

IGWEBUIKE AND UJAMAA PHILOSOPHIES OF FAMILYHOOD: IN SEARCH FOR A COMMON BROTHERHOOD

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Abstract

This paper critically x-rayed Igwebuiké Philosophy and the African socialist ideology (Ujamaa) of Julius Nyerere. It also sauntered into a comparative study of both ideologies in a bid to proffer possible ways in which our “lost” brotherhood can be upheld and restored for the common good. It adopted the comparative method of inquiry and discovered that Igwebuiké and Ujamaa have a lot in common given their common African roots.

Keywords: Igwebuiké, Ujamaa, Familyhood, Brotherhood

Introduction

Taking a cursory look at the contemporary African society, one cannot but ask some salient questions, which could plunge one into deep pondering. The sacrifices of our heroes past have, and are being thrown into the dustbins. Everything seems to be in the doldrums, our ethical values, beliefs and systems are on the verge of extinction. This recent turn of events, also reveals a growing trend of individualism among Africans, which is in sharp contrast to our traditional African society which was known for its sensitivity to the common good - the hallmark of authentic African communalism. Recent happenings have also shown that the African continent is daily being 'raped' of values that depict African authenticity such as moral consciousness, decency, unity, communalism, brotherhood, familyhood, and the likes.

This has set the African continent in a web of near total cultural disarray; the Africans have been entangled in a cabinet of crisscross network of identity crisis. Daily, human values are being trampled upon as a result of the substitution of our previously cherished moral values with western norms, which were imported to African states. It is sad, then that contemporary African society has replaced the dictum, “be your brother's keeper” with “to your tent oh Israel.” Everyman is in search for privacy, and the traditional communalistic outlook renounced and abandoned like a leper (Okojie,

2004). Therefore, there is need to revisit various African philosophical and social systems that are definitive to our existence as Africans.

Thus, this paper sets out to critically x-ray the Igwebuiké Philosophy and the African socialist ideology (Ujamaa) of Julius Nyerere. It shall also saunter into a comparative study of both ideologies in a bid to proffer possible ways in which our “lost” brotherhood can be upheld and restored for the common good.

***Igwebuiké* Philosophy in Perspective**

The word *Igwebuiké* is an Igbo word. It is a composite word made up of three dimensions. Therefore, it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence. As a word, it is written as *Igwebuiké*, and as a sentence, it is written as *Igwe bu ike* with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. The three words involved; *Igwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population. *Bu* is a verb, which means is. *Ike* is another verb, which means *strength* or *power*. Thus, put together, it means 'number (or population) is strength' or 'number (or population) is power', that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force (Kanu, 2017a).

Igwebuiké is a principle that is at the heart of African thought, and in fact, the modality of being in African ontology. As an ideology, *Igwebuiké* rests on the principles of solidarity and complementarity. Thus, to be, is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. To be, is to be with the other, in a community of beings. This is based on the African sense of community, which is the underlying principle in African philosophy and religion, and as such, the unity of African philosophy. In this case, to be with the other becomes the modality of being in African ontology. This is anchored on the African cosmology which Iroegbu describes as being characterised by a common origin, common world-view, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits, common historical experience and a common destiny (Kanu, 2014).

As an indigenous African philosophy, *Igwebuiké* philosophy gives an understanding of the human person as a being who is in relation with the other in the world. It establishes that there exists a common link between human persons and that it is through this relationship that every other person realises himself/herself. *Igwebuiké* philosophy is the capacity in Igbo-African ontology for the expression of complementarity, solidarity, compassion, reciprocity, dignity and harmony for the purpose of building and maintaining community. It celebrates in a deep cultural and philosophical modality our relatedness, our inter connectedness, our common humanity, our common responsibility towards each other and for each other.

The philosophy of *Igwebuike* is a complementary philosophy which understands life as a shared reality. Life is a life of *sharedness*; one in which another is part thereof. It is a relationship, though of separate and separated entities or individuals but with a joining of the same whole. It is a relationship in which case the two or more coming together makes each of them a complete whole; it is a diversity of being one with each other. Thus, Mbiti classically proverbialises the community determining role of the individual when he writes, “I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am” (Kanu, 2017).

Reflecting on the African idea of life as a shared reality, and in which complementarity is observed, Kanu avers that it presupposes a tailor-made cloth, measured, cut and sewn to fit into the curves, contours, shapes and sizes, peculiarities and the particularities of a being. Thus, every being has a missing part and is at the same time, a missing part.

Ekwulu (2010), therefore, writes that:

If the other is my part or a piece of me, it means that I need him for me to be complete, for me to be what I really am. The other completes rather than diminishes me. His language and culture make my own stand out and at the same time, they enrich and complement my own. In the presence of his language and culture, the riches and poverty of my language and culture become clear and I see that his own and my own when put together form a richer whole when compared to any of them in isolation.

He further opines that the self is not only completed in relating with the other, but that it attains self-realization in the other: I realize myself in the other because it is in the 'Thou-ness' of the Thou that my 'Is-ness' is realized. I am 'I' because you are 'You'. Without Thou there is no I. We are 'We' because they are 'They', and without 'They', there is no 'We'. Therefore, in the contention of Asouzu as quoted by Kanu (2017): “It is within this ontological context (of life as sharedness) that all questions of meaning can be handled adequately and fully within the context of mutual complementarity of all possible relations.”

The Ujama'a Political Philosophy

The term *Ujama'a* is a Swahili word, which means “*togetherness*” but it is technically translated “familyhood.” “Family” in this case is meant to stand for “community consciousness of togetherness, which shows all Africans as brothers and sisters” (Nyerere, 1968 A). It is an African philosophy propounded by the former President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere. He believed that communalism should be adopted as a social philosophy of any free/independent state to remove class and social inequality. For him, it can be achieved by a sense of “familyhood or “family relationship called *Ujamaa* (Brotherhood) (Ejem, 2018).

The Philosophy of *Ujamaa* (family feeling/relationship) is a theory fit for a small/subsistent society, but when practiced or applied in the modern society, it must be reformed in order to benefit from its richness. The reformation will mean the expansion and extension of this family relationship beyond the basic family unit; beyond the extended family and more. Nevertheless, the *Ujamaa* or “Brotherhood” is propounded by Nyerere to indicate African socialism. *Ujamaa* opposes western capitalism, which builds a society based on the exploitation of people, and also opposes a conception of socialism as a philosophy, which considers the class struggle, and use of force as a valid means to obtain equality. Nyerere's socialism is a return to the roots of African traditional society in order to draw from it the heritage and values found in it. Society must always be seen as an extension of the family unit.

Thus, Nyerere has this to say:

Our first step, therefore, must be to re-educate ourselves; to regain our former altitude of mind. In our traditional African society we were individuals within the community. We took care of the community, and the community took care of us. We neither needed nor wished to exploit our fellowmen.

With this affirmation, Nyerere refuses to accept the Western capitalist form of society and its method of exploitation. For no true African Socialist can look at a line drawn on a map and say, 'the people on this side of the line are my brothers, but those who happen to live on the other side of it can have no claim on me'; every individual; on this continent is his brother”(Ejem, 2018).

Background to the Emergence of 'Ujamaa' / The 'Ujamaa' Socialism in Africa

The Tanzanian nation of East Africa did not emerged out of nothing overnight. It is not merely the result of the nationalist struggle and the attainment of independence. It is rather the product of a long historical process stretching back hundreds, even thousands of years; a process which involved cultural, social, economic and political developments. However, it is impossible to come up with a single model of political organisation reflecting the different groups of tribes that inhabited the land before the coming of foreigners. There were nomads, hunters and agriculturalists, each having their own social and political structures (Aliba, 2007). For instance, among the Masai, the Moran were in charge of defense, the Elders were in charge of political arbitration, and the Laibon were ritual leaders.

Political organisation was hierarchical with the noblest holding high offices. In some lesser centralised tribes such as those who practiced the nomadic way of life, political systems were based on the age set organization which ensured strict allocation of functions according to age grades. Land belonged to all the subjects of that given territory, with the chief acting as an arbitrator in times of land or cattle disputes. Life was communal with each one's misfortunes or needs being solved and fulfilled within the community as a whole. This was the structure and the functioning of pre-colonial chieftainship. The common factor that can be drawn from such a social organization was the need to face life's needs, communally. These factors seem to be the factors that later inspired the Tanzanian president Mwalimu Julius Nyerere into claiming the Africaness of his ideology and essence of forming an African state (Aliba, 2007).

With the coming of the colonialists, formal education was introduced in Tanzania. However, the aim of this is debatable. This is because from the benefit of hindsight, a number of questions have been raised. Was the aim to train Tanzanians into being knowledgeable for their own self-determination in future or was it just to train clerks to handle information in colonial offices to cater for the need to run exploitative colonial state machinery? The latter argument is supported by the fact that, the British ruled Tanzania for 43 years and by the time they left, they left only two trained engineers and 12 trained doctors.

Nevertheless, note that it was from this class of colonial educated Tanganyikan elites that emerged leaders who led the fight for the independence of Tanganyika on the 9th day of December 1961. However, Tanzania as we have it today is a unification of former Tanganyika and Zanzibar colonies. They came together on the 23rd day of April 1964 to sign an act of union that making their countries one nation officially called the United Republic of Tanzania with Dar es Salaam as its capital city. Tanzania is a collection of over 120 different tribal groups, but there are not any dominant tribal groups. Although, Swahili and English are the country's official languages.

Prominent among those who fought for the independence of Tanganyika was Mwalimu Julius Nyerere (1922-1999). He became president shortly after independence in the year 1961 and stepped down in the year 1985. In searching for a development path for his poor country, he introduced a governing concept that was meant to meld socialism with traditional tribal government. He called it '*Ujamaa*' a Swahili word for familyhood. As president, Nyerere had to steer a difficult course. By the late 1960s, Tanzania was one of the world's poorest countries. Like many others, it was suffering from a severe debt burden, a decrease in foreign aid and a fall in the price of commodities. His solution, the **collectivization** of agriculture and

large scale nationalization was a unique blend of socialism and communal life. The vision was set out in the Arusha Declaration of 1967 thus;

The objective of socialism in the United Republic of Tanzania is to build a society in which all members have equal rights and equal opportunities; in which all can live in peace with their neighbours without suffering or imposing injustice, being exploited or exploiting; and in which all have a gradually increasing basic level of material welfare before any individual lives in luxury (Nyerere, 1968 B).

This Arusha declaration was divided into five different parts covering the ideological and political means detailing how the socialism in Tanzania could be reached. The first part was concerning its creed which stated that all human beings are equal and its aim was to safeguard this principle. Part two was concerning the policy of socialism which shall ensure the absence of capitalism and exploitation in the Tanzanian state. Therefore the major means of production and exchange will be under the control of the peasants and workers through the machinery of government.

The third part was about the policy of self-reliance. The poor can't use money as a weapon because they don't possess it; therefore it is stupid to rely on money as the major instrument of development. Foreign financial assistance will endanger independence to choose one's own policy; that is why Tanzanians have to avoid taking loans and gifts coming from other countries. First of all, Tanzanians have to rely on what they already have; land, peasants and agriculture. Self-reliance means that Tanzanians will use their local resources and depend upon themselves. The development of a country is to be brought about by people, not by money. Money and wealth are the results, not the basis of development.

Part four was about TANU (Tanganyikan African National Union) membership. It stated that every member of TANU had to accept the faith and objectives of socialism. Part five emphasized that every TANU and government leader should not be associated with any practices of capitalism, including holding shares in any company or even to own houses which he/she rents to others (Aliba, 2007).

In socialist Tanzania, agricultural organisation was predominantly that of co-operative living and working for the good of all. This means that, most of their farming would be done by groups of people who live and work as a community. Nyerere's '*Ujamaa*' represented the hopes of many in the 1960s who wished to carve out an independent socialist pathway different not only from the acquisitiveness of western capitalism, but also from the totalitarian forms of communism in Russia and China. Rather than rapid industrialization, Nyerere aimed for a form of democratic socialism rooted in the village. But, did this unique ideology survive the test of time?

Critique of the Ujamaa Socialism

Julius Nyerere's vision was bigger than his victories; his perception was deeper than his performance. In global terms, he was one of the finest minds of the 20th century. Like all giants, he had both great insights and great blind spots. His vision did outpace his victories, and his profundity outweighed his performance. His policies of 'Ujamaa' amounted to a case of heroic failure. They were heroic because, Tanzania was one of the few African countries which attempted to find its own route to development instead of borrowing the ideologies of the West. However, in a bid to avoid any form of Western influence (neo-colonialism) Tanzania had to break diplomatic ties now and then with Western countries. Nyerere refused taking loans and grants from them; a move which seriously impoverished the people and left the nation very poor. This was a failure because the economic development plan did not deliver the goods of development.

On the other hand, Nyerere's policies of nation building amounted to a case of unsung heroism with wise and strong leadership, and with a brilliant policy of cultural integration. He took one of the poorest countries in the world and made it a proud leader in African affairs and an active member of the global community. Although, internally there was lack of commitment towards forming a state based on Ujamaa principles. This was one of the major reasons that could not sustain Ujamaa as a national ideology. Even among high ranking leaders in the then ruling party TANU, few believed in it. Many saw the attainment of independence as a chance to accumulate wealth through their positions as ministers, party leaders or any high ranking position in a state institution. This caused passive discontents on the part of the masses as their hopes were dashed and their expectations were not met. It also led to mismanagement, misallocation of funds and corruption. Ironically, not one of those responsible was ever disciplined. This was the weaker side of President Julius Nyerere (Aliba, 2007).

Through a one-party rule and emphasizing racial and tribal harmony and moralistic sacrifice, Nyerere unified Tanzania from a far flung collection of tribes into a nation. But the country faltered. At the time he was leaving office after being in power for nearly three decades, Tanzania was an independent state, but far from being self-reliant, with government budget heavily subsidized from foreign aid and the debt burden crippling even further the economy. State machinery was insufficient and corruption rife. After Nyerere stepped down from power in 1985, the country was in shambles, and the socialist experiment was viewed as a fiasco. Nyerere apologized and resigned voluntarily after serving four terms.

Nevertheless, the failure of *Ujamaa* as a political ideology does not in any way diminish its potentials as an African philosophy that upholds the principle of African

brotherhood which is basically an African socialism. The true realization of such an African brotherhood implies the sharing and distribution of goods among all. It also consists in creating a sense of belonging to a community and the total responsibility of the community towards its member.

The basic assumption and mental attitude of *Ujamaa* is that everyone is a worker and so should contribute to the general coffers. In addition, no one should be exploited by others through wealth as is the case with western capitalist societies which breed millionaires and widen the gap between the poor and the rich and encourage suffocating competition, acquire tendencies towards wealth for power and prestige. For Nyerere therefore, in an acquisitive society, wealth tends to corrupt those who possess it. It breeds in them a desire to live more comfortably than their fellows and in every way to out-do them in all spheres of social enterprise. And then consequentially, the visible contrast between their own comfort and the comparative discomfort of the rest of society sets off the spirals of unhealthy personal competition- which is anti-social, since it breeds insecurity and class struggle (Ejem, 2018).

***Igwebuike* and *Ujama'a*: Towards a common Brotherhood**

The *Igwebuike* and *Ujamaa* philosophies, both see complementarity as a requisite for individual existence. This notwithstanding, one can say that while *Igwebuike* philosophy acts on moderate communalism, the African Brotherhood takes it further. This means that, while *Igwebuike* philosophy gives room for individual ownership of goods and services, the *Ujamaa* philosophy does not. Rather, it promotes communal ownership of goods and services.

The *Igwebuike* philosophy places communalism at the centre of African ethics, which implies that its cultural orientation is characterized by love, brotherliness and concern for the other person. While, on the other hand, the term African Brotherhood implies an association of men and women with common vision, aims and interests. Nevertheless, both philosophies require the unity of heads, hearts and hands for the common good.

For *Igwebuike*, to have a meaningful existence is to exist within the community. This implies that, it is the community that gives the individual person his or her existence. While that of African Brotherhood is more of common participation, in order to achieve a common goal for the wellbeing of the community. Hence, one can opine that existence for *Igwebuike* philosophy is a deeper and indispensable reality than that of African Brotherhood (Ejem, 2018).

In *Igwebuike*, co- relating with each other is an essential part of survival because it aids mutual understanding and co-existence. This gives the idea that whatever

happens to an individual person affects the community. While in African Brotherhood mutual relationship is seen as a fundamental bond that keeps brothers at peace. This holds that communal living, for example, farming together, production, hunting, security is for the interest of one another. Hence, mutual communion for the *Igwebuike* philosophy is a necessity, while same may not be said of the *Ujamaa* philosophy.

Collective effort is viewed differently by both ideologies. For *Ujamaa*, collective effort is only employed when the group is dedicated to a common cause or interest. That is, the pooling of resources together like farming together, hunting, for the sake of both the rich and the poor in the community. However, for *Igwebuike*, collective effort is seen as a way of living for the full realization of a being (Ejem, 2018).

From the foregoing, it is evident that both *Igwebuike* and *Ujamaa* philosophies lay credence to the fact that no man is an island. Human association remains an inalienable aspect of our human nature. The human person as a being, is not independent, but rather needs the other to foster his or her own existence. That is why Aristotle succinctly puts it that “man is by nature a social animal. He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must either be a beast or a god”. Therefore, relating with each other is a way of identifying our mutual importance.

Solidarity is the bond of unity or agreement between individuals, united around a common goal/unifying principle that defines a mutual support within a group. As one of the characteristics of *Igwebuike* philosophy and African Brotherhood, it finds its root on the basic principle of African bioethics. This relationship is a fundamental aspect of African philosophy. It is the vital and active link between persons. Hence, there are recognized family roles and relationships that define the obligation, rights, and boundaries of interaction among the members of a self-recognizing group. This creates a network that gives its members a sense of belonging. Therefore, to live outside this relationship, according to Maurier is “total death, irredeemable death, which is real death. This is the cutting off of all relationships with the living on earth” (Ejem, 2018).

The concept of 'brotherhood/sisterhood' refers to an association of men or women with common interests and goals. However, it is also a moral concept that points to the relationship between human persons. It has no boundary; for once a human person, you are either a brother or a sister. This idea of universal brotherhood/sisterhood is based on the African worldview which understands human persons as having a common origin, common worldview, common language, shared culture, shared race, colour, habits, feelings, hopes, desires, values, common historical experience and a common destiny. This perception of the human person as

being related to the other, also makes one to see the other as his or her brother or sister. By brother or sister, it is meant that the other is part of me. If the other is part of me, he or she is to be treated with respect and love. To do otherwise is to diminish oneself. (Ejem, 2018) Therefore, there is need for one and all to take absolute cognizance of the dignity, uniqueness and importance of the human person in our families, communities and society at large. By so doing, we will complement each other and live the life of symbiosis rather than parasitism.

Conclusion

As the discussions on the ideologies of *Igwebuike* and the *Ujamaa* Familyhood draws to a conclusion, it is pertinent to reiterate that unity and universal brotherhood remains a *sinequanon* for optimal development in any given society. Also, human association remains the way forward in explaining our nature as human beings. Relating with and helping each other are unavoidable ways of identifying the importance of each other in our dealings. Therefore, the time has come for everyone to realize that ethnic diversity remains an important aspect of social life irrespective of tribe or creed. The time has come also for Africans to realize and harness the latent potentials of their ethnic diversity towards the development of the African continent.

Furthermore, it is incumbent on Africans both at home and abroad to come together and harness what they have, along with acculturated goods. Africa should not rest on the designation of “a third world continent” and continue in the shadows of the “civilized worlds.” Rather, the philosophies of *Igwebuike* and *Ujamaa* should be employed and promoted as a means of eradicating selfish tendencies, lukewarm attitude towards community consciousness, resulting to corruption, embezzlement of public funds, indiscipline and individualism. Only then, would the continent be able to live out its full potentials

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