

# THE AFRICAN ATTITUDE OF THE MIND IN UJAMAA-SOCIALISM

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## *Abstract*

*The immediate post-independence period for Africa was an era of ideological orientations and constructions. This was an offshoot of colonial experience whereby African leaders felt that with power in their hands, they had a great role to play in charting the course of Africa's destiny going forward. It was a date with history at the zero hour – the hour of long-awaited freedom from the shackles of colonialism. While some African leadership looked towards established systems in Western and Eastern European scientific socialisms, others felt that although socialism could do, it has to find its origination or rooting and nature in the cultural realities of the African people. This way, socialism did not have to be understudied; instead, it had simply to be rediscovered since it formed, and informed the Africa of the past (pre-independence Africa). Julius Nyerere, former President of Tanzania, was a radical proponent of socialism for post-independence Africa. His brand of socialism was termed African socialism: a fundamental departure from the doctrines of Western scientific socialism with its anchor in Marxism. Nyerere's socialism sought to re-articulate the values inherent in African communal existence and highlight these values for revivification in contemporary value prioritizations. The worldview that would emerge from this would prize non-violence, freedom, equality stemming from the grand monism of inter-relationships. The African family was for Nyerere the prototype for the concretization of Ujamaa ideology. All that was needed was to extend the nuclear-socialistic values of the family to wider groups. This, it is hoped, would continue to widen tendentially towards the global scene. Besides, Nyerere hoped that Ujamaa, interpreted as brotherhood, fellowship or togetherness, would be an ideological remediation for war and the consequent entrenchment of lasting peace for Africa and mankind generally.*

**Keywords:** Ujamaa, Socialism, Ideology, Africa, Nyerere

## **Introduction**

This paper is an attempt to delve into the circumstances that led to the development of Ujamaa-socialism. It will endeavor to highlight the 'wonder' that gave birth to Ujamaa as an ideology of justice and fair play in human existence. Every philosophy, according to Aristotle, begins with 'wonder' (Copleston 2006, p. 287), that is, some kind of marvel – the realization in a surprising manner that things are not what they ought to be. This translates, in our case, to the gradual or sudden realization that things that could have been different have remained unchanged, thereby not reflecting the true situation. The wonder in question is therecognition that the status quo is no longer satisfactory, and as such, needs to undergo some modification in a positive direction. The current undertaking will trace the background to Ujamaa-

ideology in the context of the politico-economic situation of the 1960s in Africa. Further, it will consider as its major task, an insightful analysis of the African attitude of the mind as discovered and succinctly articulated by the chief proponent of Ujamaa socialism – Julius K. Nyerere. The development of this attitude of the mind and its subsequent reflection in man's daily choices and particularly in the cultural perception of the African is considered herein as a core Ujamaa value. As the essence of Ujamaa ideology, it is at once an ideal and incidentally an attainable goal. This is borne out by the fact that it is possible to point to an African institution where this 'realized-ideal' was – and has, to a large extent remained – a demonstrable fact. The African family remains one institution where Ujamaa-socialism did thrive in the past, does still operate to a reasonable degree, and will arguably continue to remain a main feature. Nyerere believes that the substantial values of Ujamaa ideology are perennially African as these values subsist in the African family whether consciously articulated by the African forebears or not. The paper will take in supplementary ideas that are quite leavening and tangential to Ujamaa goals. It must aim at preserving, in this universe of discourse, essentially the values for which Ujamaa exists. Ujamaa – both in its horizon and goals – is not about a closed nuclear family system, that is, the manner in which this sociological unit is conceived in the West, but for the unique African family which is understandably extended. Ujamaa derives its meaning and substance from this ever-widening extension. Ujamaa ideology is meant to be comprehended as a grand monism of family relationships, tending towards the family-hood of mankind. Nyerere intends to elaborate that that ideology has its roots in Africa although again by intent, he expects its wider extension until it encompasses the family-hood of man. Another way to look at this is that Nyerere projects this ideology to the global scene whereby the positive values of this African existential system may benefit humanity equally. An attempt will be made to evaluate the chosen theme and the exercise rounded off in the concluding reflections.

### **Background to Ujamaa – socialism**

Ujamaa – a Kiswahili word that means family-hood (Nyerere 1975, p. 28), brotherhood, fellowship – is a socio-political ideology that captured vividly the socio-political visions of Nyerere, its frontier exponent and former president of Tanzania. Nyerere philosophized out of the political exigencies and undercurrents of the 1960s. It was the era of Africa's quest for independence from its western colonizers. The trauma of Western colonialism was still fresh in the minds and lives of the people generally. African leaders, post-independence, were concerned with charting alternative directions for the betterment of the lives of the African people. This quest, they usually encapsulated in the form of an ideology. It was a time of taking crucial and even radical decisions on the future of Africa. The African leadership, of which Nyerere was an outstanding figure, was faced with the onus of deciding the direction that the new Africa would be steered towards politically, economically and culturally. Nyerere was deeply concerned about the realization of his dream of rapid development for Africa, epitomized in enhanced living standards of the people. Beyond the mere enhancement of the living condition of the people, Nyerere was focused on egalitarian uplifting of the mass of the people. The issue at stake was that of mass upliftment epitomized in economic, political, social, spiritual, other material and infrastructural development.

Three main ideological alternatives were open to Nyerere to opt for. One was possibly to

continue with the already familiar path charted by the colonialists. This would mean to continue to build on colonial legacies and structures. Again, this would be hinged on capitalism 'a socioeconomic system essentially based on private ownership of capital goods or means of production' (Nwoko 1988, p. 201). Capitalism is motivated by liberal pursuit of profit in the market economy. As such it is driven mainly, not only by profit taking but also its maximization. Although capitalists claim that the system makes for enterprise, creativity, competition and increased quality of goods and services, the main concern of socialists like Nyerere is its exploitative and dehumanizing tendency. Nyerere understood capitalism as a system that 'seeks to build a society on the basis of the exploitation of man by man' (Nyerere 1974, p. 12). In Africa, capitalism has been seen as an instrument of oppression, exploitation, domination and mass impoverishment of peoples, among others. The visualization of what would be the fate of the future Africa under bare-faced capitalism, drawing from hindsight and literary exposure to its principles and operations, made Nyerere reject this ideology for the Africa of his dreams. The second beckoning alternative was socialism, mainly understood as doctrinaire or scientific socialism. Doctrinaire socialism sprang up from Marxism. It operates based on certain doctrinaire features which are lacking in African socialism. Doctrinaire socialism develops from the existential realities of class distinctions or classism: feudal lords versus serfs; slave versus master; worker (proletariat) versus employer (bourgeoisies) in which the lower class in each case struggles with the higher for economic welfare. According to this theorization, the trajectory is historical and the process inexorable. The implication is that eventually capitalism would self-destruct or be overcome by socialism. The whole historical motion (dialectics) is material process that would see the enthronement of socialism. According to Marx and Engels, scientific socialism is characterized by public ownership of the means of production, (Nwoko 1988, p. 232) fair distribution of production proceeds, co-operation rather than competition by individual entrepreneurs and corporate organizations.

The socialist propaganda was fueled by the realization by its disseminators that the 'laissez-faire' market economy has been betrayed. Marx concluded that due to this great betrayal, that is the inability of capitalism to promote material prosperity for all, the system would fall and socialism emerge therefrom (Nisbet 1983, p. 235). Prior to this economic cataclysm and its re-ordering, there could not be socialism for Marx. Doctrinaire socialism is an intolerant ideology. It envisions the demise of capitalism as a necessary condition for its own (socialism's) emergence and global influence. According to Marx, capitalism contained inherent contradictions. The dialectics of this contradiction has made it grow stepwise and inexorably from primitive-communal to slave ownership, feudal, capitalist and predictably socialist-communist phases (Buznev 1987, p. 14). Capitalism being the last bastion in this series of man's economic inhumanity to man must necessarily destroy itself due to class war. The economically oppressed would always wage war against their capitalist oppressors. Capitalism was therefore destined for self-destruction so that socialism would rise up from its ruins. However, this can be hastened by violence (Nisbet 1983, pp. 237-238). The proletariats – the oppressed workers – can take their envisaged destiny into their hands and catalyze the process to socialism through revolutionary violence. It is from here mainly that the attraction of this ideology vanished for Nyerere. The use of violence was seen as repugnant to the African ways of achieving full humanization for its people. Again, for Nyerere, Africa never

witnessed class war. People cared for one another such that class war never emerged as a problem in Africa.

The third option left for Nyerere and which he adopted wholesale was that of African socialism. African socialism was not a philosophical invention. It was rather a rediscovery and radical articulation of the values dear to the African. These values were lived out in the concrete socioeconomic situation of traditional Africa. The *reason detr'e* for its rediscovery at all, i.e., through Ujamaa-socialism, is the modern African who needs to be re-educated or reoriented to Ujamaa values (Osu:27). Post-independence, it appeared the African had lost some of the values dearest to her, that is, those values that made the African forebears and the African society thick. These values would help him build a happy society for mankind. To realize fully the principles of Ujamaa, there is need to examine what Nyerere calls, 'The African Attitude of the Mind'

#### **Analysis of 'The African attitude of the mind'**

In his famous essay – Ujamaa: The Basis of African Socialism – which could serve as an 'abstract' for his subsequent development of thought, Nyerere began by proffering an insight into the mind of the traditional African. He revealed therein that socialism, just like democracy, is an attitude of the mind (Ochieng'-Odhiambo 1994, pp. 76-77). This implies, in the tradition of St. Augustine's 'City of God', that it is not about rigid divisions or categorization of people (Copleston 2003, p. 85). Ujamaa-socialism is not about the classification of people into bourgeoisie and proletariats for instance, or upper and lower classes or the 'haves' and 'have-nots', with a view to branding one group of people socialists and the other non-socialists or possibly capitalists. Instead, African socialism has distinctive philosophical underpinnings. It exists where people are mentally rightly oriented to the principles governing socialism. It is the possession of this proper mindset – a mind greatly tending towards the universal – that qualifies one to be an Ujamaa-socialist. This disposition is not determined by economic status. Indeed, it cuts across barriers placed by any economic stratification. Thus, a materially poor person can possess this attitude of the mind just like his materially wealthy counterpart. According to Nyerere,

*It has nothing to do with the possession or non-possession of wealth. Destitute people can be potential capitalists– exploiters of their fellow human beings. A millionaire can equally be a socialist, he may value his wealth only because it can be used in the service of his fellow men. But the man who uses wealth for the purpose of dominating any of his fellows is a capitalist. So is the man who would if he could (Nyerere 1963, p. 39).*

Nyerere is concerned with values and not with quantification of material wealth or its total absence. It is this disposition – this loosening of man's selfish interests in the universal concern for the welfare of the other that must always distinguish the socialist from the non-socialist.

To speak of the socialist attitude of mind is to introduce the moral element in the

socioeconomic relationship of the African one towards the other. It is a just and anthropocentric economic relationship. This involves the ultimate consideration of the interests, needs, situation, dignity and goals of the other in any economic dealings whatsoever and not just the appropriation of profits at whatever costs. Only the morally sensitive man would consider it unjust, or not according to right reason, to exploit, dominate and impoverish the other in the so-called normal dealings of the day!

The attitude of the mind of the traditional African, as clearly depicted in Ujamaa is essentially inclined to wealth distribution, rather than to hoarding or wealth accumulation. It is a mind open enough to comprehend the social-value meaning and destination of wealth. In other words, it entails the affirmation that wealth has a purpose which is fundamentally utilitarian. Material wealth in this sense is meant to be used to build the society. This implies using wealth to solve and alleviate the problems of man.

The traditional African lived a rather simpler existence than his modern counterpart; his problems then revolved around survivalism and providing mainly for the basic necessities of life in the majority of cases. However, there seemed to exist a pervading sense of contentment as people aspired to the 'good life'. The good life in this context entailed a level of economic well-being continually targeted at improving the living conditions of all the people, and not just of the few. This explains why traditional African societies did not boast of millionaires (Nyerere 1963, p. 39) or the super-rich. The socialist structure in place did not allow people to accumulate wealth for their own selfish reasons. Wealth accumulation negated the principle of the gregarious pursuit of the 'good life' for all. Due mainly to the distribution principle inherent in traditional society, people maintained a range of equality in their living standards. The society was rightly described as egalitarian. *Egalitarianism* did not at any point translate to *equalitarianism*, but simply implied that people lived within a range in which economic goods attainable by one was open to the other and was in reality equally attainable by the other within only a reasonable space of time. This calls in the important question of working hard to be able to attain such goals. Equalitarianism would imply the equality of all men and women; a concept that would radically not obtain or apply in real life.

In traditional African society, everybody was a worker (Nyerere 1963, p. 15). Working was a criterion for belonging and enjoying the privileges involved in the social structures of the African's world. Work was readily available as the backbone of agrarian subsistence. As such, it was tied to the survival of families and the society at large. The traditional African understood, perhaps intuitively and again by practical experience that work was humanizing, dignifying and rewarding. Provided that one worked hard, there was no need to accumulate wealth for retirement needs or the rainy day. This is because the community would take care of such needs (Nyerere 1963, p. 6). The structure ensured that the burdens of what lay ahead, in terms of economic needs and their satisfaction did not weigh down on the minds of the people. There was the assurance that these had been provided for in advance; and one could actually look around to confirm that it was the case. With such 'weight' off one's shoulders, one naturally tended to enjoy longevity – at times legendary – compared to the so many 'sudden exits at life's mid-day' that is a common feature of modern African life!

The aged in traditional African society did not fully retire from work. Although one did not always have to be engaged vigorously in material production processes, this did not imply that one was at any point in time, redundant or idle. One was at all times usefully engaged in building up the community in alternative or different ways. For instance, the aged had a lot to still give back to the community especially as it involved directing aright or offering useful advice to the youth and preserving values worth bequeathing future generations. Although the traditional African person was supposed to be useful, working and contributing to the pool of community resources, this was not an absolute value. Mere pragmatism did not, at any point in time, define the African attitude of the mind. That is to say that the traditional African was not an absolute pragmatist even if he essayed to bring on pragmatic considerations to bear on the projects at hand. He did always look for results as a radical standard or measure as there exist other values that count other than mere results. However, essentially, the African attitude of the mind recognized but transcended mere pragmatism, towards otherworldly realities and values. The human person was considered 'supreme'. He cannot, even today, be equated to the sum total of his production proceeds. That is why Ujamaa views the human person with dignity and even when it appears one has lost practical usefulness to the community, one is still considered a person with full rights and privileges. Provided they imbibe the spirit of Ujamaa and work hard when fit or are not supposed to work due to legitimate reasons, Ujamaa looks after the dependent ratio of the population – children, the aged and the infirm. That is why, *“the only people who live on the work of others, and who have the right to be dependent upon their fellows, are small children, people who are too old to support themselves, the crippled, and those whom the state at any time cannot provide with an opportunity to work for their living”* (Nyerere 1963, p. 16). This tends to portray, above all, that Ujamaa socialism is not necessarily about developing the Nietzschean 'superman' (Copleston 2003, pp. 413 – 415) out of everyone or trading off the full concept of person for radical pragmatism. Beyond the particularisms of disability and health or strength and weakness, wealth distribution is a social context reality of participation in the collective consciousness of belongingness. Provided people work hard and with the right spirit, the 'ground' of wealth – both material and otherwise – tends to make it possible that there is often enough to share in, including by those who must depend on others due to the aforementioned factors. This is the metaphysics upon which the African attitude of the mind derives principles for its operation. It shows beyond doubt that the African is supposed to be his brother's keeper.

### **Ujamaa–socialism as family-hood**

Ujamaa-socialism was founded on an institutional role model. The family is the social, political and economic nucleus of the society and the role model and prototype of Ujamaa ideology. The African understanding of the family is more encompassing than the western nuclear interpretation (Nze 1989, p. 2). The family for the African does not stop with parents and their children. It includes as well other blood and 'non-blood' relatives and their families referred to as extended families. Social and economic relationships continue to be extended with regard especially to in-laws, age grades or peers. The idea is that in traditional Africa, everybody was almost related with everybody else. The implication is that if we have the time and patience to sacrifice, the tracings and unraveling will, eventually expose each of us as linked to the other in socio–family relationships. It is again, a picturesque understanding of the human reality as a grand monism of relationships. Events may occasionally make people refer

to the 'oneness' of human beings perfectly understood in the above sense.

Nyerere's response is that if this is a fact, then it would form for us a solid basis for reconstructing our past for the benefit of the modern man. Much in the same way that Descartes reduced the indubitable to 'Cogito ergo sum' (Copleston 2006, pp. 90-91), and St. Augustine before him to 'If I am deceived therefore I am' (Copleston 2006, pp. 90 - 91), one could say that Nyerere discovered in the family an indubitable socialist unit; therefore the bedrock on which to build his ideology. Nyerere saw in the family a concrete society whose principles of operation are worth investigating. But if the African conception of family is 'family' in its widest extension, therefore the so-called wider society is nothing more than extended family – a macro family. That is why Ujamaa is translated as family-hood.

### **The African family's mode of operation**

The African attitude of the mind was not only incubated, but also realized its peak development in the family. The traditional setting was such that people were conventionally exposed to such attitudinal influences in their journey through life. This was made possible because the African family thrived on well-known features. It was governed by the understanding that its members enjoyed equality, so to speak fundamentally. This was an existential reality, for no particular man or woman adequately explains the purpose for the existence of the family. The reason why the family or society exists is its members, that is, every member equally with every other member (Nyerere 1963, p. 10). The possession of this 'equality' enters into the very meaning of 'family' for its members.

The family is also founded on freedom. It is the awareness of equality that gives the members a sense of freedom. As with every other human organization, the sense of freedom is always implied: "*Freedom from fear of personal attack, freedom from the effects of natural dangers which from time to time hit every individual and which cannot be withstood without help, and freedom to gain rewards from nature for which his own unaided strength is insufficient*" (Nyerere 1975, p. 10). 'Equality' and freedom give the members the opportunity to realize their potentials and aspirations. They help to preserve their sense of individuality in togetherness or unity. Unity is such a pervading and conscious family factor that the family in relation to the wider society is considered as a unit. The unit is self-contained in most of its basic needs – politically, economically and socially. The family is the most secure place to be: no one needs to preach the sacredness of life to the family for this is where it is most intuitively understood. The African family operates based on mutual respect for others' lives, freedom and the obligations that go with these.

In the family, there is authority which resides with the head. The head has clear-cut obligations, though these can all be summed up in co-ordinatory and stabilizing roles. He makes sure that decisions are taken as swiftly as possible; and ensures that compromises are made by those concerned (himself inclusive) (Nyerere 1975, p. 9) for the quick resolution of issues. He ensures as well that there is the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens. In the family, there is common ownership of the means of production: land and tools are owned in common while everybody contributes labour according to one's ability. Other essentials of life are also owned in common, particularly food and shelter. Because it is family property, all the

members have equal right to its use (Nyerere 1975, p. 11) and equal participation in caring for it. Sharing is a regular feature of family life, and of course any harmonious social organization. It is in sharing that members fully understand their 'equality', freedom and belongingness. One who does not belong has no right to any portion of what is shared. Although it may not be possible for members to receive equal parts of what is shared, yet everybody receives what is one's due. This is justice. The family is the place where justice is practiced on a regular basis, in short, as a way of life.

Sharing implies responsibility on the part of the members of the family. Every member understands that he or she is obliged to work hard to contribute to the pool of shareable goods or services. The obligation to work becomes one reason why no one would question his or her equal right to participation in the distribution of the proceeds. Even if the family in question is materially wealthy, no member would decide that because of this he or she would no longer work. That would make him a loiterer, idler and parasite. And from thence, he would be reducing in importance and dignity before the wider society. The African family, to wind up this section, is prototypically the place for collective enterprise and distribution of proceeds to the members in the understanding and pursuit of the good life.

### **Evaluation**

One difficulty in reconstructing the past (for the present) in the form of an ideology is the tendency to slide into an idyllic presentation of people's past existence. The picture becomes unrealistic and, in the end, it may be that the proponent of an ideology might have imposed his own propensities on supposed people's lived values. The African traditional family did not enjoy an idyllic existence. The life was not entirely free from the complexities, complications and outright 'bad blood' that is so much part of modern life. The life of the African forebears was also bedeviled by witchcraft practices, voodooism, discrimination against people, stealing and banditry. There was also the collaboration or connivance with Middle East (Arab) and Western (European) slave raiders, in some cases, in the process and practice of slavery, although there are other sides to this as well.

In reality, the African attitude of the mind is a perception of life that is deeply structured into African communal living. The community as the 'universal exists only in and through its particulars' (Copleston 2003, p. 100) This implies that the community is nothing but 'extension' of individuals and vice versa. However, the *authority* of the community and not *reason* is always supreme. This calls into question the nature of the freedom which the individual enjoys. The over identification and dependence on the community did not allow the individual the degree of freedom that would enable him critically reflect on and question established norms. The freedom to think and express one's views was guaranteed to the extent to which it did not depart strongly from that of the collectivity. The propagation of individual philosophic activity appeared to have been discouraged as peace and security of the individual meant docility to the status quo. Abanuka observes that communal knowledge is uniquely "underlined by the fact that the community's interest is put at the centre and individual interest is regarded as meaningful or relevant to the extent it agrees with or enhances the interest of the community (Abanuka 1994, p. 78). To make any breakthrough in terms of advancement of ideas or new insight in place of the existing ones would rather be difficult in traditional Africa.



The bond of fellowship may demand that lazy members of the family be scolded or cajoled but never outrightly abandoned or left to their fate. Care continued to be extended to them 'somehow'. This attitude of the mind may encourage negative response to the collective spirit of enterprise. Where effective checks are not in place, the system may condone laziness and further sliding down the scale of economic progress. Again, brotherhood feeling and sensitivity have peculiar meaning and appeal to immediate family members and other close relations which do not apply in equal intensity to that of the wider society. This accounts for the reason why people can be at 'peace' exploiting, oppressing or dominating those understood as not belonging to their family members. Nyerere observed the difficulty inherent in applying the prescriptions of African socialism to larger units but insists that we have virtually no other choice than to extend Ujamaa values to all. He maintained: "*Unless they are adopted, there will always be an inherent although concealed danger of a breakdown in society – that is, a split in the family unit, a civil war within a nation, or a war between nations (Nyerere 1995, p. 14)*" This is clearly an invitation to human organizations of any size to heed and operate based on Ujamaa values. This is Nyerere's panacea for maintaining stability, unity and progress in group development goals.

### **Conclusion**

Ujamaa socialism was a synthesis of the preceding efforts by social philosophers to articulate for mankind the path to rapid economic development based on structural justice and non-violence. The efficient cause of all socialist ideologies is the transformation of the human person to his best possible, especially on the ladder of politico-economic development. Whether Marxism or Ujamaa, scientific or non-scientific, the ends are the same though the paths may vary. In this sense, Ujamaa-socialism is a higher synthesis of the prescriptions of its predecessors including scientific socialism. It is above all, a correction of Marxism.

Hegel maintained that the absolute manifests itself in Nature and in the history of the human spirit (Copleston 2003, p. 189). The spirit of the era of the struggle for Africa's independence did find its reception in Nyerere and its perfect expression in his ideology. Therefore, Ujamaa socialism was never a radical tribal ideology but meant to be an ever-extending, and again tending to universal phenomenon. Apart from its African locus, it is an ideology valid for peoples of all cultures and at all times. This spirit, operating via the African attitude of the mind, represents the way forward for realizing the African struggle for a better society and also attaining and maintaining the new world order of justice, prosperity and peace.

These days, African political leadership appear to have derailed from the spirit of Ujamaa. The suffusion in unguarded materialism has drowned moral sensitivity and the sentiments of brotherhood. The net effect is corruption, bribery, economic backwardness as against material welfare for all, the widening of the inequality gap, mass poverty and indeed structured impoverishment, social and political discontent. This breeds all manners of social unrest and disequilibrium in the society. All these point to the missed opportunity offered by Ujamaa ideology as a stabilization benchmark for socio-economic growth, personal dignity, wealth distribution, infrastructural growth and the realization for Africa of the condition sine qua non for the good life.

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