

THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF AZIKIWE AS AN IDEOLOGY OF POLITICAL REGENERATION FOR NIGERIA

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Abstract

Many Africans began the search for an ideological project of self-affirmation and assertive cultural nationalism. Among these were Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Pilot of Nigerian Independence, Leopold Senghor, appraised as an apostle of negritude, Kwame Nkrumah, a radical nationalist and a proponent of Pan-Africanism, Obafemi Awolowo, a socialist oriented nationalist, Julius Nyerere, the father of Ujamaa Socialism. This piece is concerned with attending to the philosophy of Nnamdi Azikiwe, as an ideology of political regeneration for Nigeria. It looks at the structure of his political ideology, without neglecting its internal components. This culminates in an analysis of how these ideas can resolve Nigeria's problems as a nation.

INTRODUCTION

During the 19th century, the scramble for territories by European powers took a new turn as they began to make significant advances to tropical Africa. By 1913, European powers had divided the African continent into a patchwork that showed little or no regard for ethnic and linguistic boundaries. This opened the African version of colonialismⁱ. The human and natural resources of Africa were exploited, independent African communities lost their political liberty, Africa suffered a crisis of 'self-confidence', creating a lasting sense of inferiority and subjugation that builds a barrier to growth and innovationⁱⁱ. In the face of these

exploitative and ideological devaluation of the black race, emerged an interesting package to the development of African political ideology. Many Africans began the search for an ideological project of self-affirmation and assertive cultural nationalismⁱⁱⁱ. Among these were Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Pilot of Nigerian Independence^{iv}, Leopold Senghor, appraised as an apostle of negritude^v, Kwame Nkrumah, a radical nationalist and a proponent of Pan-Africanism^{vi}, Obafemi Awolowo, a socialist oriented nationalist^{vii}, Julius Nyerere, the father of Ujamaa Socialism^{viii}. This notwithstanding, this work is streamlined to attending to the philosophy of Nnamdi Azikiwe, as an ideology of political regeneration for Africa.

THE MAN NNAMDI AZIKIWE

Nnamdi Azikiwe, popularly known as Zik, was born on November 16, 1904 in Zungeru, Niger State into the family of Obededom Chukwuemeka Azikiwe and Racheal Chinwe Azikiwe. His father was a clerk, and his mother was a trader. Residing all over Nigeria enabled him know how to speak the three main Nigerian languages: Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. He left for the United States in the late 20s. While in the US, he attended Storer College in West Virginia for two years (1925-1927). He later left for Howard University, DC, where he was for two years (1927-1929). In 1929, he entered Lincoln University. In 1930, he received his BA degree in Political Science. In the summer of 1930, he was admitted to Columbia University to read journalism. He obtained an MA degree in Religion and Philosophy at Lincoln University (1932)^{ix}. While still at Lincoln University, he was employed as a Graduate Assistant. In 1933, he concluded two Master's degree programs in Anthropology and

Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania, where he was appointed a full-time lecturer in Political Science in 1933. While still pursuing his Master's at Columbia University, he registered for his PH.D. After accomplishing his academic dreams, he knew it was time to return to Africa and join in the fight to free the black race from the whites, who were then colonial masters^x.

He returned to Nigeria in the mid-30s and got involved in politics forming the NCNC party. He was actively involved in Nigeria's fight for independence. His dream was finally realized on October 1, 1960 when Nigeria became an independent nation and he was sworn in as her first indigenous Governor-General and Commander-in Chief of the Federation. In 1963, Nigeria became a republic, and he was then made the First President. He was forced out of office in 1966 by a deadly coup. He returned to politics in 1978, by founding the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP). In 1979 and 1983 his bids for the presidency were unsuccessful. He retired from active politics until May 11, 1996 when he passed away at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital. He was buried on November 16, 1996, at his country home in Onitsha^{xi}.

THE RISE OF ZIKISM

Zikism is a political philosophy or ideology designed by Nnamdi Azikiwe, aimed at the decolonization of the minds of young Africans, in preparation for a battle against the old Africa, brainwashed by their colonial masters. At a time when the chiefs supported British hegemony and were used to fight the liberal intelligentsia of Africa, Zik developed his philosophy as a reformist ideology. He stressed that Africa could only be emancipated by those who believed in the concept of a renescent Africa. The realization of a new Africa must not be through bloodshed or

disorder. The spirit of cooperation, respect and honour for the old Africa must abound. Zikism began when Zik returned to Nigeria in the mid-30s and formed the NCNC. There was a huge mobilization of people, which created a ground for national consciousness. For this consciousness to be sustained, the development of an ideology was inevitable. This ideology took into consideration the basic views of its believers. These believers were called ‘agitators’ by Zik. Since it was an ideology that spoke to their situation, the believers spread the ideology and organized people around it, thus transforming the ideology into a motivating instrument of action^{xii}.

THE FIVE CANONS OF ZIKISM

In his political theory, Nnamdi Azikiwe, in 1943, enumerated five principles that are vital to the political emancipation of Africa, and they could also be referred to as the five canons of Zikism. His aim was to provide a foundational structure on which a free national political system was to be built^{xiii}.

1. **Spiritual Balance:** while talking about spiritual balance, Zik called for respect for the opinion of others. This would involve allowing others the right to state their opinion without denying one’s right to state his or her opinion, what can be referred to as the cultivation of the spirit of tolerant scepticism for the views of one’s antagonists^{xiv}.
2. **Social Regeneration:** Zik calls for the Jettisoning of all forms of prejudice, be they racial, national, tribal, societal, political, ethical etc. This takes us back to Francis Bacon’s Idols, which are themselves prejudices. But while these prejudices in Francis Bacon impede the acquisition of knowledge^{xv}, in Zikism, they

impede the realization of political regeneration. Nnamdi Azikiwe makes this call because an African, no matter where he or she is born, is an African. To postpone the breaking down of all forms of barriers of tribal prejudice, be they inter-tribal or intra-tribal, is to postpone the social unity of Africa^{xvi}.

3. **Economic determinism:** Zik sees economic self-sufficiency as the ultimate means to the redemption of Africa. No matter how educated Africans may be, as long as they lack economic self-sufficiency, they will fail to realise a stable society. Education for the African is useless, unless it is adapted to the African environment. This was the idea of Zik, when he called for “a state of society where the mind is brought into harmony with matter... a psychological conception deeply rooted in a material environment”^{xvii}; He further argues that “The usefulness of any concept, idea or theory, lies in its implications for the practical solutions to the problems of society. In this sense, pragmatism requires that man’s efforts and intelligence should be geared towards the liberation of man and the satisfaction of his needs in society”^{xviii}; and so our education should be aimed at providing means of livelihood for Africans, to fail in this regard, Zik argues, is to dent the African social fabric^{xix}.
4. **Mental Emancipation:** the slave trade and colonization of Africa created a situation of the ‘crisis of self-confidence’ in the African, which has opened apertures for a lasting barrier to growth and innovation. Zik argues that there is no specific proof to sustain the idea of superiority or inferiority of any race, and

for the African to cultivate an inferiority complex is to sign the death warrant of Africa's future. He calls for emancipation from the crisis of inferiority and assures the African that he had a glorious past and can design a more glorious future. Zik wants the African to follow Socrates' principle: *Gnothi seauton*, (*Man know yourself*), and like a sleeping giant wake up from his slumber and harness his power for his own good and that of mankind^{xx}.

5. **Political Resurgence:** If the African cultivates a spiritual balance, experiences social regeneration, cultivates and realizes economic self-sufficiency and mental emancipation, he or she certainly finds himself or herself in a state of political *Risorgimento* (renewal or rebirth). Zik says,

Politics is a means to an end which is more glorious than the means through which this end must be attained. Socially, the end is guarantee of social security, and a right to enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, just as do other peoples^{xxi}.

Once this is attained, a people can boast of a stable and reliable political system.

THE PROBLEM OF TRIBE

In Zik's study of the Nigerian nation, he describes the Nigerian nation as having evolved from tribe to nation, tribe, in the sense of an endogamous group descended from the same ancestor, occupying a particular territory and possessing cultural, religious and linguistic homogeneity. In Nigeria, he observes that there are about 400 of such tribes who have united and formed a political union in the form of a federation^{xxii}. From this, Zik envisages a threat to national unity. He raises the all important question:

will the new autonomous state endure? Tribalism, he observes, is a reality, but proposes that even in the midst of tribalism, national unity can be a reality. How the reality of tribalism can be adapted to the unreality of national unity to make national unity a reality is one of the basic concerns of Zik. He enumerates the solution, which he refers to as keys^{xxiii}:

1. To discover the circumstances which can be superimposed on the natural chains of language and culture, which has linked the human beings who inhabit Nigeria to enable them develop a feeling of personal security and group preservation^{xxiv}.
2. He proposes a federal system of government which will concede coexistence to all linguistic groups, on the basis of equality, within a framework of political and constitutional warrantees. Such a federal system of government would protect individual freedom under the rule of law and thus preserve and sustain any linguistic group. By preserving the linguistic groups of Nigeria and conceding to them local autonomy of some satisfactory nature, an atmosphere for respect of their culture and traditions is created^{xxv}.
3. If loyalty to the nation must not be replaced by loyalty to the tribe, Zik calls for the revision of the Nigeria's Republican Constitution: first in relation to safeguarding people's fundamental human rights; secondly, providing citizens with adequate food, comfortable shelter and a minimum level of subsistence. In this case, rulers must discover the material needs of their people. Once there is a failure in this by rulers, Nigerians

will harbour grievances about political, economic and social inequalities. This will increase loyalty to tribe and disloyalty to the nation^{xxvi}.

4. An effective way to increase national unity is to concede to each region *de jure* equality and *de facto* inequality. By *de jure* equality, Zik speaks in the sense that every province and local authority in each region in the Federal Republic of Nigeria is legally equal with the federal government providing for each of them. By *de facto* Inequality, Zik means the acceptance of the fact that not all regions, provinces and local authorities are equal either in area, population, natural resources and financial means^{xxvii}.
5. Again, Zik argues that political parties will have to cut across the artificial barriers of tribes and regions. National loyalty must supersede regional claims^{xxviii}.

ZIKISM, AS AN IDEOLOGY OF POLITICAL REGENERATION FOR NIGERIA

The geographical area that is today known as Nigeria was, before the colonial invasion, inhabited by people of varied and often conflicting traditional ideologies, cultural dispositions, and socio-political and religious orientations. In their respective domain, they cherished what they shared together as a people. But with the advent of colonial powers and missionaries, the policy of divide and rule along religious, cultural and political lines was introduced. Nigeria was divided into north and south^{xxix}. This division of North and South keeps reminding Nigerians that they are different. And today, nothing in Nigerian history captures her problem of national integration more graphically than the chequered

fortune of the word *tribe* in her vocabulary. As Chinua Achebe would say, ‘tribe has been one time accepted as a friend, rejected as an enemy at another, and finally smuggled through the backdoor as an accomplice’^{xxx}. If Nigeria as a nation would move ahead, aligning with the ideology of Nnamdi Azikiwe is inevitable. Nigerians must discover the circumstances which can be superimposed on the natural chains of language and culture, the fundamental human rights of the Nigerian people must be protected. The true federal system of government need to be introduced and political parties must cut across tribes.

Azikiwe began his political philosophy with a critical examination of the credibility and workability of capitalism^{xxxi}, socialism^{xxxii} and welfarism^{xxxiii}. From his critical analysis, he envisions the possibility of making good out of the best of these three political systems to forge a new system for Nigeria. He calls it Neo-welfarism. This is defined by Azikiwe as ‘an economic system which blends the essential elements of capitalism, socialism and welfarism in a social economic matrix, influenced by indigenous Nigerian mores, to enable the state and the private sector to own and control the means of production, distribution and exchange, while simultaneously enabling the state to assume responsibility for the social services, in order to benefit the citizens according to their needs and officially-specified minimum standards, without prejudice to participation in any aspect of the social services by voluntary agencies’^{xxxiv}.

He saw it as an ideology re-oriented and truly Nigerian, manifesting the Nigerian qualities: democratic according to her institutions, welfarist in her economic background, altruistic in her sociological life and

religiously animistic. This system of government is eclectic and pragmatic in the sense that it makes a beautiful synthesis of rationalism and empiricism, incorporating into itself the utilitarian and practical elements of capitalism, socialism and welfarism^{xxxv}. At this juncture, it is good to state the primary objectives of Neo-welfarism:

1. to reform and renew the instruments of power according to the Nigerian political experience;
2. to insist on the rule of law;
3. to bring about a total restoration and reinforcement of the fundamental rights of all citizens according to the constitution;
4. to bring into reality, the universally accepted principles of the separation of power between the Executive, Legislative, and the judiciary;
5. to bring about the renewal of confidence in the integrity of government;
6. to bring about a sincere and reliable organisation and administration of public utilities, welfare services, education, agriculture, recreational facilities and entertainment;
7. to introduce an open door policy in importation and exportation of products, and
8. to introduce and sustain a taxation policy that would be in accord with a reasonable scale^{xxxvi}.

CONCLUSION

This is not to say that the political philosophy of Azikiwe is without its problems. Just like every other political philosophy it has its weaknesses. However, having studied other political systems, putting the Nigerian situation into context, the author joins his voice with that of many other African political philosophers in proposing that Azikiwe's political

ideology, which fecundates the positive and workable principles of capitalism, socialism and welfarism with the root principles native to Nigeria, is the one political system that can restore the basis for a genuine Nigerian socio-political life.

References

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- ^{xxx} Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (Taiwan: AI-united, 1985), p.5
- ^{xxxi} Capitalism is a socio-economic system essentially based on private ownership of capital goods or means of production. It is profit oriented and profit motivated. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Ideology for Nigeria: Capitalism, Socialism or Welfarism* (Lagos: Macmillan, 1981), p.20.
- ^{xxxii} Socialism is characterized by public ownership of means of production, distribution and exchange. It aims at organizing the state as a fraternal, co-operative commonwealth, with fair and equal distribution of wealth. It rejects class-division and laissez-faire philosophy. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Ideology for Nigeria: Capitalism, Socialism or Welfarism*, p.6.
- ^{xxxiii} Welfarism is a social system where the state assumes the primary responsibility for the individual and social welfare of its citizens. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Ideology for Nigeria: Capitalism, Socialism or Welfarism*, p.x.
- ^{xxxiv} Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Ideology for Nigeria: Capitalism, Socialism or Welfarism*, p.x.
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