

## **AFRICAN POLITICAL IDEOLOGY: AN INTERROGATION OF THE IDEOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA**

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### **Abstract**

African Political Thought has survived the test of time dating back to the pre-colonial period. But there were changes in this line of thought over the years especially in the post-colonial period which saw African thinkers tilting either in favour of capitalism or socialism. However, the continued interaction of the African continent with the western world particularly in post-colonial Africa, seem to have pushed the African political ideologies into oblivion which of course raises the question of the functionality of African Political thought. This paper therefore, interrogates the presence of these ideologies in the political leadership in Africa. In other words, the ideological function of political leadership in Africa. The under-development and development theory is the tool of analysis here, and the Multi-disciplinary research method is deployed for this work. This paper argues that there has been the absence of Ideology guiding political leadership in Africa especially in the post-Cold War era, and a few factors are accountable for it. These includes: lack of dynamism; political imperialism as evident in neo-colonialism; and the misconception of the notion of development. So the political Ideologies in Africa ended up dying with the various regimes/leaders that came with it. Again, there has been the lack of cognizance of the existing indigenous structure in Africa by some of these ideologies which has also resulted to it fading away. If political leadership in Africa would stand up to the task before it, and consider the interest of the generality of Africans, without interference from the west as represented in neo-colonialism, then these ideologies which are African made, that put the interest of Africans first, would be functional again.

The ideological function of political leadership is primarily to formulate and articulate guidelines for political and social behavior and to translate them into concrete plans and goals for state and society. To be reasonably effective, to release popular energies and direct them towards specific social objectives, the idea must be manageable in practice, must be articulate, consistent, and socially relevant, and must be perceived by the opinion and action of leaders throughout the state in approximately the sense intended.

### **Introduction**

African nationalist leaders waged the arduous struggle against colonialism, endured economic hardship, and made personal sacrifices to win independence for their respective countries. In the 1960's when many African countries finally gained their independence from western colonial rule, the drum of freedom at last rang across the continent. New national flags were unfurled to the chimes of new national anthems. Africa was to develop in its own image, but into what? The challenge was daunting. The task before it now therefore, was to develop Africa, because colonialist undertook little social and economic development. A model, mechanism or ideology was needed. Three development paths/ideologies were available as options:

- I. A free market capitalist approach in which the private sector serves as the “engine of growth”
- II. A state – directed and controlled path in which the state played a hegemonic role in the economy.
- III. A modernized indigenous African approach

The third option was not considered because of a pervasive belief among African nationalist and elites that Africa's own Indigenous institutions were too “backward”, “too primitive” for the rapid development of Africa. Therefore indigenous African ideas were abandoned, and most African state adopted and emerged either towards capitalism, or socialism. Therefore, the modern African political thought emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The functionality of these political ideas which are class into two main blocs: socialist and capitalist, is the focus of this paper.

### **Socialist Bloc of Political Ideologies in Africa**

Let begin with the political ideology of the socialist bloc. The wave of African socialism swept across the continent after independence, as almost all the new African leaders succumbed to the contagious ideology. The proliferation of socialist ideology that emerged in Africa ranged from the “Ujamaa” (family hood or socialism in Swahili) of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania; to the vague amalgam of marxism, Christian socialism, humanitarianism, and “Negritude” of Leopold Senghor of Senegal; to the humanitarian of Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia; to the Scientific socialism of Marien N'Gorabi of Congo( Brazzaville); to the Arab-Islamic socialism of Muammar Ghadafi of Libya; to the “Nkrumaism” (consciencism) of Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana; to the “Mobutuism” of Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire. On this path, let take the idea of Leopold S. Senghor's Negritude, to take home our point. Firstly, the concept of Negritude expressed itself more in literary forms than in political stance. Its inspiration was legitimate defence, a literary Journal started in Paris by French speaking West Indians in the 1930's. This movement developed the idea of Negritude, and its great theorist were Martiniquan poets Etienne Lero and Aime Cesaire (the real father of

Negritude). Negritude to AimeCesaire is a political and artistic ideology to combat the miseries of Antilles, the racial complexes, colour prejudice, and cultural alienation. He describes it as a resistance to the politics of assimilation and the prevailing European devaluation of African heritage. Since colonialism despises the colonized people on the ground of racial superiority, Negritude tries to exact colour through race poetry. It seeks to raise the status of the black race or the colour, black to autonomous status.

Leopold Senghor is the leading African exponent of the concept. He described negritude as the total cultural, economic, social and political values of African civilization and of the black people as a whole. In other words, Negritude denotes Negro - African values. Negritude as perceived by Senghor, seeks to make the value of the African, or rather it seeks the authenticity of the African. Authentic is conscious of its own peculiarities. He is also self-confident. He knows himself and assumes his position in History. It is worthy to note that Senghor views Negritude not in opposition to European values but as a complement to them. For instance, he called for a new order through the reconciliation of Negritude with western cultures, since his disagreement with Europe is not with capitalism but with its theory of civilization. Thus, in Senghor's perception of colonialism, we are left with the impression that all would have been well, had the colonialist accepted the validity of African values. A vivid tone of conciliation is to be found on the songs of shadow, where Senghor stated that:

Lord I have accepted white cold worse than salt, and now my heart melts like the snow in the sun, and I forget the white hands, that lauded the guns that destroyed the kingdoms; the hands that whipped the slaves.

Senghor never also hides his love for France and western civilization and even clearly justify their atrocities. For instance he re-defined French imperialism in the following material terms.

On the economic level, France can get along without Black Africa, but she cannot get along without it on the political or cultural plane. France is not Holland. She is a great lady who needs to spread her readiness over a large family reduce to her European dimensions. She will fail in her mission to the world, which is to defend man; she would lose her soul and *raison d'etre*

The concept emphasis blackism and attempts at capturing the African past. It is premised on a cultural struggle that does not tackle neo-colonialism and capitalism. And as far as Senghor is concerned, most of his expositions regarding the traditional set up are at variance with his practical life – style which is more European than African.

**Capitalist bloc of Political Ideologies in Africa**

On the other hand, the Capitalist bloc of political ideology in Africa included those countries like Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Kenya and Malawi amongst others. One of the political ideologies on this bloc is “Zikism” by Nnamdi Azikwe of Nigeria. The concept of Zikism which is also known as liberation and decolonization essentially refer to the struggle of people and countries for national emancipation and self-reliance. These struggles are usually against an international system known as imperialism, which also expressed itself in the third world as struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism.

The whole question of liberation as perceived by Azikwe finds expression in the philosophy of Zikism as argued in the “Renascent Africa”. The realization of new Africa according to Azikwe, can only be possible by African cultivating spiritual balance which ultimately leads to actualization of a social regeneration, to realizing economic determination through mental emancipation which would in turn usher in a political resurgence.

The following points formed the Five Tenets of Zikism:

- I. Spiritual balance: entails respect for others views, and that differences in opinion should not destroy friendship
- II. Social regeneration. Africans most experience this. That is, African society most look at their fellows as human beings and not otherwise.
- III. Economic determination: this must be the basis of African economic thought, in that economic foundation is necessary for the creation of a new order and that labour most have dignity
- IV. Mental emancipation: education is necessary, and that as Africans, we must have faith in the ability and greatness of African civilization.
- V. National Resurgence: when all the above have been achieved, national greatness follows.

Azikwe's approach has been criticized by a score of writers as being overly empirical and in fact mystifying the colonial state and its nature. For example, regarding the issue of liberation and decolonization, Azikwe once clearly stated that:

I have never suggested and I do not suggest the wholesale evaluation of the British from Nigeria...there is no reason why anglo – Nigeria condominium should not be the nucleons of a great federation of state...to enable us to take our rightful place in the British common wealth. If the British mean well, then they must trust us and allow us to participate actively in the management of our affairs.

Dudley for example argues that Azikwe's prescription has changed overtime. According to Dudly, Azikwe was in his youthful years a Pan-African nationalist

in the tradition of men like Marcus Garvey, Edward Blyden, and Willian Du Bois. On Azikwe's return to Africa, however, the Pan- African Universalism soon gave way to a particularistic concern to Nigeria. Dudley also sums up Azikwe's thought as being disjointed, universalistic and libertarian.

### **Submission**

Essentially it is important to note that the two major blocs of African political Ideologies: socialist and capitalist later tilted and embraced statism as a development path. Therefore, the application of the labels “capitalism” and “socialism” to African countries is not particularly useful and probably more apt to create confusion. The relevant practice has always been statism because virtually all post-colonial African government has been statist. Its precise characteristics have varied according to the social, economic, and political peculiarities within each particular country and also over time, in response to changing internal and external pressures, due largely to sentiments against the colonizers who were said to have defrauded the continent, and inferiority complex which placed African leaders always in the position to want to be like the west, thereby adopting state control over the economy so that development agenda strictly became a prerogative of the state, who however engaged in wasteful spending over the years.

Statism therefore, employs the instrumentalities of the state to promote and direct economic development to achieve various objectives this path however, did not yield any meaningful result.

Three or more factors can be observed for the lack of functional ideology in the African political space. These range from lack of dynamism on the part of the political leadership in Africa; political imperialism which is evident in neo-colonialism; and the misconception of the notion of development by the African political leadership. Taking lack of dynamism by the African leadership for example, African leaders failed to pay close attention to the nature and changes of the political system overtime. Changing times they say require changing approaches. The post-colonial political ideologies in Africa, departed from the pre-colonial ideologies which was based on Kingdoms, Chiefdoms, empires like that of the Kanem- Bornu of Nigeria, and the Sarauta-type of the Hausa city states, and the Imamate that succeeded it thereafter. The departure from these ideologies was necessitated by the imperialist interest which showed forth in colonialism. Post-colonial African political ideologies came to be a response and thereby dominated by sentiments of anti-colonialism which was said to have stagnated the region in terms of socio-economic development. Hence, post-colonial political ideologies in Africa was concern with liberating Africa from the colonial shackle, which ended up diverting attention of the leadership from considering the actual structure of political development in Africa. The changes and diversion were occasioned by the colonial regime in Africa, and main stream development issues were accidentally ignored. Instead of focusing more inward,

African leaders instead focused outward as a defence against colonialism. This was further compounded by inferiority complex. Most of the African nationalist leaders suffered from an inferiority complex that compelled them to “prove something” – either that they were not “racially inferior” or that Africa was just as “Capable” as the west. Leopold Senghor's “Negritude” as discussed above, is a good case in point here. The all-consuming mentality was: if American farmers use tractors, so, too, must African farmers. If London has double-decker buses, so, too, must Lagos. Colonial period came and gone, but there was no changes on the part of these ideologies or political leadership in Africa which buttress the point on the lack of dynamism.

This brings us to the next factor which is the question of political imperialism. The imperialistic interest of the western powers which effectively and officially took effect after the Berlin Conference of 1884/5, that saw most part of Africa partitioned among the western powers, ushered colonialism and political domination of Africa by the western world. These periods saw the exploration and exploitation of the African region, which later even integrated the economies of Africa to the west. It was so much that even after the colonialist left; following independence of the various African States, their influence was still strongly present, and perpetrated by the neo-colonialist who are apologist and bred infantry of the colonialist. They, together with the western powers ensured that Africa based ideologies do not succeed. Therefore, they became antagonist, and were antagonizing the political leadership in Africa. For example, Amicar Cabral's political Ideology which made him endeared to the poor, was overthrown and killed because he rejected western interference, and encouraged inward search and self-reliance. Muammar Gaddafi of Lybia who also represented an African brand of socialism, despite his stiff resistance to foreign powers, was ousted and killed. The same goes to Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe who together with Gaddafi, stood as the last standing icon of African brand political Ideology, were all together with support of the African mercenary who are known in common parlance as neo-colonialist, hunted and ended what seem to be the last standing image of African post-colonial political ideology. This aspect represented foreign influence to the lack of a functional ideology in African Political system.

Equally important is the misconception of the notion of development by the African political leadership. The notion of “development” was widely misconstrued by the nationalist leaders. It was misinterpreted to mean the adoption of “modernity” or modern and scientific ways of doing things – by implication, a rejection of existing ways as “old and backward”. The logic was simple and observed. The developed countries were industrialized and used modern scientific technique. Therefore, development meant industrialization and modernity. The tendency to equate Industrialization and modernism to development was a manifestation of a pathological condition known as “religion of development” This religion shaped much of the post-colonial political

ideology, which made it difficult to sustain because it were not sensitive to existing structure. And by the end of the cold war in the early 19s when Marxist-Leninist and socialist Ideologist began to demise, African countries and leaders have progressively abandoned these ideologies.

### **Conclusion**

By and large a number of political Ideologies cropped up in Post-colonial Africa which were largely identify into two main blocs: socialist and capitalist, and were branded as African own form of socialism or capitalism. However, a number of factors confronted the operationalization or functionality of these ideas. Firstly was the lack of dynamism in the leadership which failed to adapt to changes overtime; second, was the imperialist interest of the western world that consistently oppose and hunted the success of these Ideologies; and thirdly the misconception of the concept of development by African political leadership who ignored existing structure as a basis for development. These entire factors combine together militated against the functionality of ideology in the political leadership in Africa. The ideas ended up disappearing along with the regimes/leaders that came with it. No Ideology guiding any political leadership in Africa at the moment. What is prevalent however is either a dependent capitalist or socialist ideologies. Therefore, the presence of an Ideology in African political landscape can only be made functional through a demonstration of “strong will” and “sense of purpose” by the leadership in Africa.

### **Endnotes**

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