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Website: <https://jppssuniuyo.com/jld> Email: [jppssuniuyo@gmail.com](mailto:jppssuniuyo@gmail.com)

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### THE ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF MENTAL MAGNITUDE IN AWOLOWO'S THOUGHT: PATHWAYS TO PEACE BUILDING

Callistus Agianpuye Ubleble

Department of Philosophy and Leadership Studies, University of Calabar, Nigeria

Email: [carlsbego2010@gmail.com](mailto:carlsbego2010@gmail.com)

#### Abstract

This study investigates the ethical dimensions of mental magnitude in the philosophy of Obafemi Awolowo, with a specific focus on its relevance to peace-building in the Obudu and Vandeikya communities of Nigeria. The research problem stems from persistent communal conflicts in these areas, driven by ethnic tension, political rivalry, and moral decline. The main aim of the study is to explore how Awolowo's concept of mental magnitude, which emphasizes rational self-discipline, moral responsibility, and communal well-being, can serve as a foundational strategy for promoting peace and social cohesion. Using a qualitative philosophical method, the research critically analyzes Awolowo's writings, especially Voice of Reason and Voice of Courage, and applies these insights to the socio-ethical challenges in Obudu and Vandeikya. Supplementary data from conflict reports and community narratives were also reviewed to contextualize the ethical application. The study finds that the lack of inner moral discipline and rational leadership contributes significantly to the recurring unrest in these communities. The implication is that peace cannot be sustainably achieved without an ethical reorientation rooted in self-control, tolerance, and civic responsibility. It recommends that educational institutions, religious leaders, and traditional authorities in both communities integrate Awolowo's ethical principles into leadership training, youth programs, and peace initiatives. In conclusion, the research affirms that mental magnitude is not only a personal moral virtue but also a critical collective asset for achieving lasting peace, justice, and progress in conflict-prone regions like Obudu and Vandeikya.

**keywords:** Communal Conflict, Ethical Dimensions, Mental Magnitude, Moral Responsibility, Obafemi Awolowo, Obudu, Peace-building, Rational Self-Discipline, Social Cohesion, Vandeikya.

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## **Introduction**

In contemporary Nigeria, recurrent communal conflicts continue to undermine social cohesion, ethical leadership, and sustainable development. In areas such as Obudu in Cross River State and Vandeikya in Benue State, violence persists, driven by ethnic identity struggles, land disputes, political manipulation, and institutional weakness. Beyond material grievances, scholars note that these conflicts are sustained by moral deficits, erosion of trust, breakdown of communal values, and failures of ethical restraint among leaders and citizens (Okolie and Eze 214; Mustapha 67). These conditions reveal the need for a philosophical framework that addresses not only structural causes of conflict but also the moral psychology of individuals and communities. Although state security interventions remain important, peace scholars argue that sustainable peace in plural societies must be grounded in ethical reorientation and moral leadership (Lederach 45; Galtung 112). In Nigeria's fragile socio-political context, the absence of ethical grounding has encouraged cycles of retaliation and mistrust, especially in rural and semi-urban communities. Obudu and Vandeikya illustrate how moral failure and identity manipulation can override long-standing traditions of coexistence. Within this context, the moral philosophy of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, particularly his concept of mental magnitude, offers a valuable ethical resource for peace-building. Mental magnitude denotes the disciplined capacity of the human mind to subordinate instinct, passion, and selfish interest to reason, justice, and the common good (Awolowo, *Voice of Reason* 31). For Awolowo, ethical governance and social harmony are impossible without rational self-control and moral elevation.

Contemporary scholars interpret mental magnitude as a moral discipline rather than mere intellectual ability (Akanmidu 98; Ogunmodede 143). Awolowo warned that societies deteriorate when leaders and citizens act from impulse, ethnic sentiment, greed, or vengeance instead of rational moral judgment. This view aligns with African moral philosophy, which emphasizes that sustainable peace depends on moral agents capable of transcending narrow group interests for communal well-being (Metz 189). Applied to Obudu and Vandeikya, mental magnitude exposes the ethical depth of communal conflicts. Leaders often exploit emotions for political gain, weakening moral restraint and responsibility (Akinwale 56). Beyond leadership, Awolowo saw society as a moral organism where peace requires shared ethical responsibility. Peace studies similarly affirm that durable peace emerges when communities internalize norms of dialogue, restraint, and mutual recognition (Boege et al. 76). Consequently, this study argues that lasting peace begins with the disciplined ethical use of the human mind rather than coercion or force (UNDP 22).

## **The Relevance of Mental Magnitude in the Philosophy of Awolowo to Peace Building in the Obudu and Vandeikya Communities of Nigeria**

In the face of increasing communal strife and socio-political instability in Nigeria, especially in grassroots communities like Obudu (Cross River State) and Vandeikya (Benue State), the search for a sustainable peace-building strategy is urgent. Among Nigeria's foremost political philosophers, Chief Obafemi Awolowo offers a profound ethical concept known as mental magnitude, which serves as a moral compass for personal discipline and societal harmony. Awolowo's mental magnitude emphasizes the rational control of emotions, the subordination of personal interest to the common good, and the ethical use of intellect in leadership and public engagement (Awolowo, *Voice of Reason* 54). In communities like Obudu and Vandeikya, conflicts often stem from land disputes, ethnic rivalries, and poor leadership, all of which are exacerbated by emotional reactions and selfish agendas.

Awolowo argued that unless leaders and citizens cultivate self-control, altruism, and intellectual discipline, societal development and peace will remain elusive. According to him, "No society can rise above the level of its intellectual and moral development" (Voice of Courage 109). This highlights the necessity of nurturing individuals and institutions that prioritize rational dialogue, justice, and inclusivity. Applying mental magnitude to these communities means encouraging ethical leadership at the traditional and political levels, equipping youth with moral education, and fostering a culture of nonviolence and communal responsibility. Peace-building in Obudu and Vandeikya, therefore, requires more than political settlements, it demands a philosophical and moral reorientation grounded in Awolowo's vision of disciplined minds building just societies. By embracing this ideal, local stakeholder can transform the communities into models of cooperation, progress, and sustainable peace.

### **The Reasons for The Persistent Communal Conflict Between Obudu and Vandeikya Communities**

The persistent communal conflict between Obudu (in Cross River State) and Vandeikya (in Benue State) is rooted in a complex interplay of historical grievances, boundary disputes, economic competition, ethnic identity politics, and weak institutional conflict resolution mechanisms. These factors, both immediate and structural, have sustained a cycle of mistrust and violence between these neighboring communities over the years. One of the primary reasons for the conflict is the dispute over land and boundary demarcation. Historically, the exact boundary between the two communities has been poorly defined, with each side laying ancestral claims to portions of land that are agriculturally and strategically valuable. This dispute is compounded by the failure of clear state demarcation and the lack of enforcement of peace agreements. As Ugiomoh observes, "In most inter-community conflicts in Nigeria, the lack of documentation and legal adjudication over land claims leads to repeated violence and unresolved tension" (Ugiomoh 78). Secondly, ethnic identity and cultural pride have intensified the conflict. The Vandeikya people, predominantly of Tiv ethnic origin, and the Obudu people, largely of the Bette subgroup, often interpret disputes through ethnic lenses. Political actors have sometimes manipulated this divide for electoral or personal gain, thereby deepening resentment. Ethnic divisions are weaponized in narratives of victimhood and entitlement, fueling retaliatory actions and worsening communal cohesion (Ojo and Aremu 114).

Another critical factor is economic competition, particularly over access to farmlands and markets. Both communities rely heavily on agriculture, and population growth has increased the pressure on land, making any encroachment or perceived takeover a potential flashpoint. Additionally, migration and settlement patterns have heightened anxiety about land ownership and local autonomy. Weak governance and poor conflict resolution mechanisms at the local and state levels have also allowed the conflict to fester. Traditional institutions and community leaders, once custodians of dialogue and peace, have in some cases lost credibility or been bypassed. Government responses have often been reactive rather than preventive, focusing on short-term peacekeeping instead of long-term reconciliation (Okoli and Ugwu 98). The persistent conflict between Obudu and Vandeikya cannot be reduced to a single cause. It is the product of interwoven historical, ethnic, economic, and political dynamics exacerbated by institutional failures. For sustainable peace to emerge, a holistic approach, combining land reform, interethnic dialogue, effective local governance, and civic education, is essential.

## **Voice of Reason and Voice of Courage in Awolowo's Philosophy and their Application to the Socio-Ethical Challenges in Obudu and Vandeikya**

In the intellectual and political philosophy of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, two of his most influential works *Voice of Reason* and *Voice of Courage* serve as foundational articulations of his ethical, political, and philosophical ideals. These texts are not merely collections of speeches; they represent a coherent worldview centered on rational governance, moral integrity, disciplined leadership, and social justice. Awolowo's insights in these volumes offer timeless solutions to contemporary issues, particularly the socio-ethical challenges facing communities like Obudu in Cross River State and Vandeikya in Benue State. In *Voice of Reason*, Awolowo emphasizes the supremacy of the human intellect guided by moral values. He argues that true progress, whether personal or national can only emerge when individuals subordinate their passions to rational judgment. "Only the disciplined use of reason, in pursuit of truth and justice, can liberate and advance a people" (Awolowo, *Voice of Reason* 22). Here, Awolowo establishes mental magnitude the disciplined mind, as the bedrock of ethical living and national development. In *Voice of Courage*, Awolowo presents his unwavering commitment to moral convictions, even in the face of political adversity. His courage was rooted not in sentiment or violence but in principled action anchored in truth. He contended that leadership requires the ability to speak and act justly, especially when popular opinion resists truth: "A leader must possess the courage to speak truth to power and act for the good of all, not the pleasure of a few" (*Voice of Courage* 88).

**Socio-Ethical Challenges in Obudu and Vandeikya:** The Obudu and Vandeikya communities have faced recurring communal conflicts, often fueled by land disputes, ethnic rivalry, political manipulation, and the breakdown of traditional moral systems. These conflicts are symptoms of deeper ethical decay, such as self-centered leadership, emotional decisionmaking, and communal distrust. The failure of peace-building efforts reflects a lack of internal moral clarity and a culture of reactive rather than proactive governance. **Application of Awolowo's Philosophy to Obudu and Vandeikya:** Awolowo's emphasis on reason and courage offers a compelling strategy for resolving these conflicts and rebuilding fractured relationships:

- i. **Promoting Mental Magnitude in Leadership:** Community leaders in Obudu and Vandeikya must cultivate self-discipline, empathy, and rational thinking. Decisions should not be based on ethnic sentiments or personal gains but on reasoned analysis and communal benefit (Awolowo, *Voice of Reason* 45).
- ii. **Fostering Moral Courage Among Youths and Elders:** The courage to challenge wrong cultural practices, political manipulation, and violence must be instilled across age groups. Leaders must boldly reject incitement and promote truth, justice, and dialogue (*Voice of Courage* 101).
- iii. **Building Ethical Institutions:** Schools, religious bodies, and traditional institutions should adopt Awolowo's writings as part of their civic education curriculum. Teaching mental discipline and moral courage will prepare future generations for ethical citizenship.
- iv. **Encouraging Reason-Based Dialogue:** Conflict resolution must shift from emotional confrontations to rational, evidence-based dialogue. Awolowo's thought supports inclusive discussion, where all stakeholders engage in ethical reasoning to reach peaceful agreements.

In a time when emotional extremism and shallow leadership threaten communal stability, Awolowo's *Voice of Reason* and *Voice of Courage* stand out as guideposts for ethical

rejuvenation. His philosophy provides Obudu and Vandeikya with the tools to rise above conflict through disciplined minds, moral leadership, and rational community-building. His legacy reminds us that peace is not simply the absence of war, but the presence of justice, wisdom, and principled courage.

### **Ethical Dimensions of Mental Magnitude in Awolowo's Thought**

The philosophical thought of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, one of Africa's most respected nationalist leaders and intellectuals, is deeply rooted in the moral transformation of the individual and society. The concept of mental magnitude, goes beyond intellectual excellence to encompass ethical strength, personal discipline, and civic responsibility. The ethical dimensions of mental magnitude are central to Awolowo's vision of national development, good governance, and sustainable peace. Awolowo defines mental magnitude as a cultivated state in which an individual consistently subordinates lower desires such as greed, hatred, fear, or pride to higher moral reasoning and rational judgment. He wrote: "Mental magnitude is the possession of the capacity to control the lower instincts and impulses, and to act from the standpoint of reason and enlightened conscience" (Voice of Reason 33). This understanding affirms that true leadership and citizenship require more than education or political power, they require ethical maturity. Mental magnitude, therefore, is not only cognitive but moral: it is the ability to make just, balanced, and compassionate decisions for the collective good.

### **Ethical Qualities within Mental Magnitude**

The persistent communal conflict between the Obudu (in Cross River State) and Vandeikya (in Benue State) communities, characterized by land disputes, ethnic tensions, retaliatory violence, and political manipulation, calls for more than political agreements or military interventions. It demands a deep ethical transformation of individual character and communal values. Chief Obafemi Awolowo's concept of mental magnitude, with its strong ethical foundation, offers practical pathways for resolving and preventing such conflicts.

- i. **Self-Discipline:** Awolowo emphasized that no individual can lead others without first mastering himself. Ethical governance, in his view, begins with the inner ability to resist corruption, bribes, vengeance, and egotism (Awolowo, Voice of Courage 67). In Obudu and Vandeikya, many conflicts escalate due to retaliatory attacks, emotional outbursts, and failure to exercise restraint. The ethic of self-discipline teaches community leaders and youths to reject immediate, emotional retaliation in favor of calm reflection and lawful action. Integrating this into peace-building training (through schools, churches, and traditional councils) can help break the cycle of revenge and allow room for nonviolent resolution.
- ii. **Moral Courage:** He stressed that leaders must be courageous not in violence or bluster, but in standing for truth even in the face of opposition. Courage, as a facet of mental magnitude, means defending justice and the weak, and speaking truth to power (Awolowo, Voice of Courage 102). Conflicts in both communities are often sustained by silence, fear, and politically motivated falsehoods. Leaders with mental magnitude would speak the truth about historical grievances, call out injustice within their own ethnic group, and refuse to manipulate or be manipulated. Moral courage would empower dialogue, transparency, and fairness, even in the face of resistance.
- iii. **Altruism:** Awolowo believed that mental magnitude empowers individuals to pursue the wellbeing of others over selfish interest. He saw this as key to public service, where the focus should always be on uplifting the many rather than enriching the few.

- iv. **Justice and Fairness:** Ethical decision-making, rooted in mental magnitude, is grounded in fairness and the rule of law. Awolowo consistently argued that the progress of a nation depends on leaders who can rise above tribalism, nepotism, and bias to deliver justice impartially. Conflict decisions often arise from rumors, ethnic stereotypes, or political incitement, rather than verified information and rational debate. Promoting mental magnitude means encouraging deliberative conflict resolution, where elders and youth leaders are trained to assess causes, consequences, and ethical responsibilities before any group reaction. For example, a community experiencing a land dispute could establish an independent panel, guided by reasoned dialogue and traditional values, rather than impulsive community retaliation.
- v. **Emotional Intelligence:** Part of mental magnitude is the ability to manage emotions like anger, fear, or despair, which often drive people toward destructive behavior. Ethical reasoning, he argued, must always take precedence over passion (Awolowo, *Voice of Reason* 35). Elites and political figures in both Obudu and Vandeikya have often exploited tensions for personal or political gain. Embedding Awolowo's ethics means re-orienting leadership towards altruism and self-sacrifice. When leaders begin to prioritize peace over power, the community benefits collectively, and the cycle of manipulation-driven violence breaks.

Historical injustices real or perceived fuel resentment. One group may feel they are unfairly treated in land settlements, resource allocation, or legal cases. Applying Awolowo's ethical framework means institutionalizing truth-telling, fairness in arbitration, and compensation where needed. Mental magnitude compels authorities to rise above ethnic loyalties and deliver equitable justice, thus fostering reconciliation. In both communities, youth militancy and communal aggression thrive where there is apathy, ignorance, or detachment. Peace is not just the responsibility of traditional rulers or government but of every citizen. Embedding mental magnitude into civic education programs, youth associations, and religious teachings will encourage a shared ethical duty to maintain peace. The ethical dimensions of mental magnitude self-discipline, moral courage, rationality, altruism, justice, and civic responsibility provide not only personal virtues but collective strategies for conflict resolution and peace-building. By instilling these values in the leadership, youth, and institutions of Obudu and Vandeikya, the communities can move from mutual suspicion to ethical cooperation.

Awolowo's philosophy is more than historical it is urgently relevant, offering a Nigeriangrown, values-driven framework for resolving today's deep-rooted communal crises. As such, peacebuilding efforts in these communities should move beyond dialogue and security presence, and toward ethical re-education and leadership transformation based on mental magnitude. The prolonged communal conflicts between the Obudu (in Cross River State) and Vandeikya (in Benue State) communities are rooted in historical grievances, resource competition, ethnic mistrust, and political manipulation. While these tensions are often addressed through security deployment and political mediation, they persist due to deep moral and ethical fractures within the communities and their leadership structures. Obafemi Awolowo's ethical concept of mental magnitude, particularly the values of altruism, justice and fairness, and emotional intelligence, provides an enduring philosophical and ethical framework that can guide long-term peacebuilding in these communities. Communal leaders, politicians, and youth leaders in Obudu and Vandeikya have often allowed selfish interests land control, ethnic superiority, and political dominance to override the communal

good. This self-centeredness leads to decisions that prioritize revenge, personal gain, or political relevance, rather than harmony and justice.

The ethical dimensions of mental magnitude altruism, justice and fairness, and emotional intelligence are critical for addressing the communal conflict between Obudu and Vandeikya. These values transcend political quick-fixes and aim at inner transformation of individuals and ethical renewal of communities. If integrated into peacebuilding efforts, local governance structures, and inter-communal dialogue, they can usher in a sustainable peace rooted not just in the absence of war but in the presence of justice, compassion, and disciplined leadership. As Awolowo aptly observed, “Only those with mental magnitude can rise above personal passions and prejudices to serve as true leaders of society” (Voice of Reason, 38). It is this kind of leadership and citizenship that Obudu and Vandeikya now desperately need. In today’s world marked by corruption, ethnic tension, youth restiveness, and moral decay Awolowo’s call for mental magnitude remains urgent. Nigeria’s political, religious, and social leaders often falter not due to a lack of intellect, but due to ethical failure. For young people, the concept serves as a moral compass for navigating the temptations of modern life. In public life, it provides a framework for just policies and civic engagement. The ethical dimensions of mental magnitude in Awolowo’s thought offer a holistic pathway to personal transformation and national renewal. It challenges citizens and leaders to live by principle, discipline their desires, and commit to the good of others. As Awolowo wisely stated, “Only those with mental magnitude can rise above personal passions and prejudices to serve as true leaders of society” (Voice of Reason 38). By returning to this ethic of disciplined thought and moral action, societies like Nigeria can build a future based not merely on politics or power, but on justice, responsibility, and peace. Solution Pathway:

- i. Youths, who are often at the frontlines of violence, can be trained in emotional intelligence and nonviolent communication. When people learn to pause, reflect, and choose reason over rage, conflict escalation can be curbed.
- ii. Religious and educational institutions can use Awolowo’s philosophy to teach conflict de-escalation techniques, empathy, and patience.
- iii. Leaders with high emotional intelligence can model restraint and forgiveness, showing that true strength lies in peaceful resolution, not reactive aggression.

## **Conclusion**

The ethical dimensions of Obafemi Awolowo’s concept of mental magnitude offer a profound and contextually relevant pathway to sustainable peace-building in the conflict-prone communities of Obudu (Cross River State) and Vandeikya (Benue State). Awolowo’s idea of mental magnitude emphasizes self-discipline, rational decision-making, moral responsibility, and the subordination of base impulses to higher communal ideals. These qualities are not merely personal virtues but essential foundations for building harmonious, just, and progressive societies. In both Obudu and Vandeikya, communal crises have frequently arisen due to a breakdown of trust, ethnic suspicion, political manipulation, and failure of moral leadership. This research has shown that without an ethical reorientation grounded in mental magnitude, no amount of external intervention or security enforcement can yield lasting peace. Awolowo’s insistence on the disciplined and ethical use of the mind directly addresses the internal moral and psychological conditions that often ignite and sustain conflicts. The study concludes that true peace-building begins with the cultivation of mental and moral strength among individuals and leaders within the

community. It is through education, ethical mentoring, civic enlightenment, and responsible governance that the principles of mental magnitude can be internalized and lived out. Specifically, traditional rulers, community-based organizations, youth associations, religious institutions, and schools must play active roles in fostering the values of rationality, patience, self-control, and altruism as taught by Awolowo. Ultimately, Awolowo's ethical vision reminds us that peace is not merely the absence of war, but the presence of conscious, morally upright individuals working together for the collective good. In applying these insights to Obudu and Vandeikya, there lies a hopeful model for healing divisions and building a culture of sustainable peace and shared progress.

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