

## **PEACE RESEARCH WITH A DIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE: A LOOK TO AFRICA**

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### **Abstract**

This article builds upon Chadwick Alger's expressed wish in the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Peace Studies* that the journal and the whole international peace research community include a diversity of cultures, experiences, and non-Western approaches. The author uses her long acquaintance with and great interest in African traditions to make readers familiar with some central concepts within peace studies that have African roots. In this article five concepts are discussed: *ubuntu*, the conflict-solving methods of *Palaver* and of *Mato Oput, ujamaa*, and *kujitegemea*. The last two concepts are closely related to the philosophy of Julius Nyerere. The author focuses on the great contrast between the individualistic Western philosophy of "Cogito, ergo sum"- I think, therefore I am - and the collectivist African *ubuntu* philosophy of "a person is a person through other people". While the Western judicial system is based on punishment, the traditional African judicial system as discussed here is more concerned with reintegration of the plaintiff into the social community.

### **Introduction**

It has always been an IPRA [International Peace Research Association] goal to strive to achieve the maximum possible diversity in its community (Alger, 1996a: 1).

In the introduction to the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Peace Studies*, a journal of the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), Chadwick Alger (1996a) expresses his expectations for the new journal. He hopes that the journal will contribute to a type of peace research, and peace education, that is relevant to all of humanity. In his own words:

Of course, this cannot be achieved unless voices from the whole world are to be found in our community. All members of IPRA know that we have from the beginning struggled to create a truly communal community but have never fully succeeded. Indeed we still have only token membership and participation from Africa and Latin America. With the exception of Japan, involvement from Asia is also very limited. Will this journal

replicate existing patterns of IPRA memberships, or will it open the greater road to diversity? (Alger, 1996a: 1).

Whether the journal, in the eight years of its existence, has fulfilled Alger's hopes is an empirical question. It is possible to count how many of the articles have been written by peace researchers from the South. However, the fact that a certain writer, researcher or philosopher comes from Asia, Africa or Latin-America does not necessarily mean that s/he will further perspectives from her/his continent and thus contribute to the diversity Alger views as an ideal for the *International Journal of Peace Studies*, as well as for IPRA.

Many researchers in developing countries get their higher degrees in industrialized countries and are trained in Western thought. Although the "sandwich" programmes, popular with donors giving scholarships for study in industrialized countries, typically require field studies in the countries of origin, the information is normally put into existing Western theories and concepts. In this way, raw material is being taken from the developing countries and processed in the West. We are not seeing that the developing countries also have something to teach us in the way of theoretical insight.

### **The World Has Something to Learn From Africa**

Archie Mafeje (1992), writing on the indigenization of intellectual discourse in Africa, reminds African intellectuals of the guiding principle in Socratic thought: "Know thyself." Looking at African philosophical thought, he finds grounds for a new reconstruction and self-realisation. He finds that unwritten accounts, transmitted in stories, legends, and myths reflect African philosophical thought in various ways and are sources of high significance and authenticity. In an article concerning the teaching of philosophy in African universities, Kwasi Wiredu laments:

An African may learn philosophy in a Western institution of higher learning abroad or at home and become extremely adroit in philosophical disputation; he may even be able to make original contributions in some branch of philosophy. The fact remains that he would be engaged in Western, not African philosophy. Surprisingly, many Africans accept this; they have even seemed to take it as a matter of course...The usual practice seems to reserve all references to African conceptions to classes on African philosophy. As far as the main branches of philosophy are concerned, African philosophical ideas might just as well be non-existent. This trend, I suggest, ought to be reversed (1984: 31-32).

Wiredu makes himself a spokesperson for the strategy of "counter-penetration." This strategy is meant to impress upon the world that it has something to learn from Africa. In the evolving global culture, the West does well to listen to Africa. In fact,

there is much the West could learn from Africans about leading a good and harmonious life, taking care of each other and beloved dead ones, respecting the wisdom of older people, and being one with nature and the spiritual world. Counter-penetration is a strategy mentioned by Ali Mazrui (1978: 350), who raises the question of whether African universities that have been so permeated by Western culture in turn can affect Western thoughts and values. He thinks this *is* possible and outlines the strategies of domestication, diversification and counter-penetration (Mazrui, 1978). The balance of cultural trade between the North and the South must be restored. The strategy will not work, however, unless Africa builds on its own foundation and stops mimicking the West. Neither will it work before Africa is allowed to work out its own educational policies and not be forced to adopt those worked out by the World Bank or by donors overseas.

Pai Obanya (1999), for many years the Director of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Culture Organization (UNESCO) regional office for West Africa located in Dakar, writes on future prospects for higher education in Africa and about the necessity for African countries to formulate their own national policies on higher education. These policies should, according to him, follow certain systematic steps. They must first contain questions about what type of learning should be undertaken, "What types of activity are of the greatest worth, and how should these be reflected in higher education?" (Obanya, 1999: 548). After an agreement has been reached on such a question, a statement of the qualities expected of academic and other staff must follow. According to Obanya, "Higher education in Africa in the years to come has to be guided by national policies, which are understood and accepted by the populations it is supposed to serve" (1999: 549).

In light of the "education for all" emphasis, Professor Komba of the University of Dar es Salaam, in an assessment of the Tanzanian "education for self-reliance" policy, stresses the need to "analyze the possibilities to revive and use dying traditional learning systems in various tribes" (Komba, 1996: 6). In the book *Local Knowledge and Wisdom in Higher Education*, I probed further into the issue of transforming African universities by using indigenous perspectives and local experience (Brock-Utne, 2000b). To me, the great question is: how is it at all possible to reconstruct the curriculum of African schools, to root it in African culture, without a great emphasis on indigenous research, preferably by African scholars who are clearly African-based in their outlook (Brock-Utne, 2000a; 2002)? Mazrui notes that "the full maturity of African education will come only when Africa develops a capacity to innovate independently" (1978: 352). This independent innovation may incorporate elements from the West but must be based in African roots. In his book on academic freedom in Africa, Mazrui notes that any academic freedom in Africa is being devalued by intellectual dependency:

It was not the traditional African that resembled the ape; it was the more Westernized one, fascinated by the West's cultural mirror. A disproportionate number of these cultural "apes" were and continue to be products of universities. Those African graduates who have become

university teachers themselves, have on the whole remained intellectual imitators and disciples of the West. African historians have begun to innovate methodologically as they have grappled with oral traditions, but most of the other disciplines are still condemned to paradigmatic dependency. This includes those African scholars who discovered Karl Marx just before Europe abandoned him (1994: 119).

According to Tanzanian biologists Adelaida Semesi and Felister Urassa (1991), many African women have accumulated knowledge about some of the causes and effects of crop failures, and spoiled food, and have devised ways to overcome such problems. Moreover, village women are great science teachers in the fields of agriculture, medicine, and food technology, and they pass their knowledge on to their children, friends, and neighbours through practical training. A mother will show the children how to plant seeds, weed, select seed, and identify pests and she will even explain about the different soils suitable for the different crops. She will also talk about food processing and food preservation, for instance, through drying or smoking meat. It should be noted that, since much of this knowledge is not documented, it is not easily developed or challenged. As a consequence, the accumulated knowledge is seldom consulted to develop a better understanding of the environment. This can be illustrated by the Kongwa groundnut scheme, which failed because local people were not consulted to assess the suitability of the soil and reliability of the climate to cultivate groundnuts (Semesi and Urassa, 1991).

Lancy (1996) points to sensitive and open-minded research by ecological anthropologists in recent years which has shown that the kind of subsistence practices followed by slash-and-burn horticulturalists, such as the Kpelle people in Liberia, far from being inefficient, are wonderfully adapted to the local ecology. He sees Western aid, whether in the areas of agriculture or education, as something which destroys the original culture and sets the Kpelle society on to the *Kwii* way. *Kwii* is a general term that refers to Westerners and Liberians who dress and talk like Westerners, live in towns, and participate in the cash economy. In order to avoid African societies going further on the *Kwii* way, African universities need to pursue research based on local experience in collaboration with the people of Africa. What is most needed now is for African researchers to be able to develop academic fields from African roots. In the fields of African languages, cultures, and dances; physical education; philosophy; law; and environmental studies, African perspectives have a lot to offer (Brock-Utne, 2000a).

It is important that African peace educators do not derive their theories mostly from Western peace educators, but search in their own heritage for an African way to deal with conflicts. Peace education is necessary for peaceful conflict resolution all over the world, but it has to build on local roots. In Alger's tool chest for peacebuilders, peace education is listed as the final peace tool and he observes, "Indeed, the successful employment of all that we have learned about peacebuilding in the Twentieth Century is dependent on peace education" (Alger, 1996b: 41). In this section of his article, Alger continually emphasizes the need for "a comprehensive view" of peace education and the "need to probe deeper and deeper" (41). Further, he points to the need to ask, "Did my

vision leave out the special problems of the Third World?" (42). These are important issues. Peace education needs to incorporate concepts from around the world. We need to do this not only to create more comprehensive peace education, but also because we in the West have much to learn from a continent like Africa that we could use in our own peace education.

In the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Peace Studies*, I mentioned the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE) which had outlined a three year research project in peace education (Brock-Utne, 1996). Among the objectives were the following:

- To research into the African concepts and terms of conflict, as well as into African methods, techniques and processes of conflict prevention, management and resolution.
- To establish and articulate a philosophy, principles and world outlook which underline African concepts of conflict, conflict prevention, management and resolution.
- To promote and generate public interest in African concepts of conflict, and methods, techniques and processes of conflict prevention, management, and resolution as a resource for managing and solving contemporary conflicts (AALAE, 1994: 19).

Unfortunately, this research project on peace education never got off the ground and the whole AALAE organisation, a pan-African non-governmental organisation (NGO), ceased to exist because of a lack of funding. The ideas and objectives of this organisation live on, however, and continue to intrigue Africanists wherever they are found.

Around Professor Kum'a Ndumbe III from Cameroon, who for some time held a Chair at the Freie Universität in Berlin, a challenging environment has developed made up of German political science students interested in Africa, African culture and African methods of conflict solving. Some of the students have done their field studies in Cameroon helping to build up a research centre in Duala, while others have spent much time in the library digging into traditional conflict resolution skills. I was approached by Kum'a Ndumbe, who had just become acquainted with my book on the intellectual recolonization of Africa (Brock-Utne, 2000), at the IPRA conference in Tampere in 2000. At the end of 2000, he invited me to give some lectures at the Freie Universität in Berlin and to meet his student group. My international students and I invited him and his German students to Oslo and, in February 2001, we held a seminar on traditional methods of conflict resolution in Africa. Kum'a Ndumbe and I speak German together and we both lectured in German in Berlin. In Oslo, the seminar went in English, but the written materials from Kum'a Ndumbe (2001), his students, e.g. Anne Richard (2002), and me (Brock-Utne, 2001) were in German. In the seminar, five concepts became central: the concept of *ubuntu*, the concepts and conflict-solving methods of *Palaver* and *Mato Oput*, and the concepts of *ujamaa* and of *kujitegemea*. The following sections detail these five concepts and show their importance for peace studies and approaches to peace education.

## Ubuntu

The concept of *ubuntu* denotes a cultural world-view that tries to capture the essence of what it means to be human. *Ubuntu* is found in diverse forms in many societies throughout Africa, most specifically among the Bantu languages of East, Central and Southern Africa. Its clearest articulation in southern Africa is found in the Nguni group of languages. One of the best definitions of the term has been given by Archbishop Desmond Tutu who, in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*, explains the term thus:

*ubuntu* is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks to the very essence of being human. When you want to give high praise to someone we say, 'Yu, u nobuntu'; he or she has *ubuntu*. This means that they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have. It also means that my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life. We say, 'a person is a person through other people' (in Xhosa *Ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu* and in Zulu *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye*). I am human because I belong, I participate, I share. A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes with knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are (Tutu, 1999: 34-35).

There is a great contrast between the individualistic Western philosophy of "Cogito, ergo sum"- I think, therefore I am - and the collectivist African philosophy of "I am human because I belong". From the thinking that one is a "human being through other human beings", it follows that what we do to others feeds through the interwoven fabric of social, economic and political relationships to eventually impact upon us as well. In a paper reflecting on *ubuntu*, Timothy Murithi (2000), from the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), looks at the importance of *ubuntu* for the work in the Truth and Reconciliation Committee in South Africa, a Committee chaired by Desmond Tutu. Murithi observes that even the supporters of apartheid were victims of the brutalizing system from which they benefited economically and politically. Apartheid distorted their view of their relationship with other human beings, which then impacted upon their own sense of security and freedom from fear.

The notion of *ubuntu* sheds light on the importance of peacemaking through principles of reciprocity and a sense of shared destiny between peoples. It provides a value system for giving and receiving forgiveness. It provides a rationale for sacrificing or letting go of the desire to take revenge for past wrongs.

### Palaver

Several ways of solving conflicts developed on the African continent are connected to the worldview of *ubuntu*. One of these is the institution known as *Palaver* and another, which will be explained later, is *Mato Oput*. The word *Palaver* stems from Portuguese and means “word, speech, discussion.” The way it is used in Africa can best be understood as “extended negotiation or conference” (Richard, 2002: 5). The *Palaver* institution is known in most African countries, but is underused in contemporary African society. The most comprehensive study of the *Palaver* in various African countries is still the one published by UNESCO (1979) twenty-five years ago.

The most important element of a *Palaver* is the concern about the relationship between the parties involved. This concern about the relationships between people during and after the *Palaver* process, as well as the concern about the reintegration of the loser, is a particularity of the African philosophy and can be contrasted with Western philosophy. According to Jannie Malan (1997: 87), this concern about restoring relations through conflict solving is typical of Africa and something Africa could teach to the rest of the world. *Palaver* is related to the worldview of *ubuntu* explained above, in which a person becomes a human being through his/her relation to other people.

According to Bidima (1997), a *Palaver* consists of the following five elements:

- The main aim of a *Palaver* is a search for a consensus based on a discussion between the parties involved. The consensus can be of a temporary kind. The main thing is that the different parties agree at least for the time being.
- The mediators are always important actors in any *Palaver*.
- The *Palaver* has an advisory form.
- To recreate, obtain and sustain peace is rule number one during any *Palaver* process. This is even more important than getting at the truth.
- The losers in the *Palaver* process are not left on their own as mere losers but care is taken that they are reintegrated in society.

The mediators are only there to facilitate the communication. They are there to summarize, to keep the flow in the discussion, but they have no authority over the group and can take no action in the name of the group. Those who take part in the *Palaver* know that the aim is to restore social harmony and balance in the community. A crime committed by an individual towards another individual is, in a *Palaver*, looked at as a crime against the whole community and also a crime that the community should have been able to avoid. According to Bidima (1997), the institution of *Palaver* demands an active tolerance from the parties involved. The *Palaver*, being an institution where all parties in a conflict are fully represented, builds on the idea that social, as well as political, conflicts can only be publicly solved. The philosophy behind the judicial systems in the West is built on punishment. Justice is to be done by punishing the culprit. The philosophy of *Palaver* builds on compensation and, at the same time, reintegration of the culprit into society.

Most African societies have developed institutions like the *Palaver*, though they may be called by different names. In Rwanda a similar institution is called the *Gacaca*.

communities and the society as a whole. The justice needs in Rwanda are so pressing that innovative solutions to the difficulties raised by the criminal justice process need to be explored; whilst adequately bearing in mind the human rights of both detainees and the victims and survivors of the genocide and its associated atrocities (2001: 3).

Many have concluded that the dramatic difference between post-genocide and pre-genocide Rwanda is that the social trust that binds people together has been undermined, leaving a profound impact on the psyches of both the Tutsi and the Hutu. The traditional system of *Gacaca* will probably rebuild social trust better than a Western judicial system based on punishment. But, the *Gacaca* institution is a grass-roots institution, organised from below, by people themselves. When it is organised from the top, from the government, it may easily change character.

### **Mato Oput**

The *Mato Oput* institution used by the Acholi of Uganda resembles the *Gacaca* and the *Palaver* institutions. Lanek (1999) presented a paper he called “*Mato Oput*”, the “Drinking of Bitter Herb” to the 1999 All-Africa Conference on African Principles of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In this paper, he is concerned with integrating indigenous approaches with national and international mechanisms for conflict resolution and reconciliation. He also contrasts the indigenous approaches, especially the methods of the Acholi, a Luo speaking tribe occupying northern Uganda, with Western legal approaches. Western legal approaches, according to him, emphasise establishing guilt and executing retribution and punishment without reference to the victim, their families, or future reincorporation of the offender into the community. Physical and material penalties and use of force, including costly prisons, provide the sanctions against offence. Western legal approaches are adversarial and evidence must be direct and specific. The process, according to Lanek, effectively encourages the accused to deny responsibility, while the Acholi method of peace effectively encourages the accused to admit responsibility because conflict resolution and reconciliation are co-operative and evidence can be indirect and circumstantial.

Lanek explains that the Acholi has used *Mato Oput* (Acholi vernacular meaning drinking the herb of the *Oput* tree) for generations as a means of reconciliation within the context of their tradition. The Acholi believe in leadership through consensus, allowing everyone in their localised clans to have a voice with the traditional head of each clan ruling by consent. A major function of the traditional chiefs is to act as arbitrators and reconcilers when disputes occur in order to restore peace and maintain harmonious relations between families and clans. The reconciliation process he describes is called the “*Mato Oput*” process because it ends in a significant ceremony of the traditional drinking of a bitter herb of the *Oput* tree. *Mato Oput* is not a happy ceremony, the mood of all present expresses the seriousness of the occasion. The process involves:

- The guilty acknowledging responsibility,
- The guilty repenting,
- The guilty asking for forgiveness,
- The guilty paying compensation, and
- The guilty being reconciled with the victim's family through sharing the bitter drink - *Mato Oput*.

The bitter drink has no medicinal effect. The drink only symbolises the psychological bitterness that prevailed in the minds of the parties in the conflict situation. The *Mato Oput* process covers offences across the board.

### **Ujamaa**

The Kiswahili word *ujamaa* means “familyhood” (*wajamaa* = relatives) and “togetherness”. The concept of *ujamaa* is known in Africa in connection with the philosophy of Julius Nyerere. Nyerere was the first President of independent Tanzania. Until his death, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1999, he was looked at as the *mwalimu* (the teacher) and as the father of the nation (*baba wa taifa*). In his book, *Ujamaa, Essays On Socialism*, Nyerere explains that *ujamaa* is a socialist philosophy built on African roots:

The objective of socialism in the United Republic of Tanzania is to build a society in which all members have equal rights and equal opportunities, in which all can live at peace with their neighbours without suffering or imposing injustice, being exploited, or exploiting; and in which all have a gradually increasing basic level of material welfare before any individual lives in luxury (1968a: 340).

The concept can be translated as African socialism. It denotes a vision of society built on solidarity, on people helping each other, taking part in each others lives and caring for each other. Like the concept *ubuntu*, it stresses the togetherness of people and the responsibility people have for each other. When Nyerere launched the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 1996 he noted:

There are many good and honest people who believe that those ideas, which in this country are associated with my name are now dead and should be properly buried. You will not be surprised to hear that I disagree! Great ideas do not die so easily, they continue nagging and every human society in history ignores them at their own peril. And I can say this without inhibition or pretended modesty because in a very real sense they are not my ideas. I never invented them. I am simply a believer like many other believers, in the world and in human history. I believe in the equality and dignity of all human beings, and the duty to serve their well-being as well as their freedom in a peaceful and co-operative society. I am an ardent

believer in the freedom and the welfare of the individual. As I speak to you now I am asserting my own individuality. But I also believe that what gives humanity to our individuality is a sense of community and fellowship with all other human beings wherever they may be. ‘Bindadamu wote ni ndugu zangu’ (all human beings are my comrades) (The Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation, 2003: xvi).

### **Kujitegemea**

*Kujitegemea* is a Kiswahili word for self-reliance. Like *ujamaa*, it is known in Africa in connection with the philosophy of Nyerere. Nyerere tried to instill in his people that Tanzanians had to rely on themselves, on each other, to provide basic services like food and education to everybody. Schools were built all over the nation through the voluntary work of ordinary people. There are two main reasons that explain the dramatic increase in the literacy rate from 33% in 1967 to 85% in 1983 (Samoff, 1990: 231) and both had to do with the philosophy of *kujitegemea*. One reason involves the use of the language Kiswahili, well-known to all Tanzanians either as a first or second language. The other has to do with the self-help spirit of people. Those who had just learnt to read would teach others. There were adult education classes everywhere.

Nyerere broke through the colonial intellectual burden when he started using Kiswahili in Parliament. He saw to it that Kiswahili became the language of instruction in the seven years of primary school. Unfortunately, he stopped a policy taking the language further to secondary and higher levels of teaching, which would have increased the self-reliance and intellectual and economic development of Tanzania. I agree with the Ghanaian socio-linguist Kwesi Kwaa Prah who, in a recent book, claims that “development in Africa will not be forthcoming until we start using our languages as LOI from the beginning to the end of the education process” (2003: 24). Later in his life, Nyerere regretted that he had not encouraged Kiswahili to be used as the language of instruction also in secondary schools and tertiary education. Ousseina Alidou and Alamin M. Mazrui (1999) focus on the ex-colonial (termed by them the “imperial”) languages as promoting intellectual dependency to the detriment of democratic development in Africa as well as in North-South relations. Writing from the so-called “Francophone” Africa, Paulin Djité argues:

It is hard to believe that there can be, or that one can possibly argue for, a true and lasting development under such policy when so many people do not know their constitutional and legal rights, cannot understand the developmental goals of their governments and therefore cannot actively exercise their basic democratic rights simply, because they are written in foreign languages (1990: 98).

and disunity among our peoples. It has to serve the well-being of all our peoples: it has to be people-centred (2003: xvi).

Here Nyerere is concerned with Africa relying on herself, with African countries helping each other to get out of their under-development and poverty. In order for this to happen, it is probably more important for Africa to increase her self-sufficiency in food production than to increase her trade with the industrialized countries, even if the trade would be on more fair terms than at present.

### Conclusion

Celebrating diversity is important in a world threatened by globalisation and monolithic cultures. Alger's (1996a: 1) goal of achieving the maximum possible diversity in the IPRA community means striving not only to incorporate more members from Africa, Asia and Latin America, but also listening to and learning from the peace philosophies coming from these hemispheres. As shown in this article, working with non-Western concepts like *ubuntu* and the conflict-solving methods of *Palaver* and of *Mato Oput*, may have us question our own judicial system where punishment plays such a significant role. Likewise, working with the concepts of *ujamaa* and of *kujitegemea* may have us question slogans like "fair trade, not free trade" and look at the prospects for self-reliance for countries in the so-called Third World.

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