discord and disconnect between the people’s expectations vis-à-vis their leaders and the reality they face. The question posed is why do people acquire power? Is it to galvanize and bring people together or to amass wealth and exploit the very people they are to cater for? The authors under study in their creative vision attempt answers to this question as they hinge the cause of conflict on the inability of power holders to use such powers for the good of the people, reinforcing Chinua Achebe’s contention in *The Trouble with Nigeria*. The leaders pretend; they swim in the cesspool of ill-gotten wealth while the ruled languish and wallow in abject penury. Such a situation can only breed violence, frustration, injustice and disillusionment which are the ingredients of conflicts in a contemporary society. In Butake’s dramaturgical vision wherein Kamalo is the personification of failed leadership, in the dialogue between Kamalo and Kamala below, the display of arrogance, haughtiness and hate speech by Kamalo can only bring conflict:

Kamalo:

(*picks up the jumper and sniffs it*). It stinks. We cannot change roles. This suit is the insignia of my role just like the jumper is the insignia of yours. That’s what my papa says. Here, take your jumper. We cannot change roles. That’s what my papa says.

Kamala:

(*wearing jumper*). My resources belong to you?

Kamalo:

Yes. You belong to me...You belong to me. That’s what my papa says. If you don’t like it here, you can go elsewhere.

Kamala:

All right. I don't like it here. I am taking my things and going elsewhere. Where is the deed of brotherhood that we both signed? I need my share of the resources.

Kamalo:

You mean the deed of bondagehood? My papa is keeping it.

Kamala:

Keeping what? Your papa is keeping what?

Kamalo:

The deed of bondagehood which you signed.

Kamala:

Brotherhood

Kamalo:

Bondagehood...Bondagehood! Stop wasting your breath. That's why I conceive, you execute. Period (removing a document from his jacket). Here's a certified true copy, signed and sealed by my papa himself. (12-14)

The suit and jumper are pivotal symbols in that dialogue. The suit represents the imperialist culture, and the jumper stands for the indigenous culture. The Papa represents the colonial master who has put two brothers at loggerheads. The deed of brotherhood has become that of Bondagehood. This is the manipulation and deceit of the colonial masters, and this is what has bred conflict.

Kamalo represents post-independence leaders who have failed in leadership, while Kamala is a symbolic representation of the masses. Kamalo has been brainwashed and programmed by his "papa" to use his brother as his slave and to generate more wealth to sustain his papa. Kamalo has learned so well from his papa (capitalist), and he is ready to implement those dangerous capitalistic ideologies. His mind-set is to continue to dominate and be seen in control and his oppressed brother is his slave who should labour without questioning his oppression.

The use of simile by the author when he compares Kamalo's foster father to a thief implies that his ways are not just as well as his leadership. This aspect is also visible in Victor Epie Ngome's *What God Has Put Asunder* as he compares Garba to a thief through his exploitative ways as Weka, his wife, complains, "...You became lord and master over the cocoa farms my father left for me...And now you harvest from them like a thief. No pruning of the trees, no weeding of the farms themselves, not even cleaning the road thereof. And when you sell the produce, nobody sees where the proceeds go" (34). Just like Garba, Kamalo's foster father is also a thief as he only comes to collect the harvest from the estate only when Kamala is on the field working. The above simile gives room to question the leadership of Kamalo and his papa; they are thieves, and cannot promote good leadership but rather, they take from the have-nots to enrich themselves. This explains why Kamalo refuses the exchange of roles. The suit here symbolises authority while Kamala's jumper symbolises slavery. This insinuates that Kamalo, his offspring and his papa are the ones in control of the estate and beneficiaries of the resources and wealth of the estate, while Kamala and his offspring, according to them, are condemned in life to be labourers of the estate with nothing to show for it. Butake is saying that this can only breed escalating conflict and violence, and a bane to harmonious existence.

This irony reinforces one of the burning issues in the African contemporary society, as the author through representation shows a society where those in control of the resources and wealth manipulate the less privileged to labour without adequate compensation. Kamala is shocked to hear a change in their agreement, which he signs as "Brotherhood", but now it is "Bondagehood". This brings out a society where leaders have categorised leadership in terms of corruption, fraud and exploitation and careless about the aspiration and expectations of the people. Symbolically, the

author represents the post independent Cameroon where the masses thought that independence was an index of fulfilment, but misery and frustration was the outcome of independence. Thus, it is a call for leaders to construct good leadership.

Leadership is not different in Kelvin Ngong Toh's *Symphonic Shades*. He presents two sets of people who come from different regions of Njanga land with different cultures; those from Eastern Njanga land (Jean and Fatima) and those from Western Njanga land (John and Christina) and finally an anonymous character Prof. who happens to be a lady with no specific cultural background. Prof is a universal character whose intellectual vision has no colouration; she is impartial and objective. The above mentioned are university students of Njanga land whose cultural differences stand as a point of conflict among children who share the same fatherland due to colonial vestiges by leaders. Those from Eastern Njanga land claim superiority over John and Christina who are from the Western part of Njanga land. According to Jean and Fatima, John and Christina are answerable to them because they claim they are in control of everything in the country and on campus. John and Christina are against because of Prof's lectures of living together based on her principles of Twoness. The conflict between these two camps is seen below:

Fatima:

Let her be. She likes trouble and it will be given to her. She thinks she will be the one to change Njanga Land and this university. As long as people continue to eat and swell their bank accounts in this system, Prof and her band of trouble makers will talk and write and nothing will ever change. Maybe the only change is in the prisons now. But what is sure is that the rulers will fight them and as we know, they will silence their noise...

Jean:

And that noise is already a nuisance especially coming from these people from the West of this country. Now I am missing a class because she can't keep her mouth shut. People just sit, think anything and feel the pleasure and pressure to say it. They think it is easy to lead a country like Njanga land...

John:

If it is not easy, let them leave. Who is begging them to lead? People are gnawing on us and saying it is not easy. Does the mosquito pity us when it sucks of our precious blood? Does it care when it injects malaria into us? This is a police controlled university. Ears are everywhere and eyes are everywhere. No one can hide on this campus. And a full-grown man is preaching the strange sermon of not easy to rule. (9-10)

It is unfortunate that the university which is supposed to preach universal values, project the scientific method of approaching issues has become a breeding ground for potential conflicts. The above extract shows that the society is structured in a way that those from the Eastern Njanga land are the ruling class with evidence of failed leadership, and those from the Western Njanga are subjected to take instructions from the Eastern Njanga land. This is clear when Fatima refers to Prof, Christina and John as a band of trouble makers, reminding them that no matter what they attempt to do in order to change their condition, nothing will happen because the leaders are not concerned with their conditions; rather, they are more interested in what enters their bank accounts for their enjoyment. As such, the leaders will not take any nuisance from them. She refers to their cry for help as noise, and that implies the rejection of dominance going on in the Njanga land, which explains why no one cares about the detention of Prof because her ideological posture is the very antithesis of the regime in place. This angered John especially when Jean mentions that it is not an easy task to lead a country like Njanga. John sees a society where leaders are swelling their bank accounts and those from Western Njanga Land have nothing to benefit. This situation has created conflict to children of the same country who are supposed to stand for one another, but corruption and marginalisation have held them captives. John uses a metaphor when he compares the leaders to

mosquitoes. This is a demonstration of how parasitic the leaders have become; sucking and feeding on the blood of the working class. This shows the extent the western Njanga land are exploited and marginalised in a country where there are police forces in the same campus. He also uses synecdoche: “Ears are everywhere and eyes are everywhere.” The implication is that, there is nothing happening in the campus, and the society at large that the people are not aware of, yet nothing is done to change the situation. However, it is quite unfortunate that those they expect to see into their worries are all corrupt and failed in leading the people.

When a political system fails, one may be tempted to think that the Church which is seen as the moral conscience of the society is the only hope. However, as Ngugi wa Thiong’o has observed elsewhere in *Homecoming* (1972), Christianity and colonialism are twin brothers, and capitalism is their first cousin. () Failed leadership is also evident in the religious domain as the western culture claims superiority over the Africa culture. This is evident in Francis Ateh’s *Seat of Thorns* as the Bishop and the Roman Catholic church expel Father Ndong from Church because he creates a blend between the two cultures which escalated conflict. This is evident in the discourse below:

“We hear you allowed yourself to be enthroned as the Chief of your village, Aboa; you participate in pagan rituals and sacrifices; and you no longer wear mass vestments etc. Are these true?” the Bishop asked... What do you mean by God clearly spoke to you?” asked Fr. Mulligan... Why did you not inform the Bishop of your dilemma and decisions?... “Is it true you do not wear mass vestments anymore and allow men to wear caps in church?” asked Fr. Humphrey Jones.... “Hm!” the Bishop exclaimed. “And this thing about drink palm wine in church and using it for consecration.” ... “This thing about you baptising polygamists. Is it also true?” ... “Have you been truly taking part in those pagan rituals?... “We hear you have put up Pictures of your ancestors in churches, encouraging people to pray through them.” ... “And your refusal to send your percentage of church contributions to the Pope as directed in my last Episcopal letter.” ... “These accusations of you meddling with people’s wives and young girls?” ... “Following the regulations of the church, do you think you should not be sanctioned?” (102-106).

The above accusations except for the last are all true. Father Ndong fights for the enforcement of regulations and religious ecumenism between the cultures. During colonialism, the Whiteman condemned the African culture and attributed it to paganism, and forced Africans to see their culture as the way through for eternal life. This escalates conflict between those who refused to be part of the new way of life and the Whiteman’s. Father Ndong has a mastery of both cultures and sees no crime or sin in practising the African way of life, which is termed barbaric. With God’s instructions, he seeks ways to blend these cultures for peaceful coexistence. This justifies why he accepts his title as the Aboa (chief maker of the Kom people), and Reverend father to the Catholic Church. The above accusations create conflict due to intolerance on the side of the Whiteman. The Bishop and the panel are angry with Father Ndong, and this equally leads to his dismissal from the Catholic church for going against their doctrines.

The conflict extends to the entire kingdom of Kom as the Fon warns and swears to punish anyone caught going to the church because the one who shows them the through way to God has been sanctioned. Father Ndong breaks the harden hearts to accept Christ using the things they are familiar with to praise God. God even speaks to him to use every aspect of his culture for His glory. Father Ndong takes his time to study and investigate why his culture was termed barbaric and evil, and realises that, there is nothing evil about his culture, rather, the Whiteman failed to study the culture, and this made them to draw baseless and subjective conclusions and assumptions. Thus, their leadership in African was based on intolerance, which explains why conflict is not excluded in the religious domain.

At the end of the novel, Rev. Ndong’s courage, commitment and determination to blend the two cultures pays off, as conflict is brought to its barest minimum. This is to say that tolerance and freedom of worship without bias or contempt to another way of life can mitigate and minimize

escalating conflict. Given that colonialism was violent in its nature, and considering that Christianity and colonialism are twin brothers, it is not surprising.

Another potent element that can be used to resolve conflict and create sustainable peace in a contemporary society is folklore.

### **Folklore as a Tool for Peacebuilding**

Folklore has been a vital element for peacebuilding and sustainable existence in Africa. It helps pass across the history of peace from generation to generation to maintain the culture of peace. Bole Butake employs folklore to reveal the saga between two brothers and allegorically presents the English-speaking Cameroon and the French-speaking Cameroon as two different colonial entities with different cultural heritages. The perplexity that Kamala faces forces him to embark on a search for his identity and family history through his children. Their family story is intended to free himself from the identity crisis that has resulted in escalated conflict causing suffering and misery. Kamala and his children perform a series of folk dances to relate to Kamalo their family saga, which Sawa concludes to be a community experience (74) as she addresses uncle Kamalo, welcome to this spectacular performance of the folklore, the family story, the family saga of Kamanda! (74-75). Sawa, Ngong and their father Kamala represent the entire community to seek solutions to mitigate the ever-present conflict in their society. Sawa impersonates the identity of Kamanda the goddess of Kamanda society calling for the entire community as she declares, "Arise! People of Kamanda, arise! I come as a sign of love from the hereafter, I come as a signal of the wealth of this land... I come as a sign of love and as post of warning. The wealth they bequeath to you shall come to nought... Unless you hold each other's hand in bond of brotherhood, unless you uphold the mores of the land and shun greed, unless you hold your heads high in the pride of your cultural heritage" (76-77). After their performers, Kamalo weeps as he realises that he has been enslaving his own twin brothers alongside his children. He subjects Ngong to child labour and rapes his own niece, Sawa. His heart bleeds for all the abominations he has committed and blames no one. He doubts if he can never be forgiven. But since the goal for Kamala and his children is to maintain peace and unity, they all forgive him and peacebuilding takes it form. Thus, if leaders can learn from Kamalo, violent conflict will be out of the picture in the society. The implication of folklore will therefore help mitigate violent conflict in the society.

Toh also employs folklore as a tool for peaceful coexistence. He uses Prof to represent an agent of peace. She is an anonymous character representing universality. She has no identity, but from her description, she is an elderly woman with virtues and moral vision. She uses intertextuality to tell the student the history of peace. Drawing her inspiration from WEB Du Bois's concept of twoness, she explains that, "Twoness stands for two in one; It deals with accepting one another, treating mankind with dignity and love for all, we all are created in God's image and so human tribe should break all artificial barriers (26). She also references "Mimba we", Family Saga, "Martin Luther King that dreamed of a great nation, Bob Marley that cried one love, Nelson Mandela that will cry for the umbrella nation, John Fru Ndi that called for justice to all" (23). These are writers and artists who have preached love and living together. She calls for all to apply them and embrace peaceful coexistence as seen in the text. In this text, Fatima, Jean, Christina and John now see themselves as one people with two colonial identities which are to be celebrated, mixed and not melt.

Francis Ateh in *Seat of Thorns* also utilizes folklore through the extensive use of proverbial language to create a harmonious existence. Ndong is from a noble and royal family, and he has a good mastery of his culture and, that explains why he still inherit his late uncle's position as the Aboa of the Kom Fondom, a position that is revered.

Because of the clash of the western culture and the indigenous culture, he goes to Rome to know more about the new way of life and bring it back to his community. To him, Africans are no longer living in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; as the 21<sup>st</sup> century has reduced the entire world into a global village where cultures should flourish and not melt, where cultures meet and mix thereby creating a multicultural society.



The position of Aboa (king maker of the Kom Fondom) has been vacant, and he thought that leaving the village will serve him the dilemma and challenge of cultural dualism. The Fon has been waiting for Ndong to come and assume his responsibility as the Aboa. It is shocking to him as Ndong comes back as a reverend Father in his home town. The Fon could tell without being told that Ndong's return to his home town was the handy work of their fore fathers. Out of excitement and joy, the Fon uses the following proverbs, "Our people say no matter how high an eagle flies, it must perch even only to rest. You left our land and travelled to faraway places and they say you learnt the secrets of the Whiteman..." (16). This justifies why Father Ndong is sent back to his home town because running away will not settle the long religious conflict he left behind. He relates this by asserting that, "Mbehhh, I am back. Our people say when a child catches game, he takes it home to his father. "I found so much truth in the teachings of the Whiteman that I wish to share with you and our people," (16). Father Ndong does not want to work on assumptions, he went right to Rome to get the truth about the culture of the Whiteman, and the startling revelation is that Western culture is not as bad as other Africans think. This is why he explains to the Fon that there is much truth about the teachings of the white man.

Based on the single story, the Whiteman had about the African culture, he also takes time to go deep into those secret juju houses they termed barbaric and see for himself what makes it barbaric. He affirms that, "I also realised when I joined these juju societies that they are nothing but regulatory instruments of the society. The *Kwifoin*, for instance, is the legislative arm of Kom society where laws are made and everybody, including the king of the land, is judged" (105). He wonders why the Whiteman based his judgment on African culture on assumptions because they failed to study in detail the culture of the African people. From his findings, he restores the hope of the people by hybridising the cultures for peaceful coexistence. He brings in juju and the secret societies to the church; he puts the pictures of some exemplary people who had lived in the different villages and put them up in their churches, encouraging the worshippers to pray through them or at least mention them in their prayer alongside white saints in the various churches he constructed in the village (38-39). He also replaced the mass wine with palm wine in church and wears the Kom regalia during mass (103). He believes that the solemnity lies in one's faith in God, not what you wear or drink. With this new dispensation of worship, the entire Kom land jubilates because Rev. Father-Aboa Ndong has resolved the ever-present religious conflict that made some Kom people like the Fon to stay away from church because their ways of life were rebuked, condemned, chastised and termed barbaric; Rev. Ndong restores this for the glory of God. Thus, father Ndong constructs religious ecumenism in the Kom community.

On the side of the Whiteman, the Bishop and his jury members should also benefit from the growth of the church. The narrator states: "There was dead silence in the room as Ndong's speech and direct accusations sank into the senior officials of the church, his honest, fearless and straight forward nature stunned the prelates and took them completely off guard" (107). The author's use of adjective, 'dead' to describe their silence indicates and demonstrates how dumfounded the entire panel of priests trying Ndong is. His fiery arguments and submission call for deep and sober reflections. The Bishop asserts:

for all my years of work here I have never seen such frankness. Black people tremble before authority and lie about almost everything.

"But this one is different. He breathes truth and honesty. You could feel it in his words, very simple and straightforward. Fr. Giovanni agreed.

"He touches on the very essence of enculturation. Making it sound very easy to apply. Just that he goes about it the wrong way. Fr. Mulligan enjoined.

"I think this guy is a rebel. Listen to what he said about sending the quota of arms to the diocese...I think the guy is a dangerous element," argued Fr. Laurence Fabrice.

"Don't forget there is an element of truth in what he says Fabrice...Fr Mulligan put in. (107-108)

From the discourse above, this study asserts that, the hybridisation and cultural revalorisation do not only end at the level of the Kom people; it also reaches the side of the white man as they deliberate on Father Ndong's truthfulness concerning aspects and practises they condemned in the past. It makes them give a rethink as the Bishop wonders where Ndong got such guts and courage to address such issues that have been programmed by the white man. He affirms that, he has never seen such throughout his life in Kom because black before rather tremble in his presence. Fr Mulligan reasons with others on the truthfulness he brings out which is very relevant, but Fr Laurence sees him as a rebel based on his Rome anti sentiments regarding sending part of the money collected in the local churches in Kom to Rome. Father Ndong refuses to send money to Rome on the basis that Rome is financially saturated, rather, Rome should help develop poor churches in Africa. Father Ndong therefore provides a counter discourse to the hegemonic dominance of the Catholic church in post-colonial Africa. The author knows that peacebuilding is a long-term process, so he does not expect everybody to accept change at the same time, because it is rather a gradual process.. It will be wise for the Whiteman to learn tolerance and acceptance of differences as well as hybridisation and enculturation for peaceful coexistence.

### Conclusion

This paper set out to examine conflict and peacebuilding in Butake, Ateh and Toh works., Analysing these three narratives against the backdrop of New historicism and the social conflict theory, The study revealed that colonialism, the failure of nationalism and triumph of neo-colonialism and religious intolerance constitute a bane to sustainable peace as they are potential factors that breed conflicts in African contemporary society. We have been able to discuss that failed leadership is the cause of most conflicts in Africa, ranging from political, social, economic and religion. The study proposed good leadership, folklore, religious tolerance and enculturation as factors that can help mitigate and frustrate escalating conflicts in contemporary society.

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