

# African socialism: analysis of ujamaa



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## MAJOR THEMES IN AFRICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

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### QUESTION

What is African Socialism (Ujamaa)? Citing concrete examples from around Africa, examine why this ideology has faced immense opposition.

### INTRODUCTION

African Socialism is an ideology that can be traced to the 1950s and 1960s when most African countries were attaining their independence. The ideology was propounded by African leaders in independent Africa who sought to ground their states in this ideology they believed would achieve the goals and aspirations of independence. The proponents of the ideology sought to differentiate it from other forms of socialism that existed across the world at the time, particularly Marxist-Leninist strands of socialism. African socialism can therefore be defined as a belief in sharing of economic resources in a traditional African way. It is however prudent to accept that the interpretations and definitions of African socialism differ as it is not the brainchild of a single thinker. According to Freidland (1964) :

African Socialism differs in that no single leader has been distinctively and uniquely associated with the ideology. Rather the ideology of African Socialism has been the product of diverse leaders operating within the

variety of exigencies in their own countries, which helps to account for the lack of development of a unified theory. (p. 2)

African socialism can be said to be an indigenous attempt by various African leaders to develop a distinctive “ African” path of economic and political development. It advocates for a return to traditional African values practiced before colonization.

As mentioned above African socialism is a product of different leaders. Therefore to understand African socialism we must study the leaders and their works which collectively contributed to this ideology. These leaders implemented this ideology in their respective countries. Some were successful while others were not. The ideology as will be explained in this paper faced immense opposition hindering its full adoption.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF AFRICAN SOCIALISM

Though the African Socialist leaders had their own distinct views on African socialism various characteristics of African socialism can be drawn.

According to Martin (19) the socialist leaders’ conception of African socialism had the following common characteristics:

- Ideology and practice are inextricably linked
- Politics has supremacy over the economy
- Socialism is not a sacred dogma but a guide to action
- African socialism is a socialism building on and adapted to African indigenous values, culture, traditions and society

- The people are the main agents and ultimate beneficiaries of socialist development
- African socialism aims at creating ‘ a new man’
- The single party operates according to the Marxist-Leninist principle of Democratic Centralism, which institutionalizes communication between the leadership and the rank-and-file of the party, with ultimate decision-making power resting with the highest executive organ of the party.
- Collective decision making is based on collective deliberation and consensus
- State has control over the economy

Furthermore (Batsa, 1965) has summarised some six basic characteristics of African Socialism:

- It ignores the power of monopoly capital.
- It accepts the mixed economy as a permanent feature of socialism.
- It denies the existence of classes in Africa and advances the idea of the neutral state.
- It advocates a multi-party system where possible, or a single party open to all, irrespective of beliefs, with a specific denial of any vanguard role
- The African element of the theory consists of a romantic interpretation of our traditional morals and culture
- Positive non-alignment is treated as neutrality

Several African countries on attaining independence sought to establish declarations or policy documents that sought to clearly stipulate the ideology

they adopted. In the context of African socialism, very few countries had clear and concrete policy documents on African socialism. Notable among these countries is Kenya and Tanzania that formulated policies or declarations with regards to African Socialism.

Tanzania in 1967 formulated the *Arusha Declaration* a document written by socialist leader Julius Nyerere for the ruling party the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). In this declaration it is clearly stated that ' The policy of TANU is to build a socialist state'. It further goes on to lay down certain socialist principles it seeks to implement in Tanganyika. In Part two of the document lay *The Policy of Socialism* .

The first element in this policy is absence of exploitation. The declaration states that in a socialist state all people are workers and in which neither capitalism nor feudalism exists. It believes in a classless society where there is no one exploits another. Every worker receives a just return for their labour. However the declaration points out the fact that Tanzania still has elements of feudalism and capitalism that are remnants of colonialism. The second element is that the major means of production and exchange are under the control of the peasants and workers. The declaration stipulates that this should be done through the machinery of their Government and their co-operatives. The third element is the existence of democracy. This element requires that the government should be chosen and led by the peasants and workers themselves. Finally is that socialism is a belief. The declaration states that socialism is a way of life. A socialist society can only come into existence if it is built by those who believe in and practice the

principles of socialism. The declaration believes that the successful implementation of socialist objectives depends very much up to the leaders.

On the other hand Kenya in 1965 produced a sessional paper which outlines in detail both the theory of democratic African Socialism and its practical application in Kenya. The president in introducing this paper states that, ‘ we rejected both Western Capitalism and Eastern Communism and chose for ourselves a policy of positive non-alignment.’” Thus the Kenyan government fully adopted the African socialism philosophy. The sessional paper goes on to outline the operating characteristics of African socialism. They are:

- Political democracy
- Mutual social economic responsibility
- Various forms of ownership
- A range of controls to ensure that property is used in the mutual interests of society and its members
- Diffusion of ownership to avoid concentration of economic power
- Progressive taxes to ensure an equitable distribution of wealth and income

The above characteristics are evident in the various works of the African Socialist leaders. The understanding of their concept of African socialism is enhanced by looking critically at the individual African socialist leaders and their ideas and perception of African socialism.

## AFRICAN SOCIALIST LEADERS

### JULIUS NYERERE

Julius Nyerere was the founding father of Tanganyika and later on Tanzania. He comes up with his own form of socialism known as Ujamaa a Swahili term for family hood and brotherhood. Ujamaa become the official policy of Tanzania in 1967 following the Arusha Declaration. According to Nyerere socialism is an attitude of mind and not strict compliance to a standard or set political pattern (Nyerere, 1977) . Nyerere emphasised on brotherhood or family hood where people view each other as brothers and sisters or as members of one family. Nyerere argues that social institutions and organisations cannot by themselves achieve the purpose of socialism. These institutions can only do so if they are infused with the spirit of brotherhood and care for one another. Nyerere believed that Ujamaa differed from other strands of socialism in that the foundation of the philosophy was to be found in African culture and traditions. Furthermore Ujamaa was opposed to capitalism and scientific socialism or Marxism which legitimizes class conflicts.

Nyerere went further to elaborate on the practices of Ujamaa. The first is love where an African doesn't regard his brethren as another enemy. An African regards all men as his brethren as members of his extended family. People in African Societies cared for one another. Secondly, Nyerere argues that their existed a classless society in Africa. Classes were only brought as a result of the agrarian and industrial revolution. These events produced conditions that brought about a class system. Since these revolutions did not occur in Africa, therefore no classes existed in Africa. Thirdly Nyerere believed that in traditional Africa everyone was a worker. Everyone contributed his or her fair share of efforts towards the production of societal

wealth. There was no place for laxity or laziness. Finally Nyerere maintained that wealth was shared in traditional Africa. No one could hide wealth or amass it for personal selfish reasons. The riches or the poverty of an individual or family were the wealth or poverty of the whole community at large.

#### KWAME NKRUMAH

Kwame Nkrumah's ideas on African socialism were different from those of Julius Nyerere. Indeed the two showed criticised each other on their perceptions of African socialism. Nkrumah in his own admission subscribed to scientific socialism and described it as the only true socialism. According to (Martin, 2012) Nkrumah viewed African socialism as a means of not only liberating the people from the shackles of imperialism but also empowering the people politically, economically, socially and culturally after independence. Nkrumah believed that the following were the tenets of African socialism;

- Common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange
- Planned methods of production by the state, based on modern industry and agriculture
- Political power in the hands of the people in keeping with the humanist and egalitarian spirit which characterized African traditional society
- Application of scientific methods in all spheres of thought and production

#### AHMED SEKOU TOURE



Toure's concept and ideas on African socialism was similar to that of Nkrumah. The two had a strong friendship that was evident when he granted Nkrumah asylum when he was overthrown by a military coup in 1966. Toure led an authoritarian regime in Guinea that was strongly oppressive. He arrested over a thousand people who simply opposed his regime. Prominent intellectuals and cadres were jailed, tortured and executed. Sekou Toure's was more grounded in the Marxist-Leninist education as compared to Nkrumah. He had a great interest in the writings of Mao Tse-tung as well as other Marxist philosophers.

Initially during the first decade of his rule, he refused to launch the country into clear path to socialism. He downplayed the role of ideology in the construction of a new society. He adamantly refused to choose between capitalism and socialism. He argued that certain strange theories had little to do with the crucial tasks facing the country. However during the Eighth National Congress of the PDG (the ruling party of Guinea) in 1967, Sekou Toure officially launched Guinea on to a path to socialism. Sekou Toure prescribed to scientific socialism from which he derives the meaning of socialism from. That is socialism is expressed by the effective exercise of political, economic and cultural power by the working people. Toure however was for a socialist ideology adapted to African realities. He preferred the term "communaucratic" instead of African socialism. He believed that African life is communal characterized by collective life and social solidarity. An African cannot organize his life outside that of his social group-family, village or clan.

Finally Toure believes in the supremacy of politics over the economy. In this regard he was heavily influenced by the Marxist-Leninist ideology on the roles of the state and the party in the creation of institutions designed to translate socialist ideas into practice (Martin, 2012). Toure believed that the ruling party was the definer of the general interest, the custodian of the popular will and the incarnation of the collective thought of the whole Guinean people. The basic aim of Toure's socialism is alter the relationship between human beings. This is done by decolonizing their viewpoints and attitudes and by creating a new man freed from a system of capitalistic exploitation and participating with all his strength in the development of his nation.

#### MODIBO KEITA

He was the first president of Mali. He led the Nation on a path to socialism, both politically and economically. In 1960 the countries single party, the *Union Soudanaise - RDA (US-RDA)* decided to set the country on a socialist path to development. Keita's priority was to build a new society aimed at the political, economic, social and cultural empowerment of Mali's popular masses. Keita firmly believed that a type of socialism adapted to the conditions of Mali would be the best tool to achieve this goal. Mali's socialism was characterized by the following features;

- A socialism based on agricultural workers and peasants rather than on a nonexistent proletariat
- A vibrant private sector encouraged to contribute to national development

- Respect of the Malian spiritual and religious values

Modibo Keita argued that socialism cannot be adopted wholesale; it must be adapted to the specific socio-cultural context of Mali. Keita elaborated that Africa has its own values, its own history. Africa thus can solve its own problems within the African context using African methods. Malian socialism was also grounded in universal human values. Keita argued that socialism cannot be reduced to purely economic or social concerns. Its goal is man himself in its material, moral, spiritual and cultural dimensions. The African man must be open to all kinds of experiments.

Keita considered socialist planning necessary to achieve the primary goal of improving the living conditions of the majority of the people, which in Mali were the peasants. He focused on the development of agriculture through an elaborate network of rural cooperatives, down to the village level. Keita also embarked on the complete overhaul of Mali's educational system to be consistent with Mali's rich cultural heritage.

The above leaders contributed significantly to African socialism. They sought to implement their socialist ideas and concepts in their countries. Some were successful to some extent while others failed. Case in point is Kwame Nkrumah who was overthrown in a military coup.

#### OPPOSITION TO AFRICAN SOCIALISM

African socialism as an ideology faced immense opposition as an ideology. This is because of the various cons associated with the ideology. These disadvantages or flaws in the ideology brew dislike for the ideology

preventing its adoption or implementation. African socialism faced opposition due to the following.

First it is an unreal theory which cannot be implemented as it is. Most of the socialist principles were borrowed from the Marxist-Leninist school of thought. The socialist ideology is not adopted in the same way it was advocated by Marx and other socialist thinkers.

Secondly and closely related to the first is improper implementation. African socialism faced rejection due to improper implementation. Few people were in charge of wealth distribution and formulation of policies such as taxation. Thus the notion that the masses or the people have control over the nation's wealth is a fallacy.

Thirdly is that African socialism is economically inefficient. The lack of a self regulating labour market, private ownership of capital and a free financial market affects the economy negatively. Entrepreneurs and foreign investors are discouraged from investing in the economy. This leaves a country economically underdeveloped. This is the case with most socialist countries.

Another pitfall of African socialism is no real increase in standard of living. African socialism does not raise the standards of living but lowers it instead. This is because the income of the rich is reduced making them fall closer to the level of the poor. It only reduces the gap between the rich and the poor but does not improve the standards of living in the society.

Lastly is that socialism promotes laziness and incompetence among members of society. This is because of the social security system in socialist

states that takes care of those with no income. Such provisions by the government deter people from working hard to earn their livelihood. This equally affects the hard working members who feel dissatisfied as they are not rewarded for their toil. Their toil goes to taking care of those who don't work. Such a system impacts productivity and hence economic growth negatively.

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