

THE LOGIC OF PEACE IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN WORLDVIEW: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Emmanuel Iniobong Archibong

University of Uyo

&

Remigius Achinike Obah

University of Port Harcourt

Abstract

The study interrogates the provisions of peace in African worldview from the perspective of the hierarchy of force. Force in African worldview is unique in so many ways in that it captures the different categorizations of being. Johan Galtung sees peace from two points of view. The first is positive peace which is peace as stability, equilibrium or the internal states of a human being which corresponds to all good things in the world community particularly cooperation and integration between human groups. The second is peace as absence of organized violence between major human groups also known as negative peace. The second category of peace is the major captivation of this study. The study employing the method of critical analysis, examines the hierarchy of force in traditional African worldview from where it argues that peace as the absence of organized violence can be extrapolated by reason of man being at the centre of creation. Deductively then, man's life ought only to be strengthened by a means other than himself or his fellow man. Hence, in the case where Africans particularly get involved in war, violent conflict, hostility and bloodletting among themselves, it becomes an aberration and a contradiction since they are all connected with one another and share a common destiny. This position can also be applied to human preservation everywhere (East and West) on the face of the earth thereby checking wanton destruction of lives through violent conflicts.

Keywords: *Violent Conflict, Peace, Force, Reality, Brotherhood*

Introduction

Before logic as a discipline became systematized from Aristotle to the modern day logicians such as Boole, Russell and others, humans (*Homo sapiens*) have had the ability to make sense of reality using the common instrumentality of reason. Humans are

given to clear thinking which accounts for why the world is impressively organized with evidence in law, communication, healthcare, science, technology, the arts and so on. Traditional Africa is replete with men of rationality as displayed in various sector of the African life. This natural display of pure wisdom is the basis upon which the African interprets reality and makes sense of it and Asouzu rightly opines that “all matters of ontology begin with providing the enabling horizon within which the idea of being can be creditably articulated”¹

Peace theorizing or reflection in traditional African worldview is both philosophical and religious. This is the foundation upon which it can be meaningfully interrogated. Thus, no discussion about any aspect of the African life can be meaningful, if it does not begin from how the African conceive force ("vital life force" or "being"). Force in this sense is understood as the reality which though invisible, is superior in man so that the fundamental notion under which “being” is conceived lie within the category of forces. For Tempels, "force is a necessary element in 'being' and the concept 'force' is inseparable from the definition of 'being'. There is no idea among Bantu (African) of 'being' divorce from the idea of 'force'. Without the element 'force', 'being' cannot be conceived"²

This theory or notion of “vital force” in traditional Africa will help to elucidate the unique way(s) Africans think about peace slightly different from its popular understanding and acceptance of peace by the West. Peace as a universal concept is already ingrained in the notion of “vital force” in African worldview. In this worldview, it becomes an aberration for there to be violence or war in the fabric of traditional African life and in relationship with others. These and more perspective shall inform the thrust of the discussion in the study.

Conceptual Clarifications

In other to properly set the stage for the ensuing discussion, there is need to clarify the intended meaning of some fundamental concepts such as logic, peace, worldview and vital force that are central to the study.

Logic: Apart from its being a traditional branch of philosophy popularized by Aristotle (the West), and as a tool, it helps make for correct reasoning. This suggests that, even

¹I. Asouzu. *Ibuanidanda: New Complimentary Ontology Beyond World Immanetism, Ethnocentric Reduction and Imposition*, (Zurich: Lit Verlag GMBHS Co., 2007), 10.

²P. Tempels. *Bantu Philosophy*. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959), 34

without the systematic nature of logic as a field of study, humans can still reason culturally as rational animals. This is why Blackburn avers that “the aim of a logic is to make explicit the rules by which inferences may be drawn, rather than to study the actual reasoning processes that people use, which may or may not conform to those rules”³ The logic of a people therefore can be explained as that which informs their thinking upon a given subject matter and how they make sense of reality whether in written or unwritten corpus.

Peace: This is a universal concept that the human mind is familiar with and longed for. According to Mial, peace is: (i) the absence of war (absence of direct violence) (ii) justice and development (absence of structural violence) (iii) respect and tolerance between people (iv) Gaia (harmony or balance in and with the ecosystem and ecosphere) (v) tranquility or inner peace (spiritual peace) and (vi) wholeness and making whole (being complete)⁴ Johan Galtung avers that:

Peace seems to be an “umbrella concept”, a general expression of human desires of that which is good, that which is ultimately to be pursued. Mankind will always be heading for goals, some of them very concrete, some of them abstract and diffuse, and “peace” seems to be one of the terms that is used for this generalized goal⁵

Galtung further gave three points of the term peace to include (i) stability or equilibrium or the internal states of human being i.e law and order (ii) peace as the absence of organized collective violence, in other words violence between major human groups particularly nations but also between classes, racial and ethnic groups (iii) peace as cooperation and integration between human groups with less emphasis on the absence of violence⁶.

Philosophically, peace can be likened to a “precinct” state of affair. A situation where everything is alright and there is no deficit or deficiency anywhere except harmony some of the time. This precinct description of peace seems widespread in

³S. Blackburn. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. (Oxford: University Press, 2005), 213

⁴H. Mial, “What do peace studies contribute distinctly to the study of peace?” paper presented at BISA Conference, (Bradford: The Richardson Institute, Lancaster University, 2000), 13.

⁵J. Galtung. *Theories of Peace: A Systematic Approach to Peace Thinking*. (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1967), 6.

⁶J. Galtung. *Theories of Peace: A Systematic Approach to Peace Thinking*. (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1967), 12

human reality which is why more walls are being built across spaces towards the realization of peace around the globe.

Worldview: Worldview is where a people make sense of the meaning of life, existence, reality, the universe, values, afterlife, peace and the supernatural. It could also relate to any ideology, philosophy, theology, movement or religion that provides an overarching approach to understanding God, the world, the familiar and unfamiliar features of the universe. Worldview is man's construct clearly embedded in culture and culture is diverse and dynamic with the good and bad aspects. Worldview then becomes "a standard to a people by which all things are measured as real and worthwhile. It supplies the criteria for all thinking and engenders a basic understanding of the true, the good, the beautiful"⁷.

Traditional African Worldview: Placide Tempels presented the traditional African worldview of the theory of force using the Bantu-African as a basis. In the minds of the Bantu, all beings in the universe possess vital force of their own: human, animal, vegetable, or inanimate objects. Each "being has been endowed by God with a certain force, capable of strengthening the vital energy of the strongest being of all creation: man"⁸. Force is also referred to as the potent life or vital energy. Thus, Tempels avers that:

We need not be surprised that the Bantu allude to this vital force in their greetings one to another, in such forms of address as: "you are strong", or "you have life in you", "you have life strongly in you", and that they express sympathy in such phrases as "your vital force is lowered", "your vital energy is sapped. A similar idea is found in the form of sympathy,..." "you are dying",...In their own minds they are simply indicating a diminution of vital force...⁹.

There is a common understanding amongst Africans with regard to the phenomenology of vital force that explains the whole gamut of being as well as its interpretative features. For Africans, 'being is force and force is being' and it is in hierarchical mode. Apart from Tempels who systematized and popularized the concept of vital force in scholarship, other scholars such as: Alex Kagame, Johannes Jahn's, Dagogo Idoniboye,

⁷D. Naugle *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 101.

⁸P.Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959), 31.

⁹P.Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959),32.

Martins Nkemnkia, John Mbiti, Odera Oruka, Pauline Hountondji, IkengaMetuh and Innocent Asouzu have accepted the doctrine of vital force as the canon upon which African worldview can be understood. Hence, Mulago avers that “the unifying factor, the cement that holds all things together is vital union which transcends the merely visible and biological and reaches out to the invisible world”¹⁰.

Vital force as a fundamental belief in African worldview explains the whole of reality for the African from the natural to the non-natural. It also covers the ethical, psychological, political, social, religious and economic life of the African people. Even the subject matter of conflict (resolution and management) and peace mediation is contained in it.

The Provision of Peace in African Worldview

Peace as a concept, notion or state is already contained in African thinking and worldview in the hierarchy of force. That man is strategically placed at the centre of force speaks volume. Horizontally, man depends on the Supreme Force (God) and the living dead (ancestors) because of their supernatural abilities to help. On the vertical plane, man has plants, animals and minerals (natural resources) that he depends on for his sustainability. Naturally then, man is the king and the one who is in charge of the earth and his survival. He dominates the earth and everything in it for his preservation.

Man finds his essence in his participation to a greater extent in the supreme Force-God. Man (living or dead) is believed can directly reinforce or diminished the being of another man since all forces can be strengthened or enfeebled. Man grows, develops, acquires knowledge and in the process, increases his force or vitality. Mbiti asserts that “even inferior beings such as inanimate beings and minerals are forces which by reason of their nature have been put at the disposal of man, of living human forces or of man’s vital forces”¹¹.

Just as man is a force, so are plants, animals and material deposits of the environment. Each of these can be strengthened or diminished in quality. For example, if a snake bites a man, it can diminish his vital force or life force leading to death. And if a man kills a goat for meat, he diminishes the goat’s vital force and strengthened his from the nutrients derived. The real struggle therefore is on man’s life and the odds

¹⁰U. Mulago. “Vital Participation: The cohesion principle of the Bantu community”. (eds) Dickson and P Ellington In: *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*. (London: Lutherwort Press, 1969), 32.

¹¹Mbiti, J. S. *African Religious and Philosophy*. (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1969), 11.

against him such as the attack from plants, animals and minerals in the environment that puts his life in jeopardy.

Consequently, there is no provision in the hierarchy of force in African worldview that suggests a man should strengthen his vital force through another man. The implication is that if anything should come in-between the peace of man, it shouldn't be from himself or another man but from outside sources like the external environment and everything in it. This point is germane because when the word peace is mentioned in relation to the social strata of man, what is usually responsible will be the presence of violent conflict or a war situation. The question then would be: Why is man in conflict or at war with himself? Is conflict inevitable amongst men? Where there are conflicts, how might it resolved in African worldview?

Why Conflict among Men?

It is often said that conflict is inevitable among men because of several clashes of interests. Violent conflict has a close affinity with war or strife. It speaks about a tussle or struggle that brings advantage to one and a disadvantage to the other. However, conflict is not bad in itself until it generates into harm done to one or the other. This is why one can have conflict within oneself as an individual. For Oyeshola:

Conflict in essence, is the construction of a special type of reality. It may be viewed as occurring along cognitive (perception), emotional (feeling) and behavioural (action) dimension. This three-dimensional perspective can help us understand the complexity of conflict and why a conflict sometimes seems to proceed in contradictory direction.¹²

Understanding conflict from an ontological basis makes it easier to unravel its true nature different from just describing a conflict situation. Conflict is a reality that is common amongst men in their existential sojourn. Conflict can be personal, interpersonal or intergroup. Conflict that is blown out of proportion among persons often lead to hostility as well as collateral damage. When interests clash and put one or more persons at a disadvantage, conflict becomes inevitable. Hence, conflicts among men is simply as a result of an "ontological void" (a strong craving or desire) that cannot be met and a good example is the "America struggle in Vietnam viewed as part of a new global conflict against communism while the Vietnamese saw war against the United States as the latest of a life-long fight for independence"¹³.

¹²D. Oyeshola. *Conflict and Context of Conflict Resolution*. (Ile-Ife: University Press, 2005), 101.

¹³M. Hall. *The Vietnam War*. (Edinburg: Pearson Education, 2000), 1.

Conflict has an ideology that motivates its justification as have been seen in the American/Vietnam war. It has to do with incompatibility in achieving a goal which is circumstantial. It is however difficult to find a conflict situation that doesn't necessarily lead to violent expressions even though conflict can be argued to be normal amongst humans and something that cannot be wished away. Social conflict therefore, is the aspect of conflict that is of utmost concern to this discourse and one that has snowballed in many ways all around the world leading to violent actions that has left many dead and displaced. Hence, conflict becomes "the simultaneous occurrence of two or more mutually antagonistic impulse or motives"¹⁴ How is this mitigated in African worldview of force?

Violent Conflict Checks in the African Worldview of Force

In African Worldview, conflict is to be expected in any social relationship involving man and this point is very well understood. What happens if irreconcilable conflict springs up between two or more persons leading to the diminution of the vital force of other human beings? The way this question is answered from an African point of view can teach people of other cultures and worldviews some lessons about preserving the sanctity of the human life.

The African worldview of force contains some prescription that ought to bring about restraint in the face of conflict leading to harm and it is that: human life force must be strengthened and not diminished. In other words, conflict is inevitable among people but it should never lead to harm or the loss of life. By this, the taking of one's life by another is prohibited in African worldview of force. Thus, it is not in the fulcrum of African morality for a person to terminate another person's life through a physical or mystical means. Ozumba gives reasons why African morality has a sacred undertone thus:

African morality is fashioned or tailored by the interplay of human and divine forces. Force here must be seen in terms of 'being and existence'. Everything is force. In other words, force is the other term for being. Force is not different from the objects. Force in African context is not seen as energy exerted by a thing instead force is the entirety of being. In the African set up we have hierarchy of forces. God, divinities and spirits. These are divine

¹⁴J. Chaplin. *Dictionary of Psychology*. (Newyork: Dell Publishing, 1979), 109.

forces. We also have human beings, certain animals, trees, stones and other existents which are endowed with force or degree of hierophany.¹⁵

The above quote by Ozumba give us some insights about the value of life of an individual. Deductively, the life of an individual is superintended by divine force. Since peace mediation has been provided for in the hierarchy of force in African worldview by the understanding and responsibility of preserving human life force from diminution either from external forces (animal/plants) or human forces, it becomes easier for aggrieved parties to be reconciled through a reminder of what is required by kinsmen who are in conflict or for sages in the community to wade into the matter of conflict. It is cheaper for parties in conflict to reconcile their differences amicably rather than incur the wrath of the gods because the Supreme Force and the ancestors act as checks and balances on the affairs of men. There are times when a crime may be hidden from the eyes of mortal men, but not from the eyes of the gods. Ndubuisi reiterate the importance of going the way of peace in a conflict situation thus:

Life being a gift from the 100 igh, no one is expected to tamper with what he cannot create or replace. To terminate life is seen as the worst crime that one could commit. Terminologies like provocation, self-defense etc are not used as defense for killing in this community. It is the belief of the people that no reason whatsoever should be adequate reason for one to terminate one's fellow life. It is an abomination before men and the gods....¹⁶

Life is sacred to the African and this sacredness is predicated upon the belief that man should not take what he cannot create. One would wonder if this is the same value of life placed by other worldviews of the earth especially the West because the Orientals are known to have similar worldview with Africans. The truth contained in this worldview act as a deterrent in escalating conflicts. Conflict would not be seen as negative if harm or the loss of lives is not involved. Juxtaposing this position with the wanton violent killings all over Africa and the world in these contemporary times only suggests that Africans have forgotten their history.

Ijeomah alludes that "the process of the relationship between and among relatives in African worldview involves a dovetailing of realities into one another. It is through this type of relationship that equilibrium is maintained in the universe of things.

¹⁵G. Ozumba. "African Ethics" *Footmarks on African Philosophy* (ed) A. F. Uduiguomen. (Lagos: OOP Press, 1995), 55-56.

¹⁶F. Ndubuisi. "Crime and Punishment of an Ancient African Morality: In: *Footmarks on African Philosophy* (ed). A. F. Uduigwomen. (Lagos: OOP Press, 1995), 70.

In an attempt to aid this balance, humans resort to the use of charms, sacrifice, libation and ritual symbols”¹⁷. There is order and balance in the African hierarchy of force. This order, balance or equilibrium is meant for a peaceful and harmonious co-existence between all men, irrespective of colour or geographical location. The theory of vital force in African worldview is true and the same for all humans who may have their own unique interpretation. If there are lives that should be preserved from harm on the scale of importance, it would be humans. When there is mediation towards peace, this is what informs it. Arising from this understanding, it is safe to say that the theory of vital force in African worldview has the mechanism to bring about a peaceful and mutual co-existence amongst humans with the hindsight that human life is sacred and sacrosanct. Archibong noted that:

Man may be the wisest and most intelligent force compared to plants, animals and mineral resources but not to the ancestors, divinities or God who gives him divine inspiration and knowledge in general. Thus, man is not just a composite of matter alone; he has an immortal soul that lives on after the body dies. As such, African worldview does not confer loose freedom on men to live his life any how he deems fit. There has to be some divine regulations that will bring about order in the society.¹⁸

Evaluation

The theory of force can be jettisoned as being founded purely on a crude or mythical belief system without any scientific proof or evidence backing it up. Such position has its merit and demerit. For one, belief is fundamental to man just as it determines what course of action is taken and also a precursor to knowledge. Africans as a cultural people have their grounds for determining truth either as correspondence, coherence or pragmatic or all of the above. The Western treatment of the subject of conflict and peace has some strands that interconnect with that of traditional African thinking. Conflict is conflict anywhere in the globe just as peace is peace.

However, peace studies or research should focus on the traditional agenda of mapping and interpreting violence between groups and showing how this can be mitigated. It is from this perspective that it becomes imperative to examine traditional

¹⁷C. Ijeomah. *Harmonious Monism: A Philosophical Logic of Explanation for Ontological Issues in Supernaturalism in African Thought*. (Calabar: Jochrisan Publishers, 2014), 123.

¹⁸E. Archibong “A Critique of Force in African Worldview” In: *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 4, No. 4, (2018). 11.

African threshold of inter-personal relationship in order to ascertain how the African forbears were able to reconcile conflict without some, escalating into physical violence and harm. And if it does lead to physical violence and loss of lives, what measures is being put into place for retributive justice and the cleansing of the land. There is no gainsaying the fact that Africa as it is today, is proliferated with other external tradition and culture that has made it difficult for decisions on peace to be taken without some form of influence. Thus, Archibong avers that “the changing dynamics of our world today has ushered in western ideas that seem to have pushed aside the culture and tradition received and practiced by African forebears. This new culture has not fared any better in comparison to traditional African culture as there are gaps yet to be filled”¹⁹.

To this end, how has the regional bloc African Union (AU) and the world bloc United Nations (UN) been able to resolve the conflict crisis that bedevils the continent of Africa and elsewhere? That Africa is no longer those little isolated small communities of people, but a community of several independent nations is not in doubt. The African Union (AU) particularly, needs to be truly African. By this, the union has to be Pan-African in its quests for solving the numerous problems that bedevil Africa. It is common knowledge that there is a subtle external interference of some world powers that mitigates the decision of the (AU) perhaps on the grounds of getting aid. But the point remains that, if the (AU) cannot order the course of Africa by steering it to the shore of peace and progress, then it has failed in its mandate as a regional bloc to unite the whole of Africa.

The re-visitation of the notion of vital force in African traditional worldview gives the idea that Africa isn't bereft of logic with which to solve its myriads of problems. The major problem here is how the continent on a political scale is fast forgetting its root and history. Accordingly, it doesn't matter the size of the conflict, peace can always be attained. Africa has never at any time been at war with itself. It is the individuals or people of Africa that can be at war with each other. There may be communal conflicts here and there but none that cannot be resolved following the traditional understanding of conflict mediation and resolution from the truth of vital force of man and why it must be preserved from diminution.

¹⁹E. Archibong. “Traditional Oath-Taking in the Quest for Good Governance in Nigeria” In: *Oracle of Wisdom Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Vol. 1 No. 1, (2017). 73.

Conclusion

There will always be a struggle or a contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals especially in a world that is characterized by over population and fewer economic opportunities. The capitalists' posture of the framework of the world today makes it such that "the winner takes it all". Incompatibility of human desires is not one knotty issue to be resolved just by a wave of the hand. Having adopted the approach of Western and Eastern culture that hasn't taken away the conflict in most part of Africa till date, it behooves on African leaders to go back to her most cherished traditional worldview from where they can understand how the African Patriarch handled issues of conflict with regards to engendering lasting peace. Certainly, there will be a lot of puzzles to fix and riddles to unravel as it won't be an instant "quick fix" situation to current conflict situation. However, it would be a step in the right direction.

Peace cannot be discussed in isolation of conflict just as the solution to a conflict situation cannot be discussed outside how reality is conceived by a people. It is by this reasoning process that the study concedes that "the universe contains things that appeared to change, yet these very same things also possessed a certain endurance or permanence"²⁰. The traditional African worldview of force is still relevant in solving Africa's myriads of problem including conflict resolution and peace building initiative and by extension that of people of other culture and worldview.

Bibliography

- Archibong, E. "Traditional Oath-Taking in the Quest for Good Governance in Nigeria" In: *Oracle of Wisdom Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Vol. 1 No. 1, 2017.
- Archibong, E. "A Critique of Force in African Worldview" In: *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 4, No. 4, 2018.
- Archibong, E. "A Critique of the Concept of Force in Modern Science" In: *NnamdiAzikiwe Journal of Philosophy*. Vol.11, No.1, 2019.
- Asouzu, I. *Ibuanyidanda: New Complimentary Ontology Beyond World Immanetism, Ethnocentric Reduction and Imposition*, (Zurich: Lit Verlag GMBHS Co. 2007).

²⁰E. Archibong "A Critique of the Concept of Force in Modern Science" In: *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy*. Vol.11, No.1, (2019). 166.

- Blackburn, S. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. (Oxford: University Press, 2005).
- Chaplin, J. P. *Dictionary of Psychology*. (New York: Dell Publishing, 1979).
- Galtung, J. *Theories of Peace: A Systematic Approach to Peace Thinking*. (Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, 1967).
- Hall, M. *The Vietnam War*. Edinburg: Pearson Education, 2000.
- Ijeomah, C. O. *Harmonious Morum: A Philosophical Logic of Explanation for Ontological Issues in Supernaturalism in African Thought*. (Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers, 2014).
- Mbiti, J. S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1969).
- Mial, H. "What do peace studies contribute distinctly to the study of peace?" paper presented at BISA Conference, (Bradford: The Richardson Institute, Lancaster University, 2000).
- Mulago, U. "Vital Participation: The cohesion principle of the Bantu community". Dickson and P Ellington (eds) *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*. (London: Lutherwort Press, 1969).
- Naugle D. K., *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2002).
- Ndubuisi, F. N. "Crime and Punishment of an Ancient African Morality: in *Footmarks on African Philosophy* (ed). A. F. Uduiguomen. (Lagos: OOP Press, 1995).
- Ozumba, G. O. "African Ethics" *Footmarks on African Philosophy* (ed) A. F. Uduiguomen. (Lagos: OOP Press, 1995).
- Oyeshola, D. O. P. *Conflict and Context of Conflict Resolution*. (Ile-Ife: University Press, 2005).
- Tempels, P. *Bantu Philosophy*. (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959).