

## **MORAL APPROACHES TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN TIVLAND (TAR SORUN)**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores moral approaches to conflict resolution in Tivland. violent conflicts have continued to deteriorate in Tivland resulting in forfeiture of lives and property. The study employed the phenomenological method which focused on a detailed portrayal of the experience of violent conflicts. The primary sources involved the use of unstructured oral interviews. Findings show that violent conflicts in Tivland have no ethical justifications since they act against human dignity and demean the status of humans as moral agents. The research also found out that It is the observation of this study that, while peaceful societies flourish, conflict-ridden societies remain poor and underdeveloped like Tivland. The need for moral retrospection or evaluation toward sustainable conflict resolution becomes imperative. Since effective conflict management usually leads to an improvement in the social relations and conditions of the parties involved, there is every need to resolve these conflicts if the social conditions in Tivland must be improved for good. The research argued that ethical principles are capable of reinvigorating peaceful co-existence in Tivland despite decades of violent conflicts. It recommended that the application of the principle of double effect and the just war doctrine are useful models in taming crises if applied adequately. the government should establish security outlets in the conflict-prone areas of Tivland, and all parties in conflict must be conscious of our common humanity to restore the dignity and sanctity of Human life. The research concludes that peace must reign in Tivland if the approaches to conflict resolution are applied effectively.

**Keywords:** Moral approaches, conflicts, conflict resolution, Tivland and peaceful coexistence

### **Conflict Resolution Efforts in Tivland (Tar Sorun)**

Conflict resolution in Tivland is based on the principle of common humanity and communal living which saw Africans generally to consider themselves as one people. Disunity among the members was abhorred. No wonder it is common in Africa to hear people saying “We are all one people, we are all Africans, we are all one community” (Kariuki Muigua, 4). Similarly, this kind of ideology is reflected in many African cultures, the Zulu term “ubuntu” and the Swahili term “utu” meaning humanness are examples (5). Peaceful coexistence was emphasized and conflicts in African traditional society were seen as a threat to the existence of the society itself. In essence, they underscored corporate/communal interests as opposed to selfish ambitions or individualistic pursuits.

Furthermore, Otite and Ogionwo aver that, Africans have their indigenous, dynamic ways of settling disputes and resolving conflicts. An important aspect of disputes and conflicts settlement among them is dialogue, talking, negotiating, clapping, humour and even shouting are social therapies in conflict resolution (270). They can be described as curative social medicine in conflict resolution. These indigenous ways constitute interactive variables that skillful brokers, negotiators,

and acclaimed local historians, philosophers and spokesmen apply to reduce tension and resolve conflicts through negotiated settlement or dialogue. Otite and Ogionwo also emphasizes that when parties in conflict decide to take their case to the indigenous court, the emphasis of the judges-elders is not on punishment or imprisonment (270).

Many African nationalities have indigenous systems of conflict resolution that are presently extant and subsist. These systems rely on particular approaches to negotiation that respect kinship ties and elders' roles and the structures of local societies generally. This means that many societies have developed techniques, tactics and mechanisms for resolving conflicts. In Tiv tradition too the emphasis is much on the objective discovery of the truth followed by restitution and reconciliation, the center of attention is on the reinstallation of harmony and consensus while realizing the frequent occurrence of conflicts in the family, community, or town.

Conflict resolution in Tiv is called Tar Sorun/Soron. Conflict resolution efforts could be expressed as Igbinda I Sorun Tar (literally, pathways to peacebuilding). Accordingly, Genger admits that Tar Soron is also the energy and wisdom that underlies Tiv's social organization, community life, and peacemaking activities. It unites the Tiv society and sustains its harmony. It empowers the Tiv people to use their Indigenous wisdom and values as well as conflict resolution to address their challenging conflicts. He compares the Tiv worldview of Tar Sorun to the Ubuntu philosophy among the Kwa Zulu of South Africa. He notes that the constituent elements of tar soron also include personhood, humanity, community, peace, progress, respect, harmony, serenity, order, social projects, healthy relationships, togetherness, communal and individual welfare (145).

One of the features that defined Tiv society, in particular, was communalism (Mlu mom i.e. oneness). This philosophy of life plays a central role in ensuring social justice, peace and unity among the Tiv families especially in the pre-colonial era. It was a way of life where everything in the society belonged to the community and every member of the society was allowed to use it whenever he or she needed it. This philosophy was a point around which everything in the society revolved. Edward Atel notes that in Tiv commonality, all members of the community share in the fortunes or misfortunes of its members and also contribute to their destiny (23). Looking at this philosophy, the framework of communalism was built on the idea of social justice, where the common good of the people in the society was the concern of everyone.

Similarly, land in the pre-colonial Tiv society, although of much economic value, was communally owned by the host community and a member of the community who needed land for cultivation or settlement had the opportunity to use it. As James Moti points out:

This commonality explains why there is no oligarchy in Tiv's traditional administration and the land, which is the source of prosperity, is equitably shared. In the Tiv land use system, the land is commonly owned by the ityo or ya units. In spatial distribution, each adult member of the family has the agnatic rights sufficient land to farm for his wives and children (104).

Leadership was also rotational among the Tiv based on the principle of ya na wangbian. Decisions on issues affecting the community were communally taken with the heads of families representing them. The practice of "sisters sharing" called iye ingyor or lye lgyo, speaks volumes about the Tiv unity. In addition, Ahangba Utume emphasized that, when the traditional system of marriage known as Yam Ishe (exchange marriage) was still in place, those who never had sisters to exchange

for wives were donated or borrowed to enable them to marry. If it were given as debt, such debts were repaid when the debtor gave birth to a female (Oral interview, 2021). People with many sisters used to share with those who never had to enable them to obtain wives for themselves. Even now that the system is not in place, the money paid as a bride price is shared among the “ye ingyor” (close relations).

It is expressed in such maxims as *kon mom ngu lun ikyo ga* (a single tree cannot make a forest); *ka tema imongu Mbagbera ve fe iwa ye* (it is by sitting together do the people of Mbagbera come to discover the science of blacksmithing); as well as *ya na wangbian* (eat and give to another brother or sister) (Azape Tarvihi, Oral Interview). All these adages express the fact that no Tiv person is an island. Only through unity will they progress. As a result, every Tiv person looked at himself only concerning the community into which he was born; also, the interrelationship of the community, into which was born. Again, the interrelationship of the various kinds of kinship systems was such that every Tiv person considered himself a member of the wider-tribal community. This is why Bohannan will say that, “a Tiv is and can prove it’ (Bohannan 33) by tracing his descent from Tiv himself through a genealogy.

Tiv principles of communalism, *Ya na Angbian* (eat and give your brother/sister) and reciprocity became the foundation for the avoidance of violent conflict. Reciprocity is the other principle that created an ideal environment for conflict resolution. A mutual exchange of privileges, goods, favours, and obligations, among others, existed among Tiv communities thus fostering peaceful coexistence and consequently eliminating the likelihood of wars and conflicts. Abel Aor Inyaregh corroborates that typical African thought promotes hospitality, love, brotherhood, togetherness, community life, caring and sharing (23).

If a community was facing a calamity, like famine or the death of livestock, other communities would come to the aid of that particular community. Reciprocity thus nurtured a culture of communal life which fostered relationships. Reciprocity emphasized sharing and also sustained a sense of collective security through a social setup that supported egalitarian social living. It enhanced harmonious relationships by putting communal interests above individual pursuits. Through this principle, individual norms were transformed into social welfare security schemes and thus a sense of justice and fairness was embedded in it as mutual trust became an overriding value.

Respect towards parents, elders, ancestors, and the environment was cherished and well entrenched in the customs, traditions and taboos. Among the Tiv, respect is called *Ichivir*. Strong traditions, customs and norms fostered respect such that wayward members of the community faced grievous consequences, such as the imposition of fines and other penalties. This way, religion played a central role in shunning conflict-causing conduct. According to Vashir Agbe, in the traditional pre-colonial Tiv society, respect for the (*Mbaganden*) elders, (*Mbamaren*) parents and (*Mbayiase*) ancestors was highly regarded. It was a virtue well entrenched in the customs, traditions and taboos (Oral Interview). In this way, social conflicts were avoided and resolved through the respect that people had for one another, parents, elders, ancestors and even the environment.

Generally, the Tiv are a peace-loving tribe who are also welcoming. Conflict Resolution or peacemaking ideology among the Tiv people is derived from their cosmological worldview, which teaches that *Aondo gba tar* (God created the world) and blessed it with serenity and order (Genger 145). Based on this ideology, humanity is fundamentally bound to have the pleasure of

creation or nature. In other words, Tar (which means earth) is meant to be benefited from and must be sustained through shared humanity, responsible personhood, and good use of the cosmic powers (Tsav, Akombo, Adzov and lkyav) (Torkula 26). When there is conflict, the land goes bad, and the people will lack inner peace and the outside of our community will be unsafe. Tar Sorun therefore connotes employing every effort toward the use of all available resources to restore the goodness and peace that hitherto existed in Tiv land or the community.

Chia acknowledges that the tar soron paradigm and its essential elements are transmitted via family training, moral discipline, community mores, parental upbringing and social groups conflict resolution principles. Tar soron is a collective responsibility as well as an individual duty, that is, every member and the community as a whole are key actors in the tar soron paradigm (qtd. in Genger 145). Thus, conflict resolution in Tivland can take different approaches as the saying goes “Tar Sorun ngu Igbinda kposu kposu” (there are different pathways or patterns to conflict resolution). For instance, Genger has identified four key peacemaking approaches that are indigenous to the Tiv people. These four approaches are elaborated under three categories: (1) violent strategies (warring and fighting) represent physical combat approaches, peace contracts (covenant relationships and intermarriage), and the restorative approach (peacemaking gathering) represents non-violent approaches. Tiv's traditional approach to conflicts and conflict resolution takes a holistic approach. Boege points out that traditional approaches cannot be compartmentalized into “political” or “judicial” or others, rather, they are holistic, comprising also social, economic, cultural and religious-spiritual dimensions. This is following the entirety of traditional lifestyle and world views in which the different spheres of societal life are hardly separated (9).

Terlumun Agena asserts that the Tiv have certain traditional institutions that administered justice, law and order in their land such as the ijir (Moot), imongu (open assembly), ibumun (oath) and ikyuryan (covenant making) with religio-cultural beliefs and practices binding them (56). Tiv traditional institutions are usually understood as the instrument of social organisation, which have developed independently in the context of pre-modern societal structures and tested and practised over a considerable period. They constitute the roots upon which social changes occur. He adds that Tiv traditional institutions involve local actors in decision-making mechanisms in resolving conflicts within and between communities. These institutions were the mbatamen (elders), kwav (age grade) which operated under four councils or levels of various lineages of socio-political units with traditional administrative functions: ya (compound), iye ingyor (kindred), ityo (clan kin) and tar (super clan) while the Igba (maternal/matrikins) plays complementary roles (56).

A typical Tiv family (Ya/Tsombur) consists of the husband, his wives and children. The husband (Nom/Nomsoor/Orya) is the head of the family and his authority is unquestionable. He is the overall administrator of family matters and property including bride price, inheritance and where applicable, land issues. The extended family comprising of the aging parents, in-laws, relatives and other dependants is the basic socio-political and hence, the first institution in the management of conflicts. For instance, Tiv people regarded the extended family as the first institution of conflict management. Disputes that transcend the nuclear family could be determined by the extended family and the neighbours. The clan is another institution in the management of conflicts. The Tiv consider it one of the most important socio-political organizations that knit together distant relatives, facilitating a feeling of rendering mutual support in all important matters in the interest of the clan. Clan members are also guided by certain rules and regulations that are fundamental in avoiding conflicts, for instance, that members of the same clan cannot inter-marry but can marry

from other clans (Orkuma Vanger, Oral Interview).

Torkula corroborates the above when he states that, the Tiv people had practised a gerontocratic system of governance, that is, a system of government constituted and led by the elders. It is described as a system of political organisation that is seen today as stateless or segmentary. Under this system, both the executive and the judiciary were fused under a council of village sub-units, kindreds, clans and super clans- of the same ancestry or root, each headed by the most elderly person possessing witchcraft (Torkula, Tiv Cosmology... 2).

Rather than emphasize witchcraft, Dzurgba states that, the administrative structure of mbatamen (the council of elders) was a quasi-representative government in which the members represent genealogical families that constitute a compound, kindred, or a clan as the case may be. The leadership was exclusively for old men, that is, elders who by all standards qualified and were physically, intellectually, emotionally and religiously eligible to gain and use power to control the people and socio-economic activities (Dzurgba 126-127). Old women, Dzurgba emphasizes, and youths were not eligible to be part of Ityo (clan) council because of their sex, experiential knowledge, religious legibility or tradition and inability to keep secrets. For that reason, the council of elders was made up of only men. This reflects the system of government that is run by old people or consists of old people (126,127). The Tiv gave great respect to age and the authority of elders was therefore maintained.

Agena submits that the Tiv traditional institutions of the mbatamen (elders), kwav (age mate), igba (Maternal kin) and ityo (paternal kin) operate at various levels or tiers of their government and play religio-political and social roles in resolving conflicts at the ya (compound), iye- ingyor (kindred), ityo (patrilinear kin), igba (maternal kin) and tar (super clan) levels as can be examined appropriately (58). These were the characters that were involved in conflict resolution of different kinds mentioned by Genger above. The peak of these was the Ijir Tamen which involved the paramount ruler, the Tor Tiv, council of elders, chieftaincy title holders and representation of all the Tiv clans. The ijir at the level of the whole Tiv land whose traditional representative forms the Tar (superclan) council is referred to as the Ijirtamen (council of Tiv chiefs). As tradition demands, members of the Ijirtamen have a unique allegiance to the Swem (spiritual symbol of truth among the Tiv). Thus, the efficacy of the Ijirtamen to end a violent conflict was strictly adhered to by all Tiv. This thesis shall adopt the categorization of conflict resolution approaches in Tivland proposed by Genger.

### **Physical Combat/Violent Approach**

A violent approach to conflict resolution is the process of deploying war and violent fighting to impede attacks. Genger attests that the Tiv are peace-loving people, who do not like to instigate violence because they are not belligerent (146). However, they can go to war or undertake a form of severe fighting to secure peace for themselves and their nation. This was especially true during the pre-colonial period when other communities or ethnic nationalities came against the Tiv with offensive threats, they resisted with fierce fight or war to safeguard their existence and safety. The Tiv fought migration and settlement wars. During this period, groups that provoked the Tiv during their movements were fiercely fought and defeated.

The Tiv use war as the last resort in the search for peace. They used it for self-defense from the surrounding communities who posed bellicose and cultural threats to them when they were migrating to their present territory (Dzurgba 167). They fought resistance wars to keep the

invading Sokoto Caliphate Jihadists in the 19th century and the British colonizers in the 20th century off of their lands (173). The so-called conquest or expansionist wars they fought were proxy wars in support of and on behalf of the surrounding ethnic community, the Alago of Keana who invited the Tiv military power to help them scare off the Jihadists who regularly marauded the Keana kingdom (Genger, 148). It is no gainsay, therefore, that the groups that attacked the Tiv when they began to settle in the Benue Valley were violently repelled. During the era of tribal wars, the Tiv adopted a war anthem as follows:

<b>Tiv</b>	<b>Translation</b>
Mnyam chiem er Uke mile!	I dreamt that the Non-Tiv had drowned!
Ooo Uke mile!	Oh, the Non-Tiv has drowned!
Ishima yam ngi awambe awambe!	My heart is bloody bloody!
Ooon ngi awambe awambe!	Yes! It is Bloody bloody!

The chanting of this war anthem aroused the manness and consciousness of Tiv warriors to face any form of danger and to attack fiercely and bravely. Apart from the pre-colonial tribal wars, earlier in our Tiv history, the invading Fulani Jihadists intruded into Tivland with their warring horses for conquest. However, the Tiv were able to repel and overwhelm them with advanced weaponry of poisonous arrows and bees, and war prowess. They were chased away, thereby restoring peace within the Benue Valley. With this prowess, the Tiv even helped other neighbouring communities to push their enemies further away from their lands.

Furthermore, the Tiv saw war as a peacemaking tool by taking and using slave captives. For instance, Genger asserts that the Tiv communities took captives from the wars they fought and used them as slaves to foster peace between the Tiv and the foreign aggressors. Those captured in these wars were used as scarecrows to stave off potential enemies and prevent the Tiv from future threats and attacks. War captives were also used as baits to achieve peace and as seals of peace covenants with their defeated communities (147). The taking of war hostages as slaves was a measure to prevent future threats and ratify peace covenants. The indigenous Tiv worldview on war has a corresponding goal with the Western theory of just war as both reject war for the sake of warring but see it as necessary in the quest for peace.

### **Peace Contracts Approach/Covenant and Intermarriage**

The Tiv people value Covenants and Intermarriage as a traditional peacemaking strategy. Generally, peacemaking agreements are done mostly in two categories; through lkyur-yan (covenants or pacts) where Ayande grass was also planted as an insignia for peace; and through intermarriage. These peace accords empowered the Tiv people and their warring partners to discontinue and restrain their disputes, have a considerable period of peace, and enjoy meaningful support from one another. After all, the Tiv ideology that the earth is meant to be enjoyed fuels their passion for peace. Thus, the Tiv practiced the establishment of covenants between their clans and other nations to prevent conflict and build peace. This was done especially in conflict-prone or border areas. Genger stressed that:

The covenants between two or more Tiv groups were intended to tighten their brotherhood and strengthen their value of social collaboration. The covenant prohibited the parties from initiating or participating in any violent conflict against each other or in reneging on an agreed social collaboration such as rotational/band farming (lhyumbe). Those parties that defaulted on their covenant

duties were to be bothered by the death spell or the curse of ill luck (148).

Orpin Kwaghkor explained the process of resolution stating that the various parties would face one another in a circle, each presenting their grievances and seeking to persuade one another about the superiority of their positions. Both parties would invite witnesses to help establish their case (oral interview, 2021). For Agena, this kind of exercise is mostly raucous, and sometimes protracted and time-consuming, though not like the conventional approach where it lasts for days, weeks, or years before resolution is achieved but at the end, the decision arrived at with solemnity is accepted as sacred and binding on the entire community or parties involved. It is important to state that in traditional Tiv society, decision-making takes the form of negotiations, discussions and deliberation. Where a conflict is carefully managed and the issue resolved, the conflicting parties engage in the ritual performance of covenant-making (149). Specifically, Adegga emphasizes that after both parties have agreed on the need and satisfactory terms for peace, they resolved to enter into a covenant (117). He expressed that:

The ritual performance of Ifan I gberen or Ifan I hamber or mngeren ma gberen is the pouring of libation and dispelling of the effecting influence of curses pronounced during the conflict. This was symbolically done by sipping water from a calabash and spitting it out to signify that, ndorough ku gba-peace will reign supreme and that, the water will put away the heat occasioned by the conflict. Also, the conflicting parties could kuve (embrace) as a sign of peace and fraternal love between them. This is followed by the eating of kwaghyan man man msoron ma himen iyongu which is the food and beer of reconciliation indicating that conflict and differences are over (Adegga 117).

Those initiating the covenant have to enter into it willingly. It is not something that can be imposed without agreement. In the covenant process, the elders normally intervene in a communal conflict, and because such elders wield substantial powers “physically and metaphysically: their words are often respected. Their decision is therefore binding as they are believed to have access to spiritual powers. Their words are final lest their retributive justice is turned against the disobedient ones. Prayers and sacrifices are offered in terms of animals and bloodshed to the supernatural forces which act as symbolic cleansing and purification of guilt and source of reconciliation. These symbolic ritual acts express commitment and trust and build more confidence in the parties in conflict towards the reconciliation process. Agena concludes that the Tiv felt that, their reconciliation is more binding and safer as they enter into the covenant with solemnity and fear. For they believe in the supernatural connectivity to enforce sanctions and plague erring offenders. To avoid incurring the wrath that violators would suffer from the supernatural beings, they are bound to obey the terms of the covenant which makes Ikuryan (covenant-making) among the Tiv to be very effective in conflict resolution. Covenant-making in Tiv also involved oath-taking whereby the arbitrators (Elders) recommended that the disputants must take an oath called Ibumun to restrain them from going against the covenant (94-95).

There are some instances among the Tiv where Ikuryan (covenant-making) was initiated to resolve conflicts at different levels and periods. For example, the covenant between the Kusuv and Ikuryav Tiev in 1994 took place as a conflict resolution approach. It was mediated by Wantaregh Paul Iorpuu Unongo. The two clans cooperated and entered into a covenant called Igbe Tse (destruction of ancestral home), named after the consequences the violators would encounter which were natural disasters especially death in their families such that their ancestral homes

would be desecrated and deserted (Agena 98). Again, Chief J.D. Dent the Asor Tar u Tiv in 1994 also mediated in the same Kusuv and Ikurav-Tiev conflict and they entered into a covenant. A symbol of covenant establishing peace was built at their boundary. Again, the conflict between Ipav and Ukan that lingered between 1978 and 2003 was resolved in 2004 with a covenant. A traditional iyongo i mnger (water gourd) with water was given to the Ukan and Ipav elders. They sprinkled the water and brewed traditional beer was poured into this water gourd, the eldest persons from Ukan and Ipav drank from it. Thus, they entered into a covenant with a solemn oath that they would never go into conflicts that would result in the shedding of blood. If they did so, such a party would encounter misfortunes from God. This is said to have taken place in the year 2004.

Furthermore, the conflict between Mbaduku (Vandeikya LGA) and Udam (Obudu, Cross River) between 1986 and 2000s was resolved in 2014 when the two communities came together to dialogue. They resolved at the meeting that, any member of the two communities that goes to war against the other shall develop a swollen stomach. The Mbaduku people killed a goat and divided it into two gave one to Udam and retained the other. The Udam killed a dog, divided it into two, gave half to the Tiv, and kept the other for themselves. The covenant was therefore sealed with the blood of these animals, and they called on God to help them watch over and maintain the covenant. The covenant took place in the presence of God, chiefs, elders, priests, and some government officials from the two LGAs of Vandeikya and Obudu (Agena 114-115). This is also similar to the covenants between Kaambe, Nongov in the Guma local government area and Mhajir, Mbakor in the Tarka local government area in 2011. Thus, over the years, peace contracts through covenants have decisively played a major role in violent conflict resolution within and around the Tiv people.

Amid every Tiv covenant is the component of Ibumun, oath-taking. Oath-taking is the climax and seal upon every covenant that makes it efficacious. Generally, an oath is that abstemious promise that is pronounced to be binding, usually in verbal formula or emblematic action. According to Perpetual Waapela, oath-taking could be administered to two individuals or communities in order to promote and strengthen bonds of friendship and foster good human relationships (94). She adds that oath-taking binds two parties mystically, restraining them from hostility towards each other. The oath, so taken, creates something like a "blood bond" in which the two parties concerned relate with one another as if they were real blood relations and would refrain from acting recklessly or behaving in a manner that would create antagonism and aggression between them. Waapela maintains that Oath symbols used are the detective techniques or objects carved out according to the cultural postulations of a particular people dependent on their justice system. It is by these symbols that oaths are administered (94).

The use of oaths is premised on the belief among the Tiv that conflict resolution derives from a dualism of the physical and the metaphysical. The invisible facade or the supernatural was the first while the second was on the visible, physical aspect. In order for the continuity of the peace process to be enhanced both the visible and the invisible plays a part. First, the supernatural deities usually monitor the panorama of conflict resolution to ascertain compliance with the spiritual principles associated with it to avoid misunderstanding. On the other hand, in the physical earthly realm, the peace actors not only conform to the sacred directives in order not to fall victim to the misfortune and wrath of the supernaturals but also to tag along the expected principles of conflict resolution. It is to be understood that there is a connection between the two realms and balance has to be maintained between the deities and the humans' conflicting situation. This is part of the essential characteristics of conflict prevention in Tivland.



Inter-marriage is another form of peace contract the Tiv entered to foster stability between themselves and their conflict partners. Inter-marriage was a viable asset for conflict prevention and peacemaking strategy in the pre-colonial times between the Tiv and their closest neighbours. Not only did this strategy record success during the pre-colonial period, the vestiges of this practice are found in several communities in Tivland today. The inter-ethnic marriage strategy promoted family, social and peaceful relationships between the Tiv communities and their neighbours. The Tiv also entered into exchange marriages with the Ato-a-tiev (meaning, the non-Tiv communities) in order to foster a peaceful relationship, consolidate peace resolutions, and promote agricultural ties between them. This strategy served us well, with those neighbors whom we encountered while we migrated and settled in this land (Genger 151).

According to Ayangaor, the practice of marriages with the Ato-a-tiev took place mostly between the Tiv and their southern neighbors particularly the Udam and the Idoma tribes. However, the Tiv were more inclined to give their daughters in marriage to the Ato-a-tiev than take wives from them. In essence, this practice was conceived to establish peaceful relationships and ensure sustainable trade activities between the two communities (qtd. in Genger 152). Indeed, it did suppress previous hostilities and promoted greater understanding and trust so that members of both families visited, stayed, and invested in each other's community. This peacemaking approach kept the Tiv's immediate neighbors, the Idoma and Udam from regular bloody encounters, and it remains important today.

#### **Restorative/Peacemaking Gathering Approach**

Restorative or peace gathering is another non-violent indigenous approach to conflict resolution after peace contracts. Thus, the importance of family and consanguinity was first invoked during the Peacemaking Gathering. The leader or facilitator of the *mtem u soron ayoosu* usually starts by reminding the gathering of their consanguinity as family and as members of the Tiv nation. Genger elaborates that, in the past, the elders initiated this popular value by digging a big heap of soil and making the conflict parties stand on two opposite sides of it. In the opening address, he would remind both parties of their common progenitor and ancestry and draw their minds to the futility of fighting or harming each other. In the case of conflict with outsiders, a peace circle was convened after both sides elevated the *ayande* grass for the cessation of antagonism and to initiate a successful peace dialogue. During this meeting, both sides recounted some points of past mutuality in their relationship and the reasons to fight no more such as shared fears, ordeals, areas of collaboration, and interests (161).

The Tiv deploys such terms and concepts as *Mtem u soron Ayoosu* (conflict resolution sitting), *Mkohol u soron ayoosu* (conflict resolution meeting), *Ijir Teman* (arbitrative sitting), *Mtem u van a bem* (peace-returning meeting), and in extreme cases *Ijir Tamen* will be convened. Whichever nomenclature was employed or interpreted; the difference grades in restorative gathering depended on the actors that congregated. This was also based on the magnitude of the conflict. For instance, *Ijir Tamen* which is the highest ruling or decision-making body in Tivland would naturally involve the *Tor Tiv* (Paramount Ruler of the Tiv nation), *Ator* (first class Chiefs), *Uter* (second class Chiefs), *Mue Ter*, *Utyo mba lorov* (district heads), *Mbatarev* (kindred heads), *Ator a Kpande* and Chieftaincy title holders. Whereas, other lower levels of *Mtem u Sorun Tar* could also be convened. This means that restorative or peace-making gatherings can be at the level of families, communities, clans, etc. However, Genger was more specific. He states that:

The peacemaking stakeholders,” and chronologically they include the conflict parties, nuclear family heads, and extended family heads (mba yav mba ken Ate – “family heads who own the succor hut”). Other members of the of Mtem u Soron Ayoosu include the welfare overseers (“a tor-a-kpande”), kindred heads (“mba tarev”), district heads (“u-tyo mbaiorov”), clan heads (“Muer Ter”), mega clan heads (“u-Ter”), zonal clan heads (“a-Tor”) the paramount leader of the Tiv nation (The “Tor Tiv”), and the young men's age-group (154).

From the position by Genger above, it could be understood that these traditional Chiefs address conflicts at their respective leadership levels, not in isolation, but as a gathering of Mtem u Soron Ayoosu. Key matters are usually referred to the higher leaders in the hierarchy as the case demands. On the other hand, leaders at the higher levels refer conflict parties or less important issues to the lower levels to respect protocol and the principles of collaboration and subsidiarity. This also ensured harmony in the society.

In Tivland, the value of unity and communalism were unquantified. This was evidenced in philosophies and adages like “Ka tema imongo Mbagbera ve fe iwa ye”; meaning, “out of togetherness, the people of Mbagbera discovered the art blacksmithing” and “uwagh sen tswen hule; meaning, “a river that flows alone fails to go straight” are pointers to Tiv ideology of unity. They knew that one man or one community alone could not withstand the hazards and dangers lurking in the land. They knew earlier that the only way to forge a path for themselves was to come together. This could not be possible in an atmosphere of conflict amongst themselves. Thus, internal squabbles were not tolerated. A people cannot be united if there is no peace, and there can never be peace if the people are not united. Thus, the Tiv would point out the need for brotherliness and cooperation stating, “Ka tema imongo Mbagbera ve fe iwa ye”. This maxim has various implications, it is in unity, collectivism, togetherness, and communality that the Tiv would develop or achieve greater heights.

In order to show the essence of both parties in conflict to meet and deliberate for resolution, the Tiv would say lwen ka i tema sha igenegh ver, item ikye ye which translates to “It takes two stones to break a palm kernel”. This is to further accentuate that by coming together even difficult fits and challenges that one man or a single community cannot handle would easily be achieved.

Besides the Tiv would also say Kon mom ngu lun kyo ga, meaning, “a single tree cannot make a forest” and that “uwagh sen tswen hule; meaning, “a river that flows alone fails to go straight”. The Tiv knew that unanimity was more fulfilling and accomplishing as evidenced by their history of tribal wars. These pre-colonial wars taught them that there would be greatness and development in the land if they came together. According to Agena therefore, when one party still disagreed in the course of discussion, they would say, ka aciin anu, akende a moughun (when they are pressing the knees, the shoulders are rising). Accordingly, this points to the fact that the parties in conflict need to give peace a chance by resolving their conflict for development to take place (93). Usually at a peace meeting, the Tiv would advise the parties in conflict to accept their faults so that genuine reconciliation would take place. Hence, they point out that, Nyinya ngu a ngahar anyiin kpa gbe (A horse has four limbs, yet it falls). This implies that to err is inevitable for human beings, but to forgive is to forge a path for development and peace to thrive. Thus, one should be forgiven if one makes a mistake, for there is no infallible human (Shishima 28).

Ijir Teman became a valuable community activity as far back as the Tiv discovered the need for peace. This act afforded the council of elders and relations involved in a dispute an opportunity to settle their differences. The different factions were brought together under dialogue. According to Boege, the elders are highly esteemed for their knowledge of customs, myths and the history of the communities and the relationship of the parties in conflicts. Their rich experience in conflict regulation, their skills as orators as well as their social capital as leaders of the communities empower them to negotiate a resolution to the conflicts that are acceptable to all sides. Therefore, the extreme wisdom and knowledge of Tiv affairs displayed by elders at council meetings commanded respect and fear for them. Bohanan corroborates that Ijir (moot) among the Tiv is an assembly of neighbours and kinsmen who decides disputes. He points out that, Ikyryan (covenant making) usually takes place following a successful completion of a moot and ritual is performed involving swem (the spiritual symbol of truth among the Tiv) (qtd. in Genger 153).

Most importantly, the core values that assisted in conflict resolution were Mimi/Kor (truth), Icvir (respect) and integrity. Truth is the most fundamental key value. Truth-telling practices bring credibility and success to their peacemaking gatherings. However, it is only regrettable that today the dominant Western political and legal system with its exploitative and deceitful capitalist tendencies has influenced some traditional leaders with manipulative and untruthful attitudes when they process conflict resolution meetings. Getting people who can speak the truth is very difficult in our (Tiv) society today. More people are spreading injurious information than some know the truth.

Some of the leaders who facilitate peace meetings take sides thereby giving the semblance of fair judgement. For the reason of politics, few people are even neutral now. The new political way of life we have accepted has a very low content for truth and justice. But as the saying goes Kor ngu ke To (there is truth in spoken words), usually, the manipulative or untruthful instances are easily detectable and are strongly detested because the approach is essentially sincere, wide open, and participatory. Traditional leaders and the members of the peacemaking meeting only have to be sincere to impress the expectations of their people.

The Tiv believe that Mimi ngu ke Shima (Truth comes from one's heart); is manifest in words and body language and it is essentially effective. When a conflict party or member of the mtem (peace gathering) is saying the truth, one can know it in one's heart, and hear no word that antagonizes it. The person easily accepts contrary opinions and is weak when he is guilty. On the contrary, the person with logic is argumentative and not interested in restoring the ruptured situation and relationship because he is only interested in how to emerge as the winner of the case blameless.

On the other hand, the Tiv values respect in conflict resolution situations. When given respect, the guilty party called Or lbyoogh expresses remorse and apologizes more easily. In the same manner, the aggrieved party is more willing to forgive and let go and be open to the restoration of a peaceful relationship. The show of respect to both parties by the traditional leaders and members of the Mtem (council) makes it easy to facilitate peacemaking or to address conflict. However, most of the Tiv in political positions and high places of authority in government appear to be showing disregard for Tiv indigenous social systems and peacemaking values such as truth, respect, integrity and harmony. This seems to be forgetting one's own roots or abandoning their cultural values. While this is worrisome, Tiv society or culture supersedes individuals and the former's worldview will always prevail.

Integrity, availability and good disposition are another set of interconnected values in the Mtem u soron ayoosu. They indicated that the leaders lived in the community and were always available for peacemaking gatherings that provided their people with the opportunity to report cases and to be attended to for different reasons. There is more to just being available to the people. For example, the importance of the traditional leaders being disposed to listen to their people's complaints on issues is a great asset. Traditional leaders who embrace a lavish lifestyle instead of leading their people have put them in harm's way. It can be argued that leaders can have their leisure, but it should not be to the detriment of their social responsibilities and official duties or at the peril of the communities they serve. On the whole, the Mtem u soron ayoosu works at removing the causes of the conflict, addressing the situation, repairing the emerging harms, mending the fissured community and restoring the broken relationships. The Tiv people are one family come what may, and this must be restored when it is threatened by any kind of conflict.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study exposes ethical models that could curb violent conflicts in Tivland. Such a model incorporates the efforts of all and sundry – traditional authority, religious leaders, government, Non-Governmental Organizations and individuals – to work conscientiously towards the curbing of violent conflicts in Tiv land and elsewhere.

### **Conclusion**

Even though violent conflict has ravaged Tivland over the years, the adaption of proper models and complementary measures are mapped out for a lasting solution. At the moment the spate of farmer/herder conflict has become more worrisome. On this note, the government reserves the right to employ the Just War Principle to avert the conflict. The Just War Doctrine offers an alternative to using moderate force in the defence of civilians. Applying the Just Was Principle will help protect the poor villagers who are facing the brunt of massacre and displacement. Aquinas's principle of the double effect also proves effective on the part of the Tiv. Applying the principle of double effect requires the use of moderate force in self-defense. Using these two principles will help ensure that, the people are defended and farmer/herder conflict is averted.

On the other hand, other forms of violent conflicts such as political violence, and land disputes can be resolved from the ethical argument on the dignity of human life. The dignity of human life is sustained from the perspective of common humanity and the sanctity of human life. Human life is given by God from conception to birth, therefore, only God reserves the right to take life. The common humanity argument refers us back to our unity, oneness and communalism of the human race. With a society built upon communal philosophy, the Tiv traced their roots back to the community into which they were borne. With such shared values, respect for the traditional leadership and their authority in mediating violent conflict will be restored.

The introduction of Western culture, Christianity, Western social, economic and political systems in Tivland has brought about significant changes that are inimical to Tiv traditional religious and cultural practices. Consequently, practices and beliefs that were aspects of the religio-cultural life of the Tiv were now considered archaic, barbaric, uncivilized, or paganistic. The negative impact these attitudes have on the socio-cultural life of the people is very glaring; namely distortion of cultural values, moral degeneration, disunity, violence, hatred, and jealousy, to mention just a few.

The Tiv who took pride in being his brother's keeper does not see any value in the spirit of brotherhood. Therefore, in models for violent conflict resolution, this study submits that hence the

negative impact of violent conflicts overwhelms the peace and development of Tiv society, all hands must be on deck to deploy the ethical models in this study for lasting peace.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the devastating effects of persistent violent conflicts in Tivland and the findings of this research, the following are recommended.

- i. Traditional leaders in Tivland must display unstained political and religious neutrality, especially in mediating violent conflicts so as to regain authority and respect deserving of their positions.
- ii. The government and security agencies must be willing to eschew partiality, bias, and all manner of prejudice in applying the Just War Doctrine in violent conflict situations.
- iii. Even if a violent conflict should erupt, the Tiv Youths must be willing, following the Principle of Double Effect, to avoid using extreme force for self-defence.
- iv. The task for Conflict resolution must cut across all the traditional institutions such as the family, extended family, kindred, district, clan, and the level of the Tiv traditional council.
- v. The government at the federal, state and local levels must join hands to find a lasting solution to violent conflict in Tivland and beyond and to resettle the victims of violence currently living in various IDP camps to their ancestral homes.
- vi. The government at the federal, state and local levels must cooperate in establishing security outlets in conflict-prone areas such as the borders between Benue State and Nassarawa states, between Benue and Taraba states, as well as between Benue and Cross River States.
- vii. The Anti-Open Grazing and Ranches Establishment Law of the Benue State Government should be strengthened while at the same time, applying the Just War Doctrine to guard the entry points into Benue State.

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