

## A CRITIQUE ON AFRICAN SOCIALISM AS A PERFECT HUMAN RELATION

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**Abstract:** Socialism has been presented as one of the notions which is difficult to be understood in a comprehensive manner. The most important articulation about socialism is the fact that it is about human relations. This aspect is fundamentally in connection with the concept of care for each other as well as the spirit of sharing of earthly privileges which are God's given gifts to the humanity for its survival. What make socialism an issue of human concern is therefore, the struggle to understand on whether human beings are self-sufficient or to be human implies to be in a mutual dependence as ends themselves and not means an end. However, in reference to the values which African socialism propagates, provides a unified platform for a perfect human relation.

**Keywords:** Socialism, African socialism, Liberalism, Capitalism, Civilization, Human relations, Human values.

### 1.0 Introduction

This critique presents African Socialism as an ideal human existence especially on matters concerning human relation and well-being. The main argument in this discussion is generated from the fact that, one of the fundamental aspects of human existence is to live in harmony with each other as the members of human family. We therefore argue that African socialism provides an ambient where this fundamental human aspect can be fully realized. It is a critique because, African socialism appears to be a contradictory of terms as it implies to African's way of life which in this modern world is presented not only as primitive and indigenous but also irrational. This discussion will exhibit the negative perceptions that have distorted the value of African socialism. This will lead us to the claims of restoring its significant in reference to the fact that it is the perfect human relation that can promotes the well-being of humanity at large.

### 1.1 Socialism in General

Edmond Kelly in the book entitled, *Twentieth Century Socialism*, defines socialism as the solidarity of mankind. According to Kelly, the main aim of socialism is for the improvement of all and also as a platform which create an environment where exploitation, unemployment

Poverty and prostitution shall be eliminated.<sup>1</sup> In this case, socialism stands out as is as a demand for the value of a human being in terms of equality and the care for each other.

Socialism also explicates an ought to extend privileges towards each other under the same token of human equality. On the other hand, the ought to extend privileges is always compromised due to some awkward situations where socialism appears simply idealistic. For example, Bernard Shaw in the book; *Fabian Essay's in Socialism*, gives as a perspective where he categories human being as both the wise and fools. According to Shaw, the wise are those who strikes spade with heavy toil and discover the treasures provided by nature, whereas the fools are those on the other side of hedge guzzling idly at the sand glittering in the sun.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Edmond Kelly. *Twentieth Century Socialism: What it is Not, what it is, How it May Come*, (Longmans: Greed & Co 1910), 1

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Shaw. *Fabian Essay's in Socialism*, (New York: Scott Publishing ltd 1962), 3.

In these kinds of situations, the basic argument comes when we think of the wise who gets his fill by his hard-working spirit and yet he or she is demanded to share the privileges with the fools. From the perspective of human equality, fools will still remain human beings despite of not using their capacity to get their fill. In that regard, the demand for socialism as the propagation of the spirit of sharing and care for each other becomes a privilege to fools and unjust to the wise.

There is also another aspect of the argument against socialism where the structures and systems of governing the societies or nations, provide an understanding that there are some people who were naturally born as the haves and the have nots. This aspect justifies a naturalistic poverty. Aristotle is one of the ancient thinkers who believed on this notion so dearly in the perspective of the presence of the masters and slaves. Aristotle holds that there are two kinds of human beings, one of free nature and the other, a slave.<sup>3</sup>

In the same manner, Aristotle therefore accentuated that the state is made of a household in which its completeness consists of slaves and freemen.<sup>4</sup> He believed that slaves are necessary for the management of the household, for no man can live well, or indeed live at all unless he is provided with necessities.<sup>5</sup> These necessities, can be achieved by having what he called instrument which are categories into living (slaves inclusive) and non-living instruments.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of the 'haves' and the 'have nots' from the socialist's perspective, is well displayed in Karl Marx's *Manifesto*. From Marx, we see a kind of socialism which is formed due to the class struggle between the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletarians*. The 'have nots' in this perspective, are not the natural ones as the Aristotelian slaves, but the system provide the loopholes for such biasness. This problem can be justified by appealing to Jean Jaurès argument as he tells us of the people who simply want to live a luxurious life as possible. Jaurès believed that there are those people, who want to live their life to the full, enjoying developing and enjoy the spiritual fulfillment through their contact with the beauty of life and civilization of their own and the worlds.<sup>7</sup> In Marx context, this struggle gives out three forms of socialism namely; the reactionary, the conservatives or Bourgeois as well as the critical utopian socialism.

According to the *Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the critical-Utopian socialism endeavors to deaden of the class struggle and to be reconciled with the class antagonism<sup>8</sup>. Apart from the Marx and Engels' utopian socialism, there are also some thinkers who presented socialism in a very different form of utopianism. This can be drawn from Richard Stevens argument on the concept of ideal, where socialism is presented as something that is beyond reach but at the sometime, that which we should any how strive<sup>9</sup>.

The most popular utopianism is that which can be extracted from Plato's concept of the *Ideal State* where the integrating principle is justice. Plato thinks of a society where every member has a role to play. He argued that, a properly organized state is the one where people are assigned to their places according to what kind of skills, they are capable of developing.<sup>10</sup> Thomas Moore on the other hand, talked of the society where power politics, private property is condemned representing a kind of utopianism prescribed from the Christian revelation.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.2 African Socialism

African Socialism is very unique as comparing to what has been presented above. It is unique because it is both an ideology, historic and most of all, it grounded in African traditional. In its general form, African Socialism is the African's way of life. It is a product of the most basic pillars of human existence which cannot be compromised as far as human relation is concerned. These pillars are human equality and dignity, care for each other and the spirit of sharing.

<sup>3</sup> David Gress. *From Plato to NATO*, (London: The Free Press 1998), 252.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Barnes. *The Complete Work of Aristotle*, (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press 1984), 4270.

<sup>5</sup> Barnes. *Complete works of Aristotle*, 4271.

<sup>6</sup> Barnes, 4271.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Jaurès. *Studies in Socialism*. Tran: Mildred Minturn, (New York: The Knickerbocker Press 1906), vii.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx & Frederick Engels. *The Manifesto of the communist Party*. Trans: Samuel Moore (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1969), 33.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Stevens. *Political Philosophy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press 2012), 291.

<sup>10</sup> J. S McClelland. *A History of Western Political Thought*, (New York: Routledge 1996), 29

<sup>11</sup> Fredrick Copestone. *A History of Philosophy; Late Medieval and Renaissances philosophy* (New York: Doubleday 1993), 32.

### 1.2.1 African Socialism as an Ideology and Historical

As an ideology it is closely associated with Pan- Africanism which is a worldwide Black consciousness that claimed for the dignity of the Blackman against exploitation and to gain self-determination. Under the banner of Pan-Africanism, the glimpse of self-determination was realized practically in 1960's when African nation gain independence and most of the nation were under the Blackman's leadership.

Pan -African leaders proposed and adopted some socialists' ideals in order to help them to manage the running of the newly independent nations. The main target was to achieve an established political independence as it was the case with leaders like Kwame Nkrumah who was the first present of Ghana. Nkrumah believed that, political independence is as indispensable step towards securing economic emancipation.<sup>12</sup>Nkrumah, adopted socialism with a conviction that, there is only one true socialism; thus, a scientific socialism.

This kind of socialism has its roots on the universal principles which include; common ownership of means of production, distribution and exchange, planned method of production by the state, modern industry and agriculture, political power as well as egalitarian. Nkrumah, claimed that socialism was proper for Africans tradition society, though he argued that it must be with an inclusion of the application of scientific methods in all spheres of thoughts and production.<sup>13</sup>

Another prominent figure who is also the epicenter of our discussion is Julius Kambarage Nyerere who is also the first president of Tanzania after it got its independence. Nyerere believed in a socialism which is built on universal and humanistic concepts that relates humanity as the whole. A socialism which is also international in the sense that its ideals and beliefs are relate to man in the society, not only in Tanzania but in Africa and the entire world. According to Nyerere, man by the extension of the concept of familyhood and the concept of human quality, is at the center of all political, economic and social development in socialists' society.<sup>14</sup>

For Nyerere, under socialism, man is the purpose for society itself and the basis of socialism is a belief in the oneness of man and the common, historical destiny of mankind.<sup>15</sup> In this case, socialist society has nothing to do with the class struggle.

It a society where all members have equal rights and equal opportunities; in which all can live at peace with each other without suffering or imposing injustice, being exploited, or exploiting and where all have gradually increase basic levels of material welfare before any individual lives

According to Nyerere, in African socialism, there is no room for idleness because everyone is a worker. He defined a worker not in the context of being in opposition to employer, but he talked of a worker as opposed to loiterer or idler.<sup>16</sup> And so, in African socialism there was no way of earning a living for the community without doing any work.<sup>17</sup> It means therefore that the notion of the wise and the fool does not comply with African socialism rather, we only have people who works together for the benefit of all.

### 1.2.2 African Socialism as it is Rooted in the African Tradition

In our context, we can talk of African tradition in connection to two major concept that are also related to socialism and these are; the concept of familyhood which Nyerere called Ujamaa and that of a human person. As we have said earlier on, it is quite obvious that Nyerere probably presupposed that the concept of African tradition it already clears to the people of Tanzania because it was just as their way of life. However, in reference to many sources, we observed that the concept African tradition contains a lot aspects that can help us to capture the concept of familyhood at its core.

<sup>12</sup> Guy Martin. *African Political Thought*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2012), 86.

<sup>13</sup> Martin, *African Political Thought*, 89.

<sup>14</sup> Martin, *African Political Thought*, 100.

<sup>15</sup> Martin, 101.

<sup>16</sup> Julius K. Nyerere. *Ujamaa Essays on Socialism*, (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press 1968), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Nyerere, 4.

The vastness of African tradition can be understood by appealing for instance to the concept of Ubuntu. As a philosophy, ubuntu was originally adopted in South Africa in 1990's. Primarily, Ubuntu is presented as African Humanism and in its general understanding, Ubuntu mean humanity or humaneness, and it has a believe that, a person is a person through the other person or people are people through people<sup>18</sup>. Ubuntu portrays a way of life which is entirely, it is not only aims at the political, social, and economic fulfillment but also a justification of the meaning of our being as a human family.

In most of the African tradition a human being is inclusively as a spiritual being or a religious being. In other words, human being exists as created a creature that has interest in the affairs of God, the other fellow Man and also the environment. Again, African tradition provides an extension of the presence of the spirits or the extra-human beings which all together forms a member of human family. Traditional Africans postulate a hierarch of beings where on top is God, in the middle various kinds of spirits together with the departed ancestors and the human species, the lower animals, and the of course the inanimate objects.<sup>19</sup>

John Mbiti in his work on African religion also gave a remark that, most African way of life has a very great acknowledgement of God as the final guardian of law and order and the moral and ethical codes<sup>20</sup>. In addition, Mbiti tells us that, African ontology is basically anthropocentric where man is at the very center of existence and that African people see everything else in its relation to this central position of man. Mbiti asserted with a lot of emphasis that what is common in most of African societies is its compatibility with the concept of God. According to Mbiti, God is the explanation of man's origin and sustenance, as if as God exist for the sake of man.<sup>21</sup>

However, if we fuse the Mbiti's understanding on the concept African tradition and that of ubuntu, we can say that to be a person or to belong to the family or a community is not something obvious. As Van Hensbroek articulated in the book; *African Renaissance and Ubuntu Philosophy*, to be a human being in African context, is a process of becoming, through initiations onto different stages of being as prescribed by the community.<sup>22</sup> So much that to be a human being is inseparable with the belonging to a certain grouping which also has some extension with other forms of beings. We can conclude therefore that, the compatibility with God, in African tradition gives us a comprehensive outline of African's way of life. It is from this aspect where man recognizes the beginning, the proceedings and the end of life. In tradition Africa, all the social structures were built in respect of the Supreme Being.

### 1.3 The Distortion of the basic Human Existence

The distortion of human existence implies the alteration of the human equality and dignity, the care for each other and the diminishing of the spirit of sharing as members of human family. This aspect makes us to stress that, man's attachment to the Supernatural Being, is not only by choice but an ought on its own. It is from the recognition that all men have a common source and thus God, where these basic pillars can make sense as the ideals of human existence. It is not only for Africans

Humanity at large. In the European context for instance, many scholars have agreed that there are some areas where man cannot be understood except in the context of the Supreme Being who is the source of his being.

We can assert that, socialism as such cannot be fully discussed minus the concept of God. The knowledge of man is equally the understanding of God as Emmanuel Levinas believed that, there can be no knowledge of God separated from the relationships with men.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, we argue that, there is no knowledge of man separate from the relationship with God hence no human Knowledge that will build a perfect humanity excluding the idea of God. This aspect is therefore very compatible with in Africa Socialism and it does not appear in other forms of socialism.

<sup>18</sup> Van Hensbroek. *African Renaissance and Ubuntu Philosophy*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper & Philip L. Quinn. *Blackwell Companion to Philosophy; A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 36

<sup>20</sup> John S. Mbiti. *African Religion and Philosophy*, (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc 1970), 260.

<sup>21</sup> Mbiti, 119.

<sup>22</sup> Van Hensbroek. *African Renaissance and Ubuntu Philosophy*, 18.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Shepherd. *Gift of the other; Levinas, Derrida and Theology of Hospitality*, (Britain: James Clarke & Co and Butterworth Press 2014), 20.

The major problem which humanity is suffering in this modern error is the distortion of the idea of God in man's dealings. God is only a victim of being used to serve man's self-interests. This problem has a specific genealogy which is none other than the European liberalism which was flourished in the wings of civilization. In general, we can say that the civilization attitude elevated the welfares that lead to the claims of the establishment of perfect human organization. The word perfect, in this case implies that, every human's endeavor is according to the human nature in its maximization of freedom and the exercise of reason.

Webster's New Dictionary, define liberalism as to imply emancipation from what binds the mind or will by either being indifference to the tradition, conception of dogmas, laws or the rejection of these.<sup>24</sup> The adoption of such doctrine is obviously dangerous to humanity because in actual sense, the liberal mind is very spontaneous and pragmatic with the manipulative ideals so as to govern humanity at large. Again, under the liberal systems the subscriptions of the ideals that are in reference to the nature of things are utterly overthrown.

This flow of liberalism justified the division of humanity to those that are perpetually bourgeoisie, exploiters, the liberal capitalists as well as the perpetual proletarians. It also gives an access to racism by defining people to in terms of those that are Black in both physical and blank in their intellectual capacity hence, they are hatred to the core. On the other hand, it provides those that are White in appearance and they are intellectually bright and privileged. This human reality provides a definite room for exploitation, among human beings because it is from this aspect where the supremacy of races and all sorts of discrimination ventures into the scene. Out of this distortion of human values that promote equality can never bring forth the best economic system and therefore capitalism is very problematic because it got its fertile soils in this distorted environment.

### 1.4 A Call to Retrieve the Value of African Socialism

As we have stressed in our discussion in reference to Nyerere that African socialism means the African's way of life. However, the concept of African's way of life sounds very negative and problematic in this modern world. In the first place, Africa itself is presented as indigenous, primitive as well as irrational which makes it difficult to claim for the effectiveness of Africa socialism in the promotion of a harmonic human existence. What we call Africa now, is mainly in the context of the manipulated, brainwashed and the outdoor play area of the Whiteman's exercise of the claims of superiority which he has perfectly succeeded. The Whiteman is the point of reference of the reality of the world especially in Africa where the adoption of the standard way of life is in negation to what is called the indigenous African. Unfortunately, what is called the primitive or indigenous, is that which harbors the values of African socialism.

In the context where Africa a way of life is condemned as below the human standard, African values can only be recognized as valuable only when the meaning of human existence is time to time revised. Getting to know the meaning of life is one way towards the dissemination of the importance of human-well-being specifically as it is propagated in African socialism. The essence of human life is to live in harmony with each other and to propagate the common good not only the good which is for the interest of a handful of people. But when we look at the concept of modernity at large, it has made the propagation of the self-interest inevitable. There is a lot of accreditations of capitalism as a perfect economic system as is also compatible with the modernity

Capitalism is an ally of civilization where the former is completely incompatible with African socialism. Nyerere treated capitalism as inherently flawed as 'man-eat-man' system in which only the few would prosper at the expense of the society as a whole. Whereas the for Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, condemned Tanzanian socialism as a man-eat-nothing system in which the lack of production incentives would stall the economy and impoverish everyone.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, civilization has failed to integrate African values in the system. The values of African socialism were established in a belief on a human person who is entirely spiritual and in a concomitant connection with the mysterious Supreme Being, nature and ancestral lineage. In that regard, matters of income generation is not necessarily the essence of African socialism but rather the value and the equality of human beings.

It implies that, it does not make sense to talk of the best economic systems negating the basic values that govern humanity itself. It is therefore a contradiction to maintain African values and at the sometime embracing capitalism

<sup>24</sup> Merriam-Webster. *Webster New Dictionary of Synonyms; A Dictionary of Discriminated, Synonyms with Antonyms and Analogous and Contrasted Words*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (20 July 2022), 490.

<sup>25</sup> Peter J. Schraeder. *African Political Society; A Mosaic in Transformation*, (United States: Clark Baxter 2004), 131.



because such a system is not companionable with African socialism. Nevertheless, the European worldview made itself intimate with the tides that carry the vehicle of modernity with the feeling that man is a sophisticated being, capable to deform and to manipulate nature in order to maximize self-interest. These self-interests have been actualized in the form of the advanced technology that had initiated the advancement of the living standard. This way of life made the western liberal mind to carry the day and call itself the civilized mind. We talk of the European mind not out of malice but because it is the influencer, and if African socialism is not making sense today, it is because of the impact of the Whiteman's manifestation to the entire humanity.

### 1.5 Conclusion

As we have seen in our discuss, claims of civilization found its playful ground in Africa where the nature and the life style of Africans was persuasively condemned to the roots. The condemnation of African's system had greatly affected the noteworthy of African's socialism. Civilization culminated the problem of accumulation and capitalism which Nyerere indicated as the enemies of African's socialism. We have seen that civilization is not integrative but rather it alienates the roots of the sets of beliefs which grounding of human values possible. It is like this because, in the process of civilization there must be some who claim themselves as the custodians of reality who in this case are the Western, Americanization as well as China which is now settling in Africa. The condemnation of African's way of life as primitive and uncivilized has practically distorted some basic human values and this calls for a constant evaluation of the status of human existence without being overwhelmed by luxuries modernity.

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