

THE IDEOLOGY OF AFRICAN COMMUNALISM AS A SOCIALIST PATHWAY TONIGERIA'S NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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Abstract

Prior to the advent of westernization and Westerners into the African soil, Africans in their closely knit communal villages and amphi-tonies maintained an appreciable social cohesion, control and unity. Granted that there were still inter-tribal disagreements and conflicts yet, tribesmen in their traditional setting considered themselves members of the same household. Each individual was his brother's keeper and communal interest was held paramount in their socio-political, economic and spiritual considerations. However, the overthrow and subversion of traditional African values by slave-trade, colonialism and their associated ideologies, replaced an uncouth but stable space with a divisive, dominant, discriminative and politicized one. This loss of communality along with values that make for social integration and control combined with the total embrace of possessive individualism coincidental with capitalism, to pitch hitherto brothers against one another in an unhealthy competition. It also, with its characteristic exploitative instruments, introduced in Nigeria, artificial but deep ethnic divisions, rivalry, and mutual hatred – all of which tend to helplessly grind the wheels of the country to a halt. Consequently, violence, ethnicism, religious intolerance, nepotism and corruption now becloud and blindfold her nationalist spirit. Against this backdrop, this paper proposes a re-invention of African communalism and therefore explores this ideology, as an alternative socialist instrument for national integration. The author adopts the literary analysis method of enquiry for this research.

Keywords: African communalism, ideology, sociology, community, integration.

1. Introduction

African communalism as a socialist ideology emphasizes the shared way of life practiced by the Africans in their traditional setting prior to the advent of the white man and his values. African socialism emerged during the 1950's pre-independent era of most African countries as a compass body of communalistic ideas. Friedland and Rosberg (1964) have it that, the mutual principles of the various versions of African socialism, which took its roots from the communalistic ways of Africans were among others, economic development championed mainly by the public sector, a definition of African identity and personality, and a determined scheme that discouraged stratification of society into classes.

Senghor (1998) claims that socialism is natural to Africa owing to their tribal community life which constitutes their social background. He however, does not recognize as valid, the

theory of class struggle. This renders African socialism and all its variations different from Marxism and the socialist theory of Europe. Consequent upon the foregoing reasons, the term, African socialism or communalism will be interchangeably used in this paper. However, the major question prompting our present research is to uncover the extent African socialist communalism can serve an instrumental purpose to uniting the ethnic/cultural heterogeneous society like Nigeria? This is the problem that informs this work. The author therefore first-handily, discusses African communalism as a socialist ideology before examining how traditional African communalism, which subsequently blossomed into socialism, can be employed in uniting the discrete ethnicities of the Nigeria nation. Our work in any case, is rounded off with a succinct conclusion, which couches our proposed vent out of disunity namely, the activation of African indigenous communalism.

2. African communalism as a socialist ideology

Gove (1961) defines communalism, as the theory that encourages communal ownership of goods and property. It holds that each commune should be self governing and the state, a mere federation of communes. Azikiwe (1980) defines socialism, which in this case, is an adapted form of communalism, as an economic system whereby the means of production, exchange and distribution along with the administration of social services are basically in the hands of the state. Here, the foregoing is dispensed by the state, from each according to his ability, to each according to his work. In other words, in this system a socialist society frowns at private property and even the ownership of any means of production by private individuals. It rather encourages the expansion of state activity in order to ensure and enhance that freedom and justice are given to individuals.

In an attempt to determine the defining edges of this strand of communalism tagged African socialism, its crusaders are of the opinion that it aims at eliminating social injustice by abrogating social inequity, which is responsible for poverty. It promotes a fair distribution of wealth, and supports the idea that public ownership of productive and distributive ventures should reside with the public. Besides, it supports scientific planning and the promotion of equality, even social welfare is at the epi-centre of this system. Socialism therefore considers the state as a fraternal co-operative and inclusive common wealth, which resolves the contradictions of injustice and wastefulness occasioned by capitalism.

However, critics of socialism adjudge the state as poor in business management consequent upon the bureaucracy and the structure of administration it runs. Beside this, the many socialist schools of thought and strands constitute another disease of socialism. Many a critic also alleges that the collective ownership of property which socialism proposes is opposed to the nature of man hence, a resort to force in order to propel its change. These variations of socialism make it difficult for socialists to smoothly push their practice due to the fact that they lack the people's confidence. From the foregoing, we are meant to conceive African Socialism as a borrowed concept representing an indigenous social system that approximates communalism.

What then do we mean by Ideology? The term ideology was introduced by the French philosopher, A.L.C. Destutt de Tracy, ever since then, this subject has unabatedly been controversial. Ideology is defined as a form of social or political philosophy in which practical

elements are as prominent as theoretical ones, it is a system of ideas that aspire both to explain the world and to change it, (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1943). Nzimiro (1977) also has ideology as a system of ideas concerning phenomena especially those of social life; the manner of thinking characteristic of a class or an individual. Nzimiro's definition appears to be in tandem with that given by Azikiwe above, which conceives ideology as "a systematic body of concepts especially about human life or culture incorporating ways of life and thought patterns of an individual or groups of individuals regarding a particular aspect of social relations. These three definitions emphasize the fact that there is no concord as to the meaning of this highly emotive concept. In any case, Blackburn (1999), defines ideology as a conceptual scheme with practical ideas for application. Put differently, any wide ranging system of beliefs, ways of thought, and categories that provide the foundation of programmes of political and social action could be considered as an ideology.

However, Azikiwe (1980) concludes that Nigeria has a unique ideology since no cultural group exists without one. Hence, Esedebe (1980) was therefore right to have affirmed that just as a baby does not need a name to exist, so an ideology does not require a label to be a fact. What then is the dominant indigenous ideology in Nigeria? The answer to this question will give better direction to our research. Therefore, the ideology that is markedly identified and presently being considered in this work, is African Socialism but as an instrument for uniting Nigeria.

Senghor (1998) conceives African strand of socialism as a peculiar one because it best describes communal life as lived by indigenous Africans in their traditional setting and prior to the advent of the Europeans into the continent. He opines that the major elements central to African socialism are, economic democracy and spiritual freedom. Similarly, Alofun (2014) explains African socialism through the communal life practiced by traditional Africans. He says that anyone who seeks the socio-political ancestors of socialism, must go to communalism. Socialism relates communalism just as capitalism relates feudalism and slavery. He further submits that Africans' attitude towards man is at best, socialistic. Man in traditional Africa, is primarily regarded as a spiritual being, a being blessed with a certain inward integrity, dignity and value. Alofun citing Nkrumah therefore holds that the idea of the original value of man imposes duties of a socialist kind upon mankind. In this same vein, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania sees African socialism, which he calls *Ujamaa* Socialism as that which is beyond a political system but rather, a philosophy, which serves as a gateway to African selfhood. Alofun (2014) reports that Nyerere claims that African socialism approximate an attitude of the mind. This attitude of the mind goes beyond the task of reconciling individuals but entails effecting a structural change in tandem with the socialist outlook. It also involves the creation of a pattern of justice whereby creative equality and freedom get easily achieved. Therefore, as an ideology, there is difficulty in giving a univocal definition to African Socialism as its various originators and proponents conceive the concept differently.

We may after all fall back to the definition in Agbaje (1991) which has it that African socialism consists in the striving to re-live but in a modern way, the community practised by traditional Africans prior to the advent of white man's values. Besides, it is as well a search for an entirely different strand of a social system indigenous to Africans (Alofun,2014). Mboya (1963) agrees

with the foregoing understanding and conceives this type of socialism as rather, a political philosophy purposely meant for the restoration of national values, social practices of the community and most of all geared towards bringing back the rich morally laden values in the mentality of traditional African society including the ability to bring about a consciousness and indispensability of values within the context of the new world of money economy, which influences the worldviews of the majority today.

Our next major task is relate the concept with the reality of a multicultural, multilingual and highly tribalized polity, called Nigeria. This is done in order to ascertain how tenable and relevant or otherwise, it can be in uniting Nigeria people.

3. African communalism/socialism and the unity of Nigeria

Nigeria is currently made up of about 350 ethnic/linguistic and cultural groups and is held together by blood, marriage, socio-economic, and political interdependence. However, the most important of these binding forces seem to be time-bound migration, colonialism and imperialism/western education and institutions. Can these roughly three hundred and fifty ethnic linguistic and cultural groups form one indivisible entity enjoying unity in diversity? What best approach or ideology can we adopt given the state of violence and loss of lives our ethnic and religious differences have engendered in Nigeria? How then, can African communalism or socialism address the ethnic and religious differences in Nigeria? These are questions begging for answers, which in turn form the mainstay of this subsection.

The importance and instrumentality of African communalism in uniting Nigeria cannot be overemphasized based on its role in recapturing and illuminating African traditional communal way of life. This communal worldview held sway before key industries became nationalized, wealth-redistributed, the advent of a minimum wage, acceptance of constitutional supremacy, social security, decentralization, accommodation of tolerance and complementarity, separation of powers, etc. It does seem that Nigeria stands to gain national cohesion and integration if we should adopt this socialist ideology. As Novak (1989) rightly observes, human community has no parallel in nature, it is not collectivist in the fashion of a herd, livestock or bird or school of fish. But neither are humans merely individuals, as if atomic particles entirely closed off from one another. Rather, every human being is a member of the human community imagined as whole, including all ancestors, all descendants, and all contemporaries among the living; in short, the entire family of humankind. In modern times, no community can be adjudged good if it treats individuals as mere instruments. "The purpose of human community is to enable each person to reach the full term of his or her personal development, in the full range of basic human skills and virtues. Each human community is to be judged in the light of how it promotes the full development of all its individual members (Novak, 1989).

Going by the above citation, we discover that the community of our dreams can be identified in the framework of African Socialism, which espouses such socialist ideas that promote industrialization. It is only such strong force that can unite a nation like Nigeria. As an illustration, we find out that when states take over a sector and when public corporations owed by the people run their daily affairs, their ability to directly invest in key industries, distribute state profits from nationalized industries for national good, and to directly anchor

production and producers to social rather than market goals are enhanced. This leads to a more efficient control of the industries both by and for the workers. Besides, such nationalization tendency influenced by an socialist orientation helps to reach out to the larger population with the dividends and challenges of publicly funded research, which in turn brings development and unites on a wider scale.

African communalistic socialism aids in redistributing wealth, through the use of spending policies and tax. When that is done, economic inequalities get reduced then, a heterogeneous state like Nigeria gets better united. This is because, when the basic needs of a people are met, there will be high tendency of promoting the culture of unity. This is because shared experiences and common purpose have a way of fostering unity. Relating unity to community development, Udoidem (1992) opines that community development begins with the orientation of the people's minds to eschew selfishness, self centeredness, utilitarian and hedonistic relationships. Altruistic love, the wishing of good to another for that other's sake, the convivialist spirit (live and let live) is the links that bind and nurture community. If a communal life is to be developed in Nigeria, Nigerians must recognize each other as equals in citizenship. Without such identification and recognition, the tendency is to overlook, exploit and use other human beings for selfish ends will exacerbate. The more this exploitative tendency perjuries, the more community eludes us and the more communalism is a day dream.

A careful look at the suggested indices for community building as submitted in the above citation, underscores the rationale behind our preference for African communalism (socialism) over and above capitalism, as a more relevant ideology for a united Nigeria. African socialism, (which captures the community spirit as posited above by Udoidem), can foster the development of a scheme of social security, where workers are enabled to wholeheartedly run a contributory and compulsory public insurance program. That again, can also be a good tool for achieving the pan-African objectives of unity and social control.

Regrettably, the poor management of these schemes has made it difficult to achieve its purposes. There is the high possibility that proper management of these schemes can provide a leverage platform for national unity. Another instrumentality of African socialist communalism in uniting Nigeria can be found in employment protection, minimum wages and trade union recognition rights for workers' beneficence. In African socialist communalism, such policies guarantee living wages and help to achieve greater full employment opportunities for the citizenry. In joining of forces against terrorism and/or external or internal aggression within the polity, African socialist communalism can pull together nations with this ideology to form a common front against such national challenges as that of the present *Boko Haram* and Herdsmen terrorist acts in today's Nigeria.

Given the current political climate alongside hostilities toward socialism, there are lots of misconceptions about African socialist communalism and its advantages. Let us for an example expose in details the merits of socialism and how Nigeria might gain from it. Among others, socialism tends to have more of people's interest considered in the making of policy at the governmental level. For instance in capitalism, we discover that only selfish or individualistic motives are pursued and as such, unity is ultimately unsustainable. It is very

important to note that capitalism is described here as being exploitative because of the class struggle it engenders.

Buzue and Gorodnor (1989) cited Karl Marx as having observed that, the class struggle in a capitalist system is dominated by certain features.

- 1) The classes are classically reduced to two: the bourgeoisie, and the worker.
- 2) The relations of the production are founded upon one fundamental contradiction although both are partners; the act of production, the fruits of production and the mode of distribution are not commensurate with the contributions made by each class. The existence of numerous labourers cheapen labour and reduce it to mere subsistence level while the value of the products created by labour can be sold for more than it costs to hire the labour force since the product fashioned by labour can be sold for more than the cost of labour, the capitalist then reaps the difference namely, the surplus value. Marx and Engel's Communist Manifesto (2014 edition) cited above, underscores the reality that the capitalist appropriates a substantial part of wealth to himself hence; the feeling of exploitation nurtured by the proletariat organizes around this. Capitalism therefore, creates an oppressed people who are taken advantage of by the tyrannical few. In this way, capitalist democracies promote societal ills. Socialism on the other hand, fights such exploitative tendencies. One may quickly point towards the failure of the Soviet Union (USSR), as a huge weakness of our argument but recent reports from Wikileaks unveil the fact that the capitalist United States of America and its allies, tactically undermined communism in order not only to introduce liberal democracy, but also to perpetuate themselves as the overlords of the world.

Granted that, "African Socialism" or better put, African socialist communalism, is not a water tight and perfect social system just as no other economic system is. Yet, history bears witness that African societies, enjoyed greater social harmony in the pre-colonial era, when life was lived communally. Unfortunately, all that have given way to westernization and the hemorrhaging loss of valued traditional norms. Globalization, which widely spreads foreign cultures into traditional societies has hit Africa so hard that the majority have become, Americanized. Emedolu (2013) citing Ihejirika reports regarding the plight of today's African society and her culture that: now to be scientifically and/or technologically developed is to be modernized, to be modernized is to be implicitly westernized and this is then interpreted as development. Efemini (2003) has noted this tendency in his *Claude Ake Philosophy of National Development* and confesses that external agents have employed this notion and it has enabled the West to canvass Western values and experiences as being coeval with development. To be techno-scientifically aware, has come to mean to jettison our cultural and ethical values and their replacement with Western exhibitionism in dressing codes, Islamism and Christianity in religion, capitalism in economy, democracy in politics and pop and rap in entertainment.

On the contrary, African socialist communalism reduces the unhealthy competitions that breed rivalry and hate among a people. Socialism transfers the responsibility, ownership and benefits of resources and the means of production from the elite few to the collective hands of the people. Against popular belief, this actually increases the quality of goods produced, etc. After all, one does not work harder to produce a better product or service to make oneself rich. It has been observed that it is the capitalistic character of some Nigeria elites that

invigorates and fuels greed which causes the disintegration of the Nigeria's unity cocoon. The solution to such disposition, is the adoption of African socialist communalism as an instrument for social cohesion and integration.

In other words in a socialist arrangement, workers are able to acquire their own property, companies and means of production. That way, they can maintain vested interest in the said facilities make their own profits thereby stifling institution led thievery and exploitation of their pauperized personalities, who chiefly produce wealth in the first place. Socialism therefore possesses the capability of reducing necrophilic or sadistic love and the false generosity it promotes, which always terminate in divisions and wars. African socialism consciously creates community values and it reinforces the idea that "we are all in this together" instead of each man fending for himself at any cost. This tends to have positive social benefits while equally distributing the workload. If national unity of Nigeria must be achieved, the adoption of this African socialist ideology should be a step in the right direction. Howbeit, it is one of the aims of the Nigerian national policy on education to build an egalitarian society and our proposed socialist ideology creates an egalitarian society. It means that, to achieve the aim of education in Nigeria, which has a strong uniting force, African socialism should be adopted as a reliable instrument.

African socialist communalism has the potentials (when rightly guided) to better the life of Nigerians. Improved standard of living can directly and indirectly unite Nigeria. In a socialist system, need replaces profit as the propelling force of production, which means that luxuriant goods which were hitherto in high demand but yielding little profits would be largely unavailable. The workers' voices are heard and their needs are also adequately met. As Kanu (2012) notes, man in African traditional culture is not just an individual who "contracts" to live with others in society, and presumably opts out if the balance of advantages is no longer favourable. Instead, the African man sees himself chiefly as a member of his family and subsequently, that of the community and the society, where he is born into before seeing himself as an individual.

This egalitarianism and communalism, which held together the pre-colonial Africa, is irreconcilable with capitalism. Our reason for this assertion being that capitalism promotes individualism and crass materialism. (The latter is used in this context to denote excessive desire for goods and wealth at the expense of any other more enduring value including the welfare of the community). It is this excessive individualism and the struggle for selfish interests that have brought about large scale corruption in the polity. Politicians nowadays deepen Nigeria's religious and ethnic differences all in the bid to score selfish political points. Instead, the adoption of African communalism will bring about a new social and economic arrangement, which will take Nigeria community more prized than ethnic or individual interests. Commenting on the type of education in traditional African Society prior to the advent of colonialists, Okoro (2013) citing Ntahobari and Ndayizinga, observes that, children were taught the virtues of living together peacefully under one roof. These principle of community living were centered around the themes of moderation, solidarity, respect for truth and willingness to work and strive for self and community advancement, respect for authority, sense of honesty, modesty, tolerance, sense of goodness and kindness, love of one's neighbor, respect for life and so on.

The foregoing forms the pillars that strongly held communal life in pre-colonial Africa. The school, church and hospitals, which the missionaries and colonialists brought, came with a difference epistemic orientation, which indoctrinate Africans into a false belief in Eurocentricism, economic dependency, capitalism and democracy with its scientific interpretation of social reality. These foreign techno-scientific ideology, divides hence, Africans are no more their brothers' keepers rather, betrayers and all in a bid to accumulate greater wealth than the rest but to the detriment of their unity. In fact, the best legacy the Western Scientific and technological civilization left for Africa could be summarized in what Thoreau (2012) calls an improved means to an unimproved end.

4. Conclusion

Given the objectives of its proponents, we understand "African Socialism" as an ideology or movement for the revitalization of African traditional values of communalism and its associated community spirit. African socialist communalism has been found by our study, to have the potentials of bringing back Nigeria's lost values as well as modernizing the old communal way of living. This socialist ideology is worth adopting as a working instrument in achieving lasting national integration and development, which is in tandem with the traditional African ontology. This ontology couches the idea of "I am" as a direct function of "we are" hence, without society, the individual in the African setting, does not in the real sense, exist. Having identified some shortcomings of capitalism with its attendant epistemic orientation, the need for African States (Nigeria inclusive) to evolve or re-invent the traditional African communalism, which ensures economic insurance, comes more seriously now to the fore.

We are not by this, proposing a total jettisoning of democratic ideals or any other thing that is alien to Africans. Rather, our traditional extended family system is a ready-in-hand tool for social-economic re-orientation and re-engineering. Under this system, social security will not just be for the aged but also for both the disadvantaged and poor members of the family, whose efforts to meaningfully eke out a living have not been so successful. In our proposed system, provision is made for the have-nots across different ethnic groups of Nigeria society, who also will enjoy their freedom as do the haves. Such communalism reduces their chances of going into criminal activities which will endanger the society's well-being and security. African communalism and/or socialism therefore afford us the opportunity to consider Nigeria as a wider and extended family. When people of different ethnic nationalities and religious inclinations learn to trust one another, help one another, interact culturally, and economically, the politico-religious differences, which divide Nigeria will be de-emphasized. In consequence, social harmony and economic interdependence will be enhanced. When an Igbo man from the South East begins to consider the Ijaw man from South-South as a brother and the Hausa man from the North begins to welcome with open arms, the Yoruba man from the West as a brother or friend and in the spirit of African socialist communalism, unity will definitely be achieved. Until Nigeria evolves such harmonious communalism, common purpose, the social cohesion it engenders, will always be compromised. When such common purpose of our dreams become the national focus, an integrated nation and a united Nigeria will emerge, where tribal violence, incessant blood-letting, ethnic frictions and loss of property consequent upon social unrests and activities of miscreants will drastically reduce, if not totally contained.

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