

## **A CRITIQUE OF JULIUS NYERERE'S THEORY OF UJAMAA**

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### **Abstract**

*In his effort to redefine the African concepts and ideologies, Julius Nyerere was poised to develop a theory which he thought could be a remedial in actualizing this task. This theory which he called Ujamaa was targeted for re-identification of the Africans. Ujamaa was a socialist theory which fosters the sense of brotherhood and oneness in the African society. This research therefore shall adopt a qualitative research design where data shall be sourced from books, journals, periodicals, internets and encyclopedia to examine the basis of Nyerere's theory. In view of this, the expository, analytical and evaluative methods shall be employed. The expository shall be employed to establish Nyerere's notion of socialism, the analytical shall be used to x-ray the concept of socialism and the evaluative method shall be employed to make a critique of Nyerere's concept of socialism, thereby ascertaining the strength and weaknesses of Ujamaa. However, from the studies so far, it is discovered that African Socialism has fatally failed as a socio-economic blueprint for African countries. Then one is tempted to say that African socialism is nothing but a myth. A story told to explain the nature of man and the society in ancient Africa. Hence, the need to look for another blue-print for the development of Africa and "deliverance" from the present quagmire.*

**Keywords:** African Socialism, Julius Nyerere, Ujamaa, Familihood

### **Introduction**

The concept of African socialism emerged in African thoughts in the 1950's at a time when many of the African countries were getting ready for independence. Then the problem confronted by the first crop of political elites or leaders in their various territories was how to mobilize the values and the energies of their people, tradition and modern, for the development of the territories after independence. It was within this atmosphere that

African socialism emerged as a (compass) body of ideas (Agbaje, 1991). Some of these African leaders and proponents of African socialism are Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, L. S. Senghor of Senegal, Kwameh Nkrumah of Ghana, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria and Sekou Toure of Guinea.

According to Friedland and Rosberg 1964, the common principles of the various versions of African socialism were: economic development guided by a large public sector, incorporating the African identity and what it means to be African, and the avoidance of the development of social classes within society. Senghor claimed that "Africa's social background of tribal community life not only makes socialism natural to Africa but excludes the validity of the theory of class struggle, thus making African socialism, in all of its variations, different from Marxism and European socialist theory.

However, this work shall criticize Nyerere's theory of social contact where he stated that Africans from the beginning are socially related in brotherhood thereby, sharing things together in love and oneness. This concept of brotherhood as postulated by Nyerere sounds as myth as such cannot be replicated in the society of African nation.

### **The Concept of African Socialism?**

The fact that the originators and proponents are of different temperaments and have not often spoken with one voice makes it difficult to give a univocal meaning of the concept. However for a working definition we may say that African socialism is an attempt to recapture and modernize the communal way of life practiced by the traditional African before the exposure to the world and values of the white man (Agbaje, 1991). Also, we can say that it is a search for an altogether different type of asocial system with its root in African soil.

It was in this vein that Tom Mboya conceived of African socialism as a political philosophy which stands to restore national values, communal social practice and above all to restore the traditional values in the African socialist mentality and outlook, and to create more values in the changing world of money economy to build an economy which reflects the thinking of the great majority of people. Mboya's list of basic values and social practices of traditional African consist of the communal spirit, hospitality, hard-work, generosity, acceptance and practice of equalitarianism, communal ownership of land, equality of opportunities for all, tribal loyalty and so on.

Nyerere also views African socialism or "Ujamaa Socialism" as he terms it, as more than a political system, it is a philosophy, a world view as well as a gateway to African selfhood. Nyerere asserts that African socialism is:

Essentially an attitude of the mind which involves a change in personal attitude and a reconciliation of individuals but goes beyond these to effect structural change consistent with the socialist outlook, creating a pattern of justice in which creative and justice in which equality and freedom of all will be assured.

Julius Nyerere is one of the most original political thinkers to emerge from Africa. He led his country Tanzania to independence through the party he founded in 1952- the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). At independence in 1961, Nyerere was elected president of Tanzania. On 7th February, 1969, he made the famous Arusha declaration, which laid down new social ways of pursuing development in Africa. His Ujamaa philosophy emphasized breaking Tanzania into small sizeable villages and pursue intensive grass root human and material development. The concept Ujamaa comes from the Swahili for extended family or familyhood, which is distinguished by several key characteristics such that a person becomes a person through the people or community (Brockway, 1963; Friedland and Rosberg 1964) In spite of the difficulties Nyerere faced in the pursuit of his Ujamaa, he is recognized all over the world as one of the few African leaders with integrity. His death in 1991 was mourned by many statesmen all over the world (Osam, 2002).

Leopold S. Senghor sees African socialism as a form of socialism that is peculiarly African by saying. Our socialism is not that of Europe. It is neither atheistic communism nor quite the democratic socialism of the second international. We have modestly called it the African mode of socialism. Senghor believes that two elements are central to African socialisms, namely “economic democracy” and „spiritual freedom”.

Likewise, Kwameh Nkrumah explains African socialism through the communal life practiced by traditional African, he says; anyone who seeks the socio-political ancestors of socialism, the one must go to communalism. Socialism has characteristics in common with communalism, just as capitalism is linked with feudalism and slavery. Kwameh Nkrumah avers further that the traditional African as an attitude towards man which can describe as being socialistic. This he believes arises from the fact that man is regarded in Africa as primarily a spiritual being, a being endowed originally with a certain inward dignity, integrity and value, Nkrumah believes that the idea of the original value of man imposes duties of a socialist kind upon him.

### **Background of Nyerere’s African Philosophy**

Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere (1922- 1999) was the first president of Tanganyika, presently known as Tanzania. He was given the title “Mwalimu” as a mark of honour for being a teacher. Nyerere was a secondary school teacher and when he became the

president of Tanzania, he led his people wisely and firmly like a good teacher guides his pupil (Akinpelu 98). Julius Nyerere studied at Edinburgh, in Britain. He was the first Tanzanian to study at a British university and only the second to gain a university degree outside Africa. He obtained his Masters of Arts degree in Economics and History in 1952. It is at Edinburgh University where Nyerere learned the concept of Socialism that he later connected to African communal living.

When Western education was introduced to African countries, most African people viewed it as a form of "civilization." Some people like Henry Carr (98) were very grateful for the introduction of western education to Africa during the period of colonization from 1800 to late 1900. Nyerere had a different view of Western education being imposed on Africans. He believed that Western education was alienating Africans from their own values and thus reinforcing western values. Nyerere (269) stated colonial education "was not designed to prepare young people for the service of their own country; instead it was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of the colonial society and to train individuals for the service of the colonial state." The British (Tanzania was a British colony) system of education placed more emphasis on the white-collar jobs and less on blue collar jobs. White-collar jobs are mainly office work related jobs while blue collar jobs are the manual jobs. Nyerere (270) noted that the education system was not transmitting the "values and knowledge of Tanzanian society from one generation to another; it was a deliberate attempt to change those values and replace traditional knowledge by the knowledge from a different society." According to Mulenga (2001a), Nyerere refused to reject the African traditional way of life from his first year of education. He wanted to restore the African traditional value system that was despised by the colonizers. He wanted people to appreciate themselves as Africans.

### **Nyerere's Socialism: Ujamaa**

The origin of Ujamaa as one of the "significant landmarks in the history of Tanzania" is generally traced back to the formation of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), a "mass party" founded by Julius Kambarage Nyerere (1922-1999), on the 7th July 1954 (de la Rue, 40; el Saadawi, 13). TANU asserted that Tanzanians should be free to govern themselves and to determine their own destiny as a people. To achieve this objective TANU mobilized Tanzanians to demand independence from the British Government and on the 9th December 1961, Tanganyika became independent with Nyerere as its first Prime Minister (Haussler, 2009). However, Nyerere's premiership was short lived as in January 1962, he resigned from "this position in order to concentrate on party issues and to prepare a policy for Tanganyika" (23).

The policy that Nyerere was preparing for Tanzania at this time can be identified as Ujamaa for two key reasons; firstly, three months after his resignation as Prime Minister, Nyerere published Ujamaa: the Basis of African Socialism “a TANU pamphlet” (Nyerere, 1), in which he argued for Ujamaa for the first time. Secondly, in 1967 Ujamaa became the official policy of the ruling party TANU and its government, and remained so for close to twenty-four years that Nyerere was the head of state.

However, Nyerere was against the economic and social ideas that the colonizers introduced in Africa. He believed that the economic system introduced by colonizers was a capitalist system that encouraged individualism at the expense of the community. Nyerere noted (Akinpelu 115), “Capitalism fosters excessive individualism; promotes the competitive rather than the cooperative instinct in man; exploits the weak; divides the society into hostile groups and generally promotes inequality in the society.” He believed that capitalism regarded some individuals as superior (the rich) and others as inferior (the poor). He further asserted that the major aim of capitalism was the production of goods and profits, not human satisfaction or the interest of the consumer. Capitalism encouraged inequality since each person was allowed to acquire as much as one can (Nyerere 68). According to Nyerere, these capitalist ideas could not be reconciled with African values; therefore, he advocated for Socialism.

Nyerere’s idea of African Socialism was based on three principles: work by everyone and exploitation by none; fair sharing of resources which are produced by joint efforts; and equality and respect for human dignity (Akinpelu 115). Nyerere advocated for Socialism because he believed in the idea of Ujamaa or familyhood. By tradition, Africans are people who work together for the benefit of all members of the society (Nyerere 68b). Many Africans hold the value of sharing and assisting one another, which in Botswana is called “letsema”.

However, Ujamaa was to help restore the cooperative spirit that the African people had before the colonizers introduced the idea of individualism. Mulenga (17) stated, “Nyerere’s aim was to transform the colonial value system which had alienated Africans from their past into one group of attitudes based on past African values and attitudes of self-esteem, cooperation, and family.” The idea of unity and cooperation in African tradition is further supported by Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe describes how Okonkwo pleaded for communal unity involving feasts in which he said: A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlight village ground it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for the kinsmen to do so... I fear for you young people because you do

not understand how strong the bond of kinsmen is. (Adeyemi and Adeyinka 431). Unity was one of the principles that Nyerere advocated among Africans. He believed that when the society is united, they can help one another. Nyerere believed that people of Tanzania had to live as a family.

So, Nyerere emphasized equality among the society. He believed that social justice could not be achieved if there was no human equality. People were not to be judged by skin colour, material wealth or intellectual ability, but “each individual should be assessed by her or his worth as a person” (Mulenga 15). Each individual person was to be respected and valued for who he or she was. This idea encouraged respect among members of the society.

### **Ujamaa: Brotherhood and Familyhood**

Nyerere depicted Ujamaa (his form of socialism) as “an attitude of mind ...which is needed to ensure that the people care for each other's welfare” (Nyerere 1). This is the attitude of “brotherhood” or “Familyhood” (12). Hence, Nyerere considered that to be a very close links between caring for one another and the attitude of brotherhood or familyhood. In the document he suggests that care for one another can only be guaranteed if people view each other as brothers and sisters or as members of the same family. The emphasis that Nyerere placed on the sense of brotherhood does not mean that socialist institutions and organizations are irrelevant, rather it implies that “without correct attitudes, institutions can be subverted from their true purpose” (89).

Thus, although to Nyerere socialist institutions and organizations are important they cannot by themselves lead to the attainment of a true purpose of socialism, which is the well being of all people, unless the people in those institutions and organizations are infused with the spirit of brotherhood and actually care for one another. Therefore, to Nyerere “in the individual, as in the society, it is an attitude of mind which distinguishes the socialist from the non-socialist” (1). To Nyerere, then, it is the attitude of familyhood which is the litmus test and the condition sine qua non, for the existence of socialism.

In short, the essay on ‘Ujamaa: the Basis of African socialism’, offers an understanding of Ujamaa as ‘familyhood’ or ‘brotherhood’. This is what Nyerere means when he concludes: “‘Ujamaa’, then, or ‘Familyhood’ describes our socialism” (Nyerere, 12). ‘Our’ refers to the “African-ness of the policies” (Nyerere, 2). This was what he intended to follow, and it implies that Ujamaa is a term that describes the ‘African- ness’ of the policy, that is to say the foundations of the document are to be found in African culture and traditions. It was not only this expression of African-ness that led Nyerere to believe that Ujamaa differed from other strands of socialism. He cites two further reasons: firstly,

Ujamaa was “opposed to capitalism” (12), which according to Nyerere (12) “seeks to build a happy society on the basis of the exploitation of man by man.” Secondly, Ujamaa was also “opposed to doctrinaire socialism” (12), which Nyerere considered to be a form of socialism that “seeks to build a happy society on the philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man” (12). Hence, for Nyerere, Ujamaa was opposed to scientific socialism or Marxism on the grounds that Marxism legitimises class conflicts. To conclude it can be said that in the pamphlet, Nyerere described Ujamaa in terms of family hood or brotherhood and he considered this concept as being unique because it was opposed to capitalism and scientific socialism.

### **Nyerere’s Socialist State**

The uniqueness of Nyerere’s theory or movement was because of his ability to specify a through relationship in brotherhood. Nyerere formed his own socialist state which he stated that the African should not be taught socialism as in democracy because socialism runs in their blood as a traditional heritage drawn from the recognition of a society as an extension of the basic family unit.

In traditional African society, Nyerere stated that the social effects of the accumulation of personal wealth were absent namely; poverty, exploitation, oppression, class distinction, parasitic or marginal existence, etc. there was no loiter nor capitalistic exploitation. Everybody except the sick and children was worker, cooperative rather than competitive; land was communal. All fell secure and worked for the common welfare. He went further to emphasize that society should not boarder about what will happen tomorrow provided that he did not hoard wealth today because society will look after him, his widow or his orphans. This is exactly what the traditional African society has succeeded in doing. The rich and the poor individuals were secure in traditional African society.

Nyerere went further to define the essential attributes or characteristics of a truly African socialist state. It is one in which all people are workers and in which neither capitalism nor feudalism exists. It does not have two classes of people, a lower class composed of people who work for their living and an upper class composed of people who depend on the work of others or working for other for their survival. In a really socialist country, no one exploit the other, anyone who is physically able to work does so.

In a socialist state, there is communal ownership of property and the major means of production. The major means of production to be communally owned are land, forest, minerals, water, oil, electricity, new media, communications, banks, insurance, and import and export trade and factories of all kind especially those who provide essential

components of other industries; large plantations especially those that provide raw material for essential industries.

However, Nyerere's socialist state has a negative as well as a positive task, such as the war against poverty, human oppression, exploitation, etc. as well as the promotion of the well being of the people, economic progress as well as self reliance. He thus states the dual aim of this state, men must be prevented from exploitation of each other and at the same time, institutions and organizations must be such that men needs and progress can be cooperatively accrued.

### **Nyerere of Education**

From the beginning, Nyerere has been critical of the educational system which Tanzania inherited from its colonial overlords. It was judged inadequate and inappropriate for the kind of society that he expected to build. It was an education modeled on the British system 'but with even heavier emphasis on subservient attitudes and on white-collar skills ... it emphasized and encouraged the individualistic instincts of mankind, instead of his cooperative instincts' (Nyerere, 47). This being the case, it cannot serve the new society to be built on principles of love, equality and freedom. This inappropriateness was soon manifested in the attitudes of the products of various colonial institutions, especially college students. Though Tanzania was spending 20% of her national income on education, only a tiny percentage were able to make it to the university level because of inadequate supply. Those who survive this struggle tended to think of themselves as superior and therefore became arrogant. The climax came in 1966 when college students protested against participation in the National Youth Service scheme which was then newly instituted. This infuriated Nyerere and he had 393 students expelled immediately. Recalling this later, he blamed everything on the colonial heritage of education which did not train students for service and which installed a barrier between them and the community. There is therefore the need for an educational system that will be more Tanzanian in content. This requires a clarification of the kind of society that is desired and the purpose of education itself.

### **Education for Self Reliance**

The purpose of education is to 'transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society and to prepare the young people for their future membership of the society and their active participation in its maintenance and development' (45). For this reason, it has to take its cue from the nature of the society. Tanzania, Nyerere insists, is a poor agrarian society. She depends on the cooperation,



loyalty and sacrifice of her peasantry who have been mobilized for social transformation on the basis of self reliance. It has been agreed that Tanzania will not depend on aid for her development. This should therefore be the basis for designing the education of the young. The curriculum should at every point emphasize self reliance and inculcate it as a virtue. The merit of work - manual work - should be the focus and from primary school to college, every student should be made to understand the need for work and self reliance. The educational system must emphasize cooperation. In addition it has to:

Foster the social goals of living together and working together for the common good. It has to prepare our young people to play a dynamic and constructive part in the development of a society in which all members share fairly in the good or bad fortune of the group, and in which progress is measured in terms of human well-being, not prestige buildings, cars or other such things ... Our system must therefore inculcate a sense of commitment to the total community, and help the pupils to accept values appropriate to our kind of future, not those appropriate to our colonial past (52).

But this does not mean that the inquisitive instincts of the young should be stifled. The idea is not to encourage robotism. Rather the educational system should encourage the development of;

An inquiring mind, an ability to learn from what others do, and reject or adapt it to his own needs; and a basic confidence in his own position as a free and equal member of the society, who values others and is valued by them for what he does and not for what he obtains. (53).

As president, Nyerere caused appropriate steps to be taken to correct the ills of colonial educational heritage and to create institutions for the realization of the goals of education for self reliance.

### **Critique of Ujamaa Socialism**

The theory or concept of socialism by Julius Nyerere was formed to unite the Africans together and give them a new concept of behaviour, value and life pattern. This theory no doubt gives the Africans a new orientation and value in the society. We have to applaud the first crop of African leaders for reacting to the capitalist exploitative hegemony of the west under the influence of colonialism and its advanced stage of neo-colonialism, at a point in African history by propagating an African traditional ideological orientation; African socialism, and stating emphatically that it is peculiarly African. Their efforts notwithstanding, we need to critically interrogate their assumption about the past and its suggestion for the present, especially those connected with the society and the individual.

Firstly, the socialist present the African past society as one that is conflict free but from history we know that this was not the case, there were cases of intra/inter-tribal wars. For example, the Egbas of Ogun state were formerly part of the old Oyo Empire, but incessant conflict led to their migration to their present domain. Also, there were criminals and exploiters in the traditional societies of Africa, as we have in the present capitalist states.

Secondly, communal co-existence suggested by African socialism for the present African socialism is not plausible in an over populated geographical area as the African states, except if sanctions will be applied in proportions to the populations. However, that could be a drift towards capitalism. Communalism is not peculiar to Africa, it is found in traditional industrial societies all over the world.

Thirdly, African socialists assert that the bond of brotherhood and unity, in the traditional society of Africa was very strong; they therefore suggest that these brotherhood and unity should be encouraged in the modern society. This is really a good suggestion; but then if the bond of brotherhood and unity was that strong, why did Africans sell their fellow African brothers into slavery in exchange for the goods of the white man? Again, it is believed that the values extolled as African values, values such as communal spirit, hospitality, hardwork, generosity, and altruism are not peculiar to Africa, these values are human values, encouraged by human beings all over the universe, since human nature is universal.

Finally, as a results of the above short comings and the fact that African socialist have not been able to translate their theory into practice in the present African states. In this present dispensation many Africans are living below the poverty line, many of our roads are bedeviled with “pot-wells” not “holes”, we witness epilepsy in our power supply, unavailability of portable water, unemployment, underdevelopment, security threat and a lot more challenges (Ayttey, 90).

Therefore, African Socialism has fatally failed as a socio-economic blueprint for African countries. Then one is tempted to say that African socialism is nothing but a myth. A story told to explain the nature of man and the society in ancient Africa. Hence, the need to look for another blue-print for the development of Africa and “deliverance” from the present quagmire. However, we suggest that instead of going back to the ancient past and emphasizing the superiority of the lifestyle over the contemporary lifestyle, we should encourage the human values that will make African society the “best possible world” for the actualization of the potentials of the individual.

## **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it is quite clear that Nyerere has a conception of the ultimate meaning of human existence, consistent with the traditional values of Africa and which he shares with other African political leaders (Gbadegesin, 14). Central to this conception is Ujamaa with its threefold vital factor and principle. It combines the emphasis on human dignity with the recognition of community as essential for the realization of the individual's dignity. It is a view which rejects any idea of competition between the individual and the community. The relationship should be one of the complementarities.

However, as a reaction to the objection stated above, Nyerere himself anticipates some objections to the principles he has identified as the moral foundation of Ujamaa. First, the conditions that made these principles valid in traditional family unit are probably no longer available in the complex modern societies of Africa. The traditional society with its network of social relations is no longer there. He also concedes that though these principles worked in traditional society, they do not make that society the idyllic one in a Rousseauian sense. For it has its own problems in the form of the insecurity of life and property and the absence of conditions that make life bearable. Yet it does not appear that Nyerere puts a lot of emphasis on these problems. In the final analysis, his position is still that if these principles are valid for traditional societies of Africa, they are valid also for the modern African nations. But though he puts it this way, I think what he has in mind is that though the institutions which we now have are quite different from those of traditional societies, the spirit behind the institutions of those societies should also help in their realization in the modern society. In other words, even when the institutions cannot be recreated, the spirit behind them can be. The question whether there was indeed any spirit behind them other than normal inevitable responses to the environmental conditions they faced did not seem to bother Nyerere. This is surprising because he also seems to appreciate that these practices are reactions, often unconsciously, to the vagaries of nature and the requirements of survival (Nyerere, 12).

Nyerere is therefore not arguing that there already exist these principles, at least, not now. They used to exist and to direct the ordering of traditional societies. But colonization came and impacted upon them with its 'individualistic money economy' which encourages 'acquisitiveness and economic competition'. Indeed:

This change is not just economic. By introducing the possibility of hoarding wealth through money, by encouraging the acquisitive instinct in man, and by basing social status on material wealth, the very basis of traditional social life is undermined. The economic inequalities between men become so great that man's basic equality is imperceptibly transformed into a merchant and client

relationship. It is then impossible for all members of the society to discuss together as equals with a common interest in the maintenance and development of society. The common interest has been at least partially replaced by two interests, those of the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. The unity of society has been weakened because the equality of its members has been broken (Nyerere, 11).

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