

## Sanitizing the African Socio-Political Sphere for Good Governance

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### Abstract

*This paper posits that the African socio-political sphere is a vast circle in need of sanitization. It acknowledges that the African socio-political system needs a change of political theory. In this vein, the paper identifies and condemns the present ongoing corruption, bribery and embezzlement of public funds typical of the current socio-political space. These and other institutional flaws obviously lead to bad governance and of course lack of service delivery. As a solution, the work starts with the notion of political theory which is nothing but the attempt of man to understand the circumstances surrounding his group and societal problems and eventually proffers adequate solutions to them. Consequently, the work proffers that Africans should readopt African socialism which is founded on the spirit of familyhood, brotherhood and communality. These are the fundamental features of the political philosophy which was bequeathed to Africa by the likes of Nyerere and Senghor. It minimizes corruption, greed and also promotes unity, moderation and social obligation.*

### Introduction

The problem of governance is a universal phenomenon and it is always evident in all human relationship. The nature of man as a being in relationship and dependence on others for his happiness and fulfillment has made it imperative that man survives best in an organized society where his rights are protected and he concurrently performs his duties and obligations to the society in question. This work as a result delves into the need to sanitize the African socio-political space, in order to usher in good governance. The work is divided into two major parts. Part one is an insight into the notion of political theory since we are dealing with political institution here and the public sphere. Since political theory deals with the problem of the group and society and how to overcome them, the paper in this vein throws light on what political theory is all about. Political theory cannot be studied independent of political institution and the society; on that note, the work in continuation of part one treats the concept of political institution and its relationship with political theory. It is seen that there is a logical nexus between political theory and the political institutions. Political institution as we shall see is a man-made social structure for which man is responsible for its success or failure.

The second part of the work takes a keen look at the subject matter proper. It positions the family which is the nucleus of the society, as also the primary unit of sanitization of the socio-political space for good governance in Africa. Education starts from home and the type of formation anyone has actually affects his mindset and belief-system. African families therefore are encouraged to impart their children and all members with those traditional African values like sense of brotherhood, responsibility and mutual share of love and commonwealth as the hallmark of their public life. Since one can only give what he has, the paper believes that if Africans hold these values dearly starting from their families, they would also transcend their actions in the public sphere. Furthermore, the work proffers the need to re-embrace the African socialist philosophy which encourages communality, familyhood, brotherhood and fair acquisition/distribution of commonwealth. The work ends with a conclusion which is a recap of the salient issues raised.

### Political Theory

It is a known fact that man has a gregarious nature. Every individual is not only born in a society, but is above all a society dependent being. Many thinkers, ranging from the ancient Greek philosophers to the contemporary thinkers have developed different political theories which are primarily aimed at how to solve the myriad of human problems in various groups and organizations within the bigger society. "Thus, political theory is an intellectual tradition and its history consists of the evolution of men's thoughts about political problems over time" (Sabine & Thorson, 1973: 3). There is no doubt that the society has its inherent peculiarities and challenges. There is no human relationship without difficulties. This is because no two individuals are actually the same. While we do not challenge the ontological sameness of all rational beings, we on the other hand acknowledge the sociological differences between one individual and another.

The point here is that there is the need to understand that political theory, as a disciplined and conscious political inquiry is a product of social evolution and in which much credit is given to the Greeks. From the Greeks emerged the Western philosophical intellectual tradition. Political theory as an intellectual exercise deals mainly with a collection of writings, though not separable from the socio-political practices and life to which such writings belong. Hence, political theory is part of culture as a result it deals with human relationship and organization in the society. Political theory goes as far as demonstrating the meaning of political practices or what political practices ought to be and not merely what they are.

The Greeks were pacesetters of political theory. “Was it a climate that simplifies small repetitive preoccupations such as those which fret us over underwear and draughts? Or were the people not too many? Or did slavery solve the domestic problem, both upstairs and down? Whatever it was, the Ionian curiosity gave a twist forever to the rudder of time. It was the attribute of happiness and virtue” (Ibid: 4). The Greeks were actually interested in the causes of things and that is why they were also interested in political theory, knowing very well that: “the Oracles constantly remind one that the art of government is in the management of people’s *feelings*” (Ibid: 169). Thus, political theory is both manmade and equally interwoven with political nature of man as a social animal.

### **The Interface of Political Theory with Political Institution**

Human life is always built on a particular social foundation which is naturally culture-oriented. Without a society, there will be no culture and without culture there will be no institution and not to talk of political theory. “Both political institutions and political theories are part of culture; they are extensions of man the physical entity. Groups of humans create institutions and practices whether political philosophers are there to philosophize or not” (Sabine & Thorson, 1973:4). It is the need to establish a good sense of common good that led to the formation of political institutions which in turn regulate people and the events in the society in the interest of all. The point here is that political theory is interwoven with political nature, considering the fact that political exercise is a manmade undertaking.

Man is at the center of political theory, just as he is the subject matter of political institution. Political institution simply put is the arrangement of power and authority in the body politic. The manner and ways the question of power and authority are exercised in the society is very important because: “Certain institutions in the society are regarded as legitimate exercisers of the authority to make decisions for the community as a whole” (Ibid: 5). From his point of view, Chinoy (1967) describes power as the capacity to generally control the actions and inactions of others and sometimes its correlative phenomenon. Authority on the other hand is both a legitimate power and equally a generally recognized right to command. Since authority is a recognized right to command, it is attached with a lot of roles and statuses. For example: “Those who hold public office are the most obvious examples of persons possessing both power and authority, for, in passing or enforcing laws and in adjudicating among individuals or between individuals and the state, they decide what others can or must or cannot do” (Ibid: 175). Another typical example is that of a corporate organization where you have a chain of command and administrative hierarchy; a situation whereby superiors can easily enforce their orders to their subordinates. In a similar vein, Mills (1951) remarks that institutions as components of social organization go with prestige and status, which in effect involves at least two actors in which one claims an honour, while the other is to honour the claim.

In the exercise of power within the perimeter of political institutions, the State is the possessor of legal monopoly of force in the modern societies. Consequently, all other forms of power are invariably subject to political cum institutional control. As far as socio-political theory and social institutions are concerned, there are patterns of cultural goals and institutional norms. According to Merton (1968), the various components of social and cultural structures constitute of two major importance, which though merge in concrete situations, are notwithstanding analytically separable. The first component comprises culturally defined goals and aims, coupled with rightful objectives for the good of all, or on the other hand, for the different members of the society. The cultural goals as regulated by institutional norms are generally integrated and usually arranged in a given hierarchy of value. These goals consist of *aspirational* references which are somehow related to the biological drives of man.

Institutionalism is basically therefore the anchorage of the relationship of political power in every given political society. With the legitimacy of political institutions, the various political undercurrents establish the acceptance of those who possess authority by those who do not possess it. Cultural structure in this vein takes a key role in defining values in line with the institutional norms. Thus: “A second element of the cultural structure defines, regulates and controls the acceptable modes of reaching out for these goals. Every social group invariably couples its cultural

objectives with regulations, rooted in the mores or institutions, of allowable procedures for moving toward these objectives” (Ibid: 187). During the ancient Greece, the Assembly or *Ecclesia* which was a composition of the body of over twenty year old male citizens in Athens, was a major political institution through which public decisions were taken. The important characteristic of the Athenian public institution is not necessarily the assembly of the whole citizens. The most important key is the political character which is organized in such a manner that the magistrates and public officials in general were answerable and accountable to the body of citizens.

Unlike even the modern political institution, with the much said about it in line with common interest, the Greeks on the other hand actually communed with the city. Based on the city they developed philosophy, sociology, ethics and art. When Aristotle says that man is social in nature, he derived the source of this affirmation from the nature of the city. They must have understood that: “If a society is to exist at all, it must find some means for distributing its scarce goods and values in such a way that the great majority accept the outcome or protest against it only by means approved by the social system itself. And it must find a way to control the expression of hostility generated by frustration, pain, and guilt” (Yinger, 1969: 63). Political institution in this regard takes cognizance of the fact that social life and actions are based on the fact that the society is made up of different individuals. This affirmation is certain since a society is basically a complex but integrated system rather than a mere collection of unrelated parts or units.

Without political institutions, society could not have been normatively governed since everyone must have remained on his own. It is self evident that human life is culturally patterned and without institution culture itself could not have been regulated. Mating for instance is necessary for human procreation, but since man is more than a mere animal, he needs the institution of family to carry him beyond biological survival, to societal protection. Without political institution which provides for rules, regulations, protection of human/civic rights, welfare and laws, everyone could have been living in fear and isolation. The absence of political institution will naturally lead to continuous strain and friction among individuals which cannot be managed by anyone. It is quite difficult to study any society as an interaction of human beings or group without reference to their culture or political institutions.

Man struggles with the distribution of scarce values in the society. Man lives in a society where by his interest is in constant clash with that of others and even when it does not clash, he is not sure of safeguarding and protecting it. Political institution is then necessary in the society in order to ensure an equitable and dispassionate maintenance of law and order, coupled with an even allocation of values. In fact, if not for political institution: “How can a society prevent individual and sub-group pursuit of these values from disrupting the network of agreements and accommodations that social life requires? And how do social groups prevent the hostility that is generated by frustration, by a sense of injustice, by guilt, from constantly tearing the fabric of society?” (Ibid: 62). To guarantee a social order, the society must ensure the establishment of political institutions, in tandem with the underlying political ideals of the society in question.

Political institutions help to install social equilibrium. It is also a fact that the changes which occur in a society, nevertheless often emanate from the workings and internal dynamics of its institutions. “By equilibrium is meant a state of affairs in which institutions, values, and social structures are functionally interrelated to form a more or less integrated whole. Religious institutions sustain the existing forms of political authority and family relationships; educational institutions inculcate accepted moral standards and train individuals to undertake the adult roles they are to perform” (Chinoy, 1967: 107-108). No individual can create a social equilibrium on his own. The society is required to create a social equilibrium but this is very difficult without the involvement of political institutions. However: “Since no society is absolutely static or ever fully integrated, this equilibrium should be conceived of as dynamic or moving and always as partial. As changes occur and their repercussions are felt, adjustments are made that tend to restore equilibrium of the system” (Ibid: 108). In any case, the fact that there is equilibrium or even integration does not negate the fact that individuals are permanently in harmony with one another. The point is that political institutions are created to create stability and deter the individuals from anti-social behaviours.

### **Family and Good Governance**

Family is the nucleus of the society and human society emanated from the relationship between male and female. Human life is quite different from animal life, just as human relationship is equally different from that of animals. While man has the right to procreate like any other living being, the family on the other hand is the basis of his coming to be. In all known human society of today, family is an important point of reference for all, hence a means of tracing one’s legitimacy of belongingness to a particular group or society. In fact: “The family, it is frequently said, is the

basic social unit. The immediacy of our involvement in family life, the intensity of the emotions which it generates, the sexual and other satisfactions that it provides, the demand it makes upon our loyalties and efforts, and its functions with respect to childbearing and child care seem to offer ample evidence of its priority as the fundamental social group” (Chinoy, 1967: 136). The essence of the family to human formation is very essential to both the family and society in general. The point is that the nature of family background which an individual has, absolutely affects his social life. In the same vein, the values which a family inculcates into its members basically affect their relationship with others in the larger society.

The family is therefore a fundamental social unit which needs to be sanitized in order to achieve good governance in Africa. Social relationship is interwoven. The problem of bad leadership in Africa cannot be solved if families refrain from promoting and inculcating pro-societal values into their members, right from homes. Since every member of the family is from one home or the other it is then imperative that families should look inwards for the re-orientation of values within their members. Africans regard their extended family members as part of the nuclear family, just as an average African sees and calls a fellow African as brother or sister. It is therefore necessary that this level of love and intimacy should actually extend in practice to the real social life and relationship with the African society at large. An authentic sense of brotherhood and sisterhood should also be reflected in the public sphere since a good brother would not like to cheat his fellow brother, just as a good sister would not like to embezzle the public fund which she shares in common with other brothers and sisters.

It is a known fact that even the education of the child starts from home which is the family. The African family ought to propagate a good sense of solidarity for the entire continent, starting from the family since: “All the relations up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generational latitude regard themselves as brothers and sisters and in that latitude, they can deeply share their joys and problems. The extended family system is still very much alive in contemporary Africa. It is a conflict-and-crises-resolution ocean... Mutual help at the material level is another of its positive asset” (Ibid: 85). Furthermore: “The African practice of solidarity is witnessed on both the economic, social and religious spheres. The traditional Nigerian was his brother’s keeper especially at the communal level. In fact he was, and still is often solitary to a fault... A brother’s success was equally a common success, celebrated as such” (Ibid: 86). In the same vein, even a sister or brother’s misfortune is also a common mishap which is also shared by all. Why should not this level of solidarity radiate the entire continent? This is absolutely expected because if everyone in one way or the other is considered as a brother, then the African public sphere would be ennobled with the aura of oneness, which ought to have triggered the spirit of good governance in the interest of all.

#### **African Socialism: Familyhood, Brotherhood & Communalism**

Going back to the African traditional values, familyhood and brotherhood have always been cherished as part of the people’s ideal. Today, Africa needs to reawaken the true spirit of familyhood and brother to permeate the public space which is regrettably polluted temporarily with corruption, selfishness and massive misappropriation of public fund with impunity. These anti-social vices in the public sector are surely contrary to the spirit of familyhood and brotherhood which are the hallmark of African worldview. This is actually the fundamental of African socialism which Julius Nyerere of Tanzania terms *Ujamaa*, a social philosophy based on “community spirit”, otherwise called “familyhood” (Nyerere: 1971: 12). The nucleus of this brand of socialism is to encourage the spirit of mutuality and brotherhood which is already embedded in the African traditional values. This is a peculiar socialism which is geared towards love and neighborliness as it is evidenced in extended family.

Actually early African post independent philosophers mainly embraced socialism, but it needs to be remarked that the socialism they proffered had its African traditional value coloration. In this regard: “Unlike today in which stifling selfishness and monopoly reign, African socialism was distributive in nature, no one owned everything, while his brother owned nothing. As an economic approach to life, it distributed ownership and control of growing capital properly as widely as possible in society. Everyone was one’s brother’s keeper” (Nwigwe, “In Quest of an Authentic Theory of Development for Africa” in *UCHE: Journal of the Department of Philosophy University of Nigeria Nsukka*, Volume 11, 2005: 47). It is quite obvious that the distributive spirit of African socialism is generally lacking in the present African political institutions and public sphere in general.

The African socio-political sphere needs to be sanitized and in so doing, the sense of communalism which characterized the African socialism is imperative. In fact: “in defining their ideological stance, most governments opted for the umbrella of African socialism, believing that it held the potential for fast growth after years of

exploitation by Western Capitalists” (Meredith, 2011: 144). It is the peculiarity of African socialism, its spirit of pro family, brotherly and communal wellbeing that makes it desirable. That is why: “African societies, it was commonly claimed, traditionally included many indigenous aspects of socialism: the communal ownership of land; the egalitarian character of village life; collective decision-making; extensive network of social obligation; all were cited as examples” (Ibid: 145). Unfortunately, since Africans abandoned these vital ingredients of social cohesion, governance has been bastardized by self-serving kleptomaniacs who are obsessed with the quest for the embezzlement of public fund.

Generally, the political institutions in Africa of today seem to be pro-political class with different cliques who highjack political and economic powers, at the expense of the common man. In some quarters, commonwealth and political power rest in the hand of a few who constitute an indigenous clandestine neo-colonialist superstructure called godfathers. They often manipulate the political pace and usually impose their cronies on the people. This class of people is so desperate and influential that with the monumental economic and material resources at their disposal, they assume the status of quasi deities and consequently dictate the calls and becks of the political arena. In the present African bastardized political institution: “There are so many influential people, like the various divinities, that can facilitate or delay matters for the individual in the socio-political set-up. In traditional society, certain animals and their parts belonged to certain deities, so also certain parts of federal allocation of states [today] belonged to certain godfathers or influential individuals who must be appeased or nothing worked for the state” (Njoku, 2009: 48). This general malaise runs counter to the underlying philosophy of African socialism, thereby plunging governance on the continent to a downward spiral, compared with other continents of the world.

The beauty of African socialism is that it puts all aspects of human life into consideration. It incorporates education, family, religion, community and morality. In fact: “Kenneth Kaunda maintains that our generation has the obligation to preserve the traditional African communitarian spirit and assimilate into it some vital heritage of modern civilization for the good of present day and future Africa” (Nwigwe, in *UCHE*: 2005: 46). From this point of view it is clear that individualism is not an acceptable way of life, since it is against the communalistic provision of both African traditional values and African socialism itself. Thus: “Communitarian life was not as a result of any form of premediated contract or choice, but by the biological bond of kinship and eminent spirit of the tribe. ...Everyone was taken care of, including the sick, the disabled, etc; all in a massive system of social security” (Ibid: 47). It is therefore important that the present Africa should reconsider the centrality of African socialism as it is reflective of familyhood, brotherhood and communality. By so doing, the African political sphere could be re-sanitized, as a gateway to good governance.

Similar to Nyerere’s *Ujamaa*, Leopold Senghor also developed his brand of African socialism called “negritude”. In fact: “What Senghor and his companions in Paris eventually formulated was a philosophy they termed ‘*negritude*’, a black consciousness which asserted the unique contributions, values and characteristics of black people and black civilization. *Negritude* served as an intellectual precursor to nationalism. But while Senghor stressed the importance of cultural liberation, he nevertheless remained committed to French empire” (Meredith, 2011: 59). Thus: “The great concern of these thinkers is to fashion an African society in which some of its traditional values are blended with life in modern societies” (Makinde, 2007: 186). African socialism is not opposed to Western civilization rather it embraces those core values which form the being of Africans as a people.

It needs to be mentioned that another foremost African nationalist thinkers like Nkrumah also subscribed to socialism based on dialectic materialism, as a key to pragmatic socialist output, unity and freedom. While this paper is not intended to make an extensive discourse on these various thinkers, the point remains that they all had a common denominator which is the development of socialism that puts into consideration the basic African traditional values like family and the ideal of communality. With these values, the spirit of greed and corruption could be abated. “Because of the communal life of African people, individualism is a remote concept. Individuals in a traditional African society are rich or poor according to whether the whole society is rich or poor. This means that both the rich and the poor are secure, and the poor cannot starve since he could depend on the wealth of the community of which he is a member” (Makinde, 2007: 186).

The point here is that socialism from this perspective is quite distributive. Being an integral part of African traditional thought pattern, it is seen as “an attitude of the mind” (Nyerere, 1971: 1). In short, it is a cherished value which ought to permeate the African socio-political psyche for good governance. Unfortunately today, what is observed in some

African political institutions and public sphere in general is a situation whereby the continent is being: “haunted by a culture of materialism” (Njoku, 2009: 56) which inflicts poverty on majority, thereby perpetuating injustice and social disparity.

For how long will Africa continue to crawl when other continents are practically on the path of progress? “Where are the leaders with the character to step forward and do something? Are there really no heroes?” (Colson, 1989: 90). For the achievement of good governance and public morality, there is also need for personal character. “Character flaws are not unforgivable, of course; we all have them. But the increasing loss of discipline and values among those who will lead us is a dangerous consequence of the rise of relativism and radical individualism....Other political consequences are more subtle, more destructive and more ominous” (Ibid: 93). Governance goes with leadership, character, integrity and vision. In the Igbo traditional setting for instance, leadership in the traditional sense of the word is entrusted in a figure referred to as *nnukwu madu*, one who above all ought to be upright and open-minded. “An *Nnukwu-Madu* must know how to share the life of the society while remaining at the same time, in some way, aloof, influential, having the ability of leadership. Traditional Igbo society encouraged justice and fair play in society. Leadership was a purely functional position and an *Nnukwu-Madu* was not to be a tyrant nor to lord it over others” (Aligwekwe, 1991: 203). This peculiarity of leadership lacks in most leadership circles of today’s Africa, thereby subjecting the socio-political sphere to jeopardy.

### **Conclusion**

The problem of governance and effective management of socio-political institution is still a major problem in Africa as the paper posits. However, the paper identified some of the problems which militate against the socio-political institutions in Africa among which are bad leadership and corruption. The paper is of the standpoint that African socialism which some of the leading African nationalist thinkers bequeathed to the post colonial Africa ought to have provided a sustainable remedy if subsequent African leaders had maintained this line of thought. Socialism in the African context as the paper unravels is enrooted in familyhood, brotherhood and a deep sense of communality and social responsibility.

The paper is not actually interested in the concept of socialism in general as we have seen, or in various socialist brands of different African thinkers. The centrality of African socialism here is best captured in Julius Nyerere’s socialist concept of *Ujamaa* which is an enclosure of familyhood as it is reflected in the extended family and social obligation by extension. Africa therefore started getting it wrong in both political institutions and social sphere from the time it digressed from this idea of African socialist mentality. The African political class lost bearing by the time they lost touch with this fundamental worldview of the African traditional value and resorted consequently to the accumulation of wealth, misappropriation of public fund, with its attendant malady of individualism. The earlier the continent re-embraces the spirit of brotherhood, communality, even distribution of public good and social responsibility, thereby using them as tools for the sanitization of the public sphere for good governance, the better.

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