

JULIUS NYERERE'S *UJAMAA*' SOCIALISM VIS-À-VIS DEMOCRATIC RULE IN NIGERIA: A HERMENEUTIC APPROACH

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Abstract

A deeper look into Nigeria's political history, especially evaluating our peculiar democratic government, has simply reflected our inability to bring to light the ideal reality and dividends of true democracy. Nigeria's democracy has been bemused with many inconsistencies which cripple development in all sectors of the nation's growth. It is a sneaking fact that despite excessive human natural resources with which we are blessed, we have remained minor in virtually all orbs of our natural life. Nigeria has continued to experience general downward growth instead of progressive growth in all sectors. This scholarly discourse is mainly based on exploring systematically and holistically the thought of socialism in Nigeria's democratic system of governance an ideology called "*Ujamaa*" in order to solve the chronic problems of unemployment, poverty, exploitation, and constant political crises. *As a philosophical principle, Ujamaa* is an attitude of the mind, as Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere termed it. Nyerere's *Ujamaa* socialism underscores a way of life expressed by the values of solidarity, responsibility towards one another, and civic friendship in sharing the benefits and burdens of a global society. In this work, the researcher employs the method of hermeneutics to interpret text. This research does not intend to apply all that '*Ujamaa*' preaches but to address the reasons for his failure and to suggest possible solutions to his existing policies. This work asserts that the *Ujamaa* principle is based on a sense of mutual responsibility, moral concern for the other, and a sense of relationship, which acts as the unifying factor and is people-centered. This work aims to show that if the principle of *Ujamaa* and the application of good leadership in churches, territorial boundaries, armed forces, economic sectors, educational sectors, political systems, and good leadership in our traditional council in Nigeria's democratic rule, it could be a guiding principle in search of a common good that will help Nigeria to achieve social harmony, sustainable economic growth, and political stability in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Ujamaa*, Socialism, Democracy, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of social and political philosophy, several African thinkers, including Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Leopold Senghor of Senegal, have strived to establish a system of social and political organization grounded in African traditional values. These values emphasize social justice, communal

living, family bonds, and brotherhood, and they are seen as fundamentally at odds with the principles of capitalism, characterized by traits like avarice, consumerism, societal inequality, and dehumanization. Nonetheless, despite the rich human and material resources in Nigeria, the nation has faced ongoing challenges since gaining independence in 1960.

After emerging from a period of military rule, Nigeria transitioned to a liberal democratic regime in 1999, with hopes of fostering good governance, protecting fundamental human rights, and valuing the sanctity of human life over a culture of violence and destruction. Regrettably, despite these expectations, it appears that Nigeria is grappling with a resurgence of societal unrest, reminiscent of the Hobbesian state of nature, where human life becomes “nasty, brutish, and short.”

The people of Nigeria continue to suffer from political violence, which has taken a toll on their collective psyche, casting a shadow on the nation's progress toward a more just and harmonious society. It is axiomatic to state that “Nigerian politicians have woefully failed this country due to their large inability to provide its citizens with purposeful, effective, and visionary leadership.”¹ For most politicians in Nigeria, life begins and ends with controlling power and wealth. Nothing else is meaningful and important to them.

Not even the present and the future of their children and many generations unborn would make them think and work as men and women of rational intellect. The future of Nigeria remains very gloomy. Frustration, poverty, hopelessness, and desperation are written on the faces of many of her citizens. Amidst these political predicaments, this paper predicated itself on the positive principles of '*Ujamaa* Socialism' of the great African philosopher and Politician Julius Nyerere as a nostrum for Nigeria's problems. According to him, “*Ujamaa* ensures that in a state, there are provisions of the basic social amenities for the common good except for none. More so, members of the state enjoy security and hospitality provided by the society and shun every form of Cultural, social, economic exploitation and tribal biases.”²

The '*Ujamaa*' concept was founded on a development philosophy based on three essentials: freedom, equality, and unity. The ideal society, Nyerere argues, must always be based on these three essentials. According to him, there must be equality because only on that basis will men work cooperatively. There must be freedom because society does not serve the individual unless it is his. Furthermore, there must be unity because only when society is unified can its members live and work in peace, security, and well-being. These three essentials, Nyerere further contended, are not new to Africa; they have always been part of the traditional social order. He notes that *Ujamaa* was supposed to embrace the communal concepts of African cultures, such as mutual respect, common property, and common labor. The challenge was extending these traditional values to the modern post-colonial setting. In meeting the challenges of Unemployment, Exploitation, Poverty, and Political instability, Nyerere submitted '*Ujamaa*' as a means of solving problems.

Considering the unfavorable compatibility between Western capitalism, the African state, and the underdeveloped world, socialism emerges as a preferable and more desirable alternative. Nigerian politics is in great conflict with the principles mentioned above of *Ujamaa*, though she admits to being democratic. To bring to light these perturbing enigmas, the aim is to sift out certain elements from Ujamaa Socialism that can aid in restructuring Nigeria's democratic practice.

THE COMPATIBILITY BETWEEN ‘UJAMAA’ AND DEMOCRATIC RULE

A hermeneutic approach allows us to interpret and understand these concepts in light of their historical contexts and the present-day challenges facing Nigeria. While *Ujamaa's* emphasis on communal living and economic equity aligns with some aspects of socialism, the applicability of this ideology to Nigeria's diverse and complex society remains a subject of scrutiny. One must consider whether Nyerere's *Ujamaa* socialism, which was tailored to Tanzania's specific circumstances, can be applied universally in a country as diverse as Nigeria. The heterogeneity of Nigeria's population, its historical experiences, and the challenges it faces require a nuanced approach to governance that accounts for both collectivist and individualist tendencies. Moreover, the compatibility of socialism, including *Ujamaa*, with democratic rule warrants examination. Democracy places a premium on individual rights, political pluralism, and competitive elections, which may not easily coexist with the collective ownership and decision-making processes inherent in socialist models.

‘UJAMAA’

The concept ‘*Ujamaa*’ is "Uhuru N' *Ujamaa*". It simply means familyhood. It is, therefore, a political theory designed on the family model as its foundation. The term “*Ujamaa*” in his native language Swahili means family.

It is thus a philosophy or an ideology that is based on traditional African values of togetherness of brothers, the being- with philosophy or the “We - instead of I - spirit”.³ Defining the meaning of ‘*Ujamaa*,’ two most important elements must be acknowledged with Nyerere’s concept of “*Ujamaa*.’ The first has to do with the rejection of the colonialist attitude of mind and the recapturing of the traditional African “attitude of mind.” This aspect may be called the dissociative element of “*Ujamaa*’. It is dissociative in that it draws attention to a mode of production and a state of mind that is antithetical to the traditional African experience. Nyerere saw the need to take steps to overcome these contradictions.

Part of the collective and ethical aspects of overcoming these contradictions, Nyerere contended, was the recapturing of the traditional African “attitude of mind”.⁴ The second element of “*Ujamaa*’ was not well defined until 1967 in the historic document: “The Arusha Declaration”.⁵ Here, the development aspect of ‘*Ujamaa*’ was emphasized, as the philosophy of ‘*Ujamaa*’ was brought to day-to-day practices. Base to Nyerere’s philosophy of socialism

was his insistence that *Ujamaa* was an “attitude of mind”. What exactly did the cultivation of ‘*Ujamaa*’s attitude of mind imply for Nyerere? In answering this question, it becomes necessary to digress to examine the notion of attitude formation in general. An attitude of mind is based on the individual’s mental adaptation to his experiences. It is a more or less permanently enduring state of readiness of mental organization that predisposes an individual to react in a characteristic way to any object or situation with which he is related.⁶

Nyerere’s objective in stressing the dissociative element of “*Ujamaa*” was to provide a new structure of value orientation that would predispose his people to effect a change of attitude at a philosophical level.

Hence, Nyerere’s call for recapturing the traditional attitude of mind could be said to represent a value or a slogan capable of rationalizing action by encapsulating a positive attitude towards a healthy state of affairs.⁷ He asserted that ‘*Ujamaa*’ is based on three principles: equality and respect for human dignity; sharing of the resources which are produced by man’s effort in the society; work by all or everyone and exploitation by none⁸.

SOCIALISM

Socialism is a philosophical, political, and economic theory that says that land, the chief industries, transport, and natural resources such as coal, water power, etc., should be owned, run, and managed by the state or the public bodies and wealth equally distributed.⁹ Socialism as an economic system does not allow or encourage individual ownership of private properties. Socialism, as a political and economic ideology, gained momentum across Africa during the post-colonial period. Leaders like Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Leopold Senghor of Senegal, among others, advocated for variations of socialism adapted to African realities. These political leaders believed that socialism could address the profound socioeconomic inequalities and inequities inherited from colonial rule.

In contrast to Nyerere and Leopold Senghor, Awolowo contends that African social and political organizations cannot be forged through a revival of traditional values. He argues that the advocated social and political values for Africans inherently rely on a traditional communal way of life, which leans towards a system akin to communism or socialism, often referred to as African Socialism. Awolowo, in his book *The People’s Republic*, deviates significantly from his contemporaries by asserting that the theory of socialism, as a foundation for social and political organization, cannot align with African traditional values.

Much like Nkrumah, Awolowo rejects the notion that African Socialism, or any form of socialism, can find its roots in historical traditions. Unlike Nkrumah, Nyerere, and Senghor, he takes a step further by asserting that the creation of a distinctly African socialist doctrine is unfeasible. Awolowo differs from Nyerere and Senghor, arguing that African society can’t revive traditional principles. He believes African social and political ideals align with a

communal lifestyle akin to African Socialism. In 'The People's Republic,' Awolowo rejects socialism as compatible with African traditions, like Nkrumah. Unlike Nkrumah, Nyerere, and Senghor, he deems a distinct African socialist doctrine unfeasible. Awolowo writes:

Socialism...as it is generally agreed by all socialists, is a normative science. Before any theory at all can answer the name of science, it must be of universal application. If any principle is purely and strictly peculiar to a given intuition, region, or state, it may be a custom, practice, or even a theory, but it certainly cannot lay claim to the status of science. Just as there can be no African Ethics qua Ethics as a science, or African Logic, so there can be no African Socialism (Awolowo, 1968, p. 208).¹⁰

Awolowo postulates a philosophical doctrine 'Mental Magnitude', with this he advocated for an increase in education and improving the quality of education in Nigeria. The goal was to create a magnificent mind among the Nigerian people, through education and training.

DEMOCRACY:

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has had a complex history with democracy. After gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1960, Nigeria experienced periods of democracy interspersed with military dictatorships.

The struggle for democratic rule reached a milestone in 1999 when Nigeria transitioned to a democratic government, ending a series of military regimes. This transition was expected to usher in an era of political stability, human rights protection, and good governance. Democracy hinges on two fundamental principles: "The people are the repository of political power, and the government must exercise the power freely given to it by the people in the interest of the people."¹¹ From the etymological viewpoint, democracy means the rule of the 'demos (the people). Thus, the common thread in democracy is the notion of political power in the hands of the many rather than a few or just one person.

Democracy is regarded as a fundamental element of a socialist society. This stems from the belief that equality among people should be reflected in the political structure, ensuring that everyone has an equal role in governing society. In 1965, Nyerere expressed the view that Tanzania had developed its own form of democracy, diverging from the Western model. He believed that the Western model of democracy was not suitable for their specific circumstances, although their constitutional development had previously been influenced by it.

Nyerere's perspective suggests that Tanzania sought to establish a democratic system that aligned with its own unique needs and values. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach,

they aimed to create a democratic framework that resonated with their cultural, social, and economic context. This approach reflects the belief that democracy should be adaptable and tailored to the specific circumstances of each society, allowing for the expression of their distinct aspirations and ideals. By embracing their own form of democracy, Tanzania aimed to ensure that the principles of equality and active participation in governance were upheld in a manner that resonated with their national identity and goals. Thus he writes:

We looked at different democratic systems around the world, studied the work of different, and asked ourselves two questions. First, what is the purpose of a democratic system? And second, what are the conditions of Tanzania, and what special problems face the country? Then we worked out a system of one-party Government which seemed to us to include the essential elements of democracy at the same time as it provided for unity and strength in Government, and took account of our poverty, our traditions, and our aspirations.... This system suits us better than any system operating elsewhere, and we believe that it safeguards the people's sovereignty at the same time as it enables the effective and strong Government so essential at this stage of our development.¹²

Without democracy, socialism can be prone to authoritarianism, lack of accountability, and concentration of power. Therefore, the presence of democracy in a society is vital to safeguard the principles and goals of socialism, foster social progress, and ensure the well-being and empowerment of the people. Nyerere argues that "a state is not socialist because its means of production and exchange are controlled or owned by the government, either wholly or in large part. For a country to be socialist, it is essential that its government is chosen and led by the peasants and workers themselves."¹³

CONCLUSION

Julius Nyerere believed that embracing socialist principles rooted in African values was crucial for Africa's (including Nigeria's) development. He advocated for *Ujamaa* Socialism, which prioritizes human development, equality, freedom, and solidarity. This approach can help Nigeria overcome its current political instability, exploitation, and poverty. By restoring self-esteem, self-confidence, and independent thought, Nigeria can reclaim its lost cultural values and promote good leadership in all sectors. *Ujamaa* socialism rejects master-servant relationships among leaders, promoting equal collaboration for the common good. Its principles can revitalize Nigerian culture, encourage active participation in governance, and inspire nation-building with patriotism, unity, and solidarity.

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