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## *Chapter 3*

### **A Critical Evaluation of *Ujamaa* in Julius Nyerere's Political Philosophy**

**ANTHONY OKEREGBE**

#### **Abstract**

In his works *Essays on Socialism* and *Man and Development*, Julius Nyerere develops an African socio-political philosophy with which he sought to address the African predicament occasioned by colonialism and its effects. He dubs this philosophy *Ujamaa*, a term which has been variously translated as 'brotherhood', 'familyhood'. By Nyerere's submission, the kernel of *Ujamaa* is an attitude of mind which inclines people towards a deeply felt obligation to care for their fellowmen. Nyerere thinks this philosophy is originally African, hence the appellation African Socialism. This paper intends a critical examination of *Ujamaa* by analyzing the salient positions of this socio-political philosophy. Amidst the cultural dictates of the global world order, it examines the views explicated by Nyerere to see whether they can retain their philosophical texture under the purifying fire of rational scrutiny.

## Introduction

Many years after Independence from colonial interlopers, most African countries were (and are) still unable to stand on their feet. They have been faced with problems of unstable political leadership, and the socio-economic relics of colonialism. Julius Nyerere, as a political thinker, was confronted with this vacuous philosophical situation, and in response posited that the problem confronting the post-independence Africa was the inability of the African to see that which is his authentic cultural values amidst the consequences of the colonial impact in African history. According to him, in an ideal society, there are three principles upon which society is built, namely, equality, freedom and unity. He claims that these principles are not new or strange to the African because they have always been exhibited in pre-colonial traditional Africa. The task now is for these principles to be deployed in the organisation of modern African nation-states, which are the products of colonization.

To do this, Julius Nyerere proposes the philosophy of *Ujamaa*, which is his own version of socialism. He terms it a suitable ideology for independent African states. This paper intends a critical examination of *Ujamaa* by analyzing the salient positions of this socio-political philosophy. Amidst the cultural dictates of the global world order, we shall examine the views explicated by Nyerere to see whether these principles can retain their philosophical texture under the purifying fire of rational scrutiny.

## The Concept of *Ujamaa*

The basic features of Nyerere's *Ujamaa* are found in his vision of man. Although he does not engage in any consistent overt treatment on the theory of man, his writings are laced with certain postulations about man which can be systemically arranged to bring out his conception of man.

Fundamentally, Nyerere embraces a metaphysical conception of man as a being composed of a body and an immaterial soul. While he does not philosophical justify this position, he only believes that man is a creature of God whose composition is such that he is affected spiritually as a rational being in his moral decisions, and also as a Cartesian *res extensa* who feels the effects of his decisions. Though Nyerere is inclined to

support the superiority of spirit and ideas over matter, he still believes that it is the creation of both material and spiritual conditions that enables man to become his best. However, more importantly, he maintains that it is the collaboration of the human condition and divine action that makes human life meaningful, and it is from this collaborative enterprise that Nyerere interpretes man in history. Thus, history is man's striving for happiness within his all-embracing community, and in contact with a deeply spiritual and transcendent world.<sup>1</sup>

Nyerere also conceives man as a free being who realizes his freedom by being self-reliant. By being self-reliant, Nyerere implies man's state of being dependent on his own work, a situation which becomes effective only if realized collectively or in a society. What this implies is that man's freedom, his liberty must be realized by his dependence on his hard work and skills such that he must be able to see the result of his efforts as a prerequisite for future development. According to Nyerere, "... between money and people it is obvious that the people and their own hard work are the foundation for development."<sup>2</sup> Thus, man must be led to the consciousness of his own responsibility as a shaper of history who depends first and foremost on his strength and self dedication. To achieve this, Nyerere posits that it is necessary that men live in small communities or *Ujamaa* villages to form more efficient groups that would work in integrity for their self-realization.

In relation to society, the thrust of Nyerere's conception of man is rooted in the existential social ontology that situates the man's essence as being-in-the-world and being-with-others. For him, society is a network of individuals coming together in achieving the goals of life which are self reliance and independence. The individual, according to him, can realise himself only if he identifies himself with the society for it is by being a member of society that his rights and dignity will become meaningful. In other words, man has no essence in himself unless he realizes himself within the whole, namely the village of *Ujamaa* of which he constitutes a

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<sup>1</sup> Dismas Masolo, "Some Aspects and Perspectives of African Philosophy" in *Journal of Philosophy*, December 1980, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. *The Arusha Declaration and TANU's Policy on Socialism and Self Reliance*, (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Information Service, 1967), p. 17.

part. In the economics of *Ujamaa*, the individual is regarded as only a tool or implement for the development of the living and committed society. He is a tool-member. On this Nyerere avers: "We are spending large and disproportionate amounts of money on a few individuals so that they should in future make a disproportionate return to the society. We are investing in a man's brain in just the same way as we invest in a tractor..."<sup>3</sup>

Thus we see that the society is appraised at the cost of the individual, and by implication the purpose of the government is principally for the service of the people; hence, Nyerere states categorically that, "the people are the government".<sup>4</sup>

### **Ujamaa: What is it?**

Etymologically, the word *Ujamaa*, which is a Swahili coinage, has an unsatisfactory translation. It is said to be susceptible to numerous interpretations depending on the context and who is using the term. But for the present purpose, 'familyhood' or 'brotherhood' seems more appropriate. Nyerere himself uses *Ujamaa* in reference to African Socialism. According to him, *Ujamaa* is opposed to capitalism which "seeks to build a happy society on the basis of the exploitation of man by man, and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism."<sup>5</sup> In other words, while it is not a variant of capitalism, it is also not socialism as bandied by the Marxist-Leninist tradition. If it is neither, then what is it? According to Nyerere, *Ujamaa* may be defined as "an attitude of mind which ensures that people in a society care for each other's welfare."<sup>6</sup> The attitude of mind which is referred to here is one that inclines people towards a deeply felt sense of obligation for the welfare of their fellowmen. In other words, *Ujamaa* presupposes a duty to the welfare of one's fellow man. One is bound by this attitude of mind to incline towards responsibility for the other's well-being. Thus Nyerere gives attitude of mind a special place in

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<sup>3</sup> Julius K. Nyerere, *Man and Development* (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 5

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Julius K. Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12

the socialist society. He takes it to be more important than rigid adherence to a standard pattern because the attitude conveys the notion of conviction.

In *Ujamaa* society, therefore, socialism is a way of life; it is life lived out of conviction. In portraying the role of conviction, Nyerere points out that possession or ownership of wealth is not the deciding factor of who a socialist is. He sees attitude of mind revealing itself on one's outlook to the use of wealth. While destitutes or beggars can be potential capitalists in the sense of being exploiters of their fellow men, a millionaire can be a socialist if he values his wealth only because it can be used in the service of his fellow men. The role of 'attitude of mind' in this sense is that of being the arbiter of socialist ideals (*Ujamaa* ideals) given the possibilities of exploitation of man and service to man. It is not the acquisition of wealth, or the possession of property that constitutes socialism but the motive or intention behind such action. Yet, such motive or intention has to be verified by only one standard and that is the service to one's fellow man. Consequently, the standard for *Ujamaa* is the inclination towards service which has to be justified by the deed itself.

From this, Nyerere outlines three principles: Equality, Brotherhood and Solidarity, which are explained respectively to mean equality and respect for human dignity, sharing of the resources which are produced by men's effort in society, work by all and exploitation by none.<sup>7</sup> But these do not rule out the fact that African Socialism does not recognize the unequal capabilities in man, rather it is based on man's equal rational nature. Socialism, he says, also recognizes that every person has selfish and altruistic tendencies both of which are at war with each other. The task for *Ujamaa* is to reconcile these conflicting positions.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Dialectics of Ujamaa**

Like Nkrumah, Nyerere distinguishes three aspects of history affecting contemporary African socio-political philosophy. While Nkrumah identifies the African traditional society, the Islamic African society and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 15

<sup>8</sup> Ahmed Mohiddin, "Ujamaa na Kujitegemea" in *Socialism in Tanzania, Vol. 1*, Lionel Cliffe and John Saul (eds.) (Dar Es Salaam: East Africa Publishing House, 1972), p. 167.

the Euro-Christian culture and recommended a blend of the best in the three cross-cultural currents for Africa's post-colonial reconstruction, Nyerere highlights the traditional society, the colonial impact and the *Ujamaa* society, each emerging respectively as thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

### *The Thesis: African Traditional Society*

In his exploration of the African traditional Society, Nyerere brings out a very romantic and utopian African society. He posits that the African Society embraced a socialist attitude of mind, and this traditional socialism was founded on the institution of the extended family. The nature of the extended family is such that an African sees others outside his nuclear family as his 'siblings', and hardly discriminates against them as such. The reason behind such fraternal association can be attributed to their belief in ancestors which essentially influences their thought processes. So, while belonging to a society in which belief in the same ancestors is rife, the African relates with everyone and comes to see everyone as part of his family. This ultimately leads the African to acquire that attitude of mind which predisposes him towards socialism.

In Nyerere's version of socialism, we see therefore that there is no clear-cut distinction between collectivism and socialism. Even socialism is synonymous with the collectivism practiced in traditional African societies, wherein joint labour and the basic goods of life were identified in such communalistic rendition as 'our food', 'our land', 'our cattle'. In Nyerere's words, the organisation of the society was such that "...nobody starved, whether of food or human dignity, because he lacked personal wealth; he could depend on the wealth possessed by the community of which he was a member. This was socialism. This is socialism."<sup>9</sup>

This socialist attitude of mind has survived in the African consciousness owing to the inherent principles prevalent in African traditional society. These principles are work, joint ownership, respect, and classlessness. In Nyerere's narrative, everybody in the traditional African society was a worker who contributed his or her fair share of

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<sup>9</sup> Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays On Socialism*, op. cit. p. 8.

efforts towards the production of the wealth of the society. He further elucidates on the specialized sense of the word 'worker' meaning 'employee' as opposed to 'employer' which reflects a capitalist attitude of mind. The employer-employee relationship is fundamentally an exploitative one and was not there in traditional African society since there was absence of desire in the African to dominate others. Since the society was so structured and organized that there was no need to acquire wealth with the view of dominating others, traditional African society could not produce millionaires or billionaires. The reason being that "its distribution of the wealth it produces was such that there was hardly any room for parasitism."<sup>10</sup>

On the political plane, the traditional African society was structurally classless. In fact, Nyerere states: "I doubt if the equivalent for the word 'class' exists in any indigenous African language; for language describes the ideas of those who speak it, and the idea of class or caste was non-existent in African society."<sup>11</sup> However, there was authority to maintain the unity of the society but this was not absolute as checks and balances existed. The authority was not said to have been based on any class structure; the society was not divided into ruler and ruled. The authority was said to be based rather on the maxim of "the first among equals."<sup>12</sup>

In summarising the state of affairs of the African traditional society, supposedly characterized by brotherhood (familyhood), classlessness, joint ownership of duties, goods and responsibilities, Nyerere succinctly puts it this way: "we in Africa have no need of being converted."<sup>13</sup>

### ***The Anti-thesis: The Colonial Impact***

Like many nationalist/ideological philosophers of his time, Nyerere believes that colonization and colonialism dealt a terrible blow on the African traditional society. One of the most devastating effects of colonialism is the suppression of the African's power to act, through

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 10

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 12

<sup>12</sup> Julius K. Nyerere, "One Party Government" in *Transition* (Dar Es Salaam: Tanzania Information Service, 1961), p. 11

<sup>13</sup> Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, op. cit. p. 12

certain obnoxious policies aimed at dehumanizing and reifying the African. One of such dubious designs is the principle of assimilation, by which Africans were systematically de-Africanized through language and culture, and invited onto a phantom integration that culturally annexes the African territories as appendages of the colonialists' home country. This suppression of the African's power to act was further aggravated when the colonialists shifted the gravity of Africans' political, social and economic power to the colonial metropole.<sup>14</sup> Thus the African's action and aspirations were assessed, justified and facilitated by the colonial metropolitan power. This implies that the colonialists dictated judgement and initiative for the African. For Africanist theorists like Fanon and Cesaire, the effect of colonialism was inferiorization of the African. All this is summed up by Nyerere when he comments that:

Of all the crimes of colonialism there is none worse than the attempt to make us believe that we had no indigenous culture of our own; or that what we did have was worthless – or something of which we should be ashamed, instead of a source of pride. Some of us, particularly those of us who acquired a European type of education, set ourselves out to prove to our colonial masters that we had become "civilized", and by that we meant that we had abandoned everything connected with our great past and learnt to imitate only European ways. Our young men's ambition was not to become well educated Africans but to become black Europeans.<sup>15</sup>

For Nyerere, capitalism is also a product of colonialism. According to him, colonialism brought in capitalism and introduced individualism, thereby destroying the attitude of co-operation in the African. In the African traditional society, he claims, men thought of themselves as one and the same members of a community, but the capitalist's monetary economy, introduced to Africa by the colonial and trading powers and

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<sup>14</sup> Mohiddin, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

operating on the basis of profit motive, encouraged individualism and economic competition. By encouraging economic competition and individualism, capitalism transformed the essentially communal society into the acquisitive one exhibited. However, Nyerere adds that acquisition of wealth would not have surfaced had another attitude of mind not been introduced – the power to dominate somebody else. The most apparent evil of capitalism, he contends, is exploitation. Capitalists become exploiters of men in order to build personal power and prestige.

Another aspect of colonialism that was antithetical to African traditional culture is western education which is seen in language, ideas and aspirations as an effective cultural tool for cultural imperialism. By Nyerere's contention, western education transforms the traditionally egalitarian African child to a class-conscious one.<sup>16</sup> Western education is modeled with heavier emphasis on subservient attitude and white collar skills with the effect that tends towards the encouragement and promotion of the individual instinct of men. Emphasis on inequality was also obvious as can be seen in the sense of passing examinations, and superiority given accordingly regardless of any respect for ingenuity in practical fields. From this, it is seen that Africans' lifestyle has been corrupted and the African alienated in his own milieu. What the African needs therefore is to build an ethic appropriate to the development of a good and stable society.

### *The Synthesis: Ujamaa*

This good and stable society is the *Ujamaa* society. Nyerere claims that the present poverty and national weakness in Africa makes socialism the only rational choice for Africans. *Ujamaa*, he argues, is opposed to both 'capitalism' and doctrinaire socialism because while the latter seeks to build its happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man, the former seeks to build a society on the basis of exploitation of man by man. In opposing the rival political philosophies of the colonial period, Nyerere posits *Ujamaa* as a synthesis of the most cherished values

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 167.

in African traditional society, and other African values that survive the colonial experience. He describes the result of this new synthesis as

a country in which all her citizens are equal; where there is no division into rulers and ruled, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, those in distress and idle comfort... in this country all will be equal in dignity; all would have an equal right to respect, to the opportunity of acquiring a good education and the necessities of life; and all her citizens should have an equal opportunity of serving their country to the limits of their ability.<sup>17</sup>

Thus enunciated above, *Ujamaa* becomes a utopia that Africans should seek. However, there are steps to be taken and these include radically changing the existing social structure that tends to promote class system, and society must be made to serve man.

### ***Basic Tenets of Ujamaa***

A basic tenet of *Ujamaa* is the absence of exploitation. Exploitation is here understood as a factor that hinders the reign of equality, and the establishment of *Ujamaa* means fighting against exploitation. But then, what characterizes exploitation in *Ujamaa*? In an outline provided by Matthew Nwoko, exploitation, in Nyerere's contention, covers the following: (i) making a living from the work of others; (ii) making an amount of money that is out of proportion with respect to the rest of society; (iii) a rich person making a profit from a poor man; (iv) taking more than one needs; (v) displaying a capitalistic attitude of mind; (vi) inordinate greed for power and prestige; (vii) having control over the poor for one's own profit; and (viii) making money without working.<sup>18</sup>

Given the above, Nyerere contends that private ownership of the means of production is taken to be the first cause of exploitation; and it is for this reason Nyerere associates exploitation with capitalism since the latter

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<sup>17</sup> Julius Nyerere, "President's Address to the National Assembly" presented on December 1962.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew I. Nwoko, *Basic World Political Theories* (Owerri: Claretian Institute of Philosophy, 1988), p. 245.

allows private ownership of the means of production. Nyerere thus argues that “when one controls the means by which another earns and obtains the food, the clothing and the shelter which are essential to life, then there is no equality. One must call another ‘master’ for he is master of life.”<sup>19</sup>

Another underlying factor taken by Nyerere as a property of *Ujamaa* is the belief in the equality of men. As mentioned above, this equality is based on the assumption that men are creatures of God and as such fundamentally equal. The equality of men as discussed by Nyerere should not be confused with equality in human capabilities, for this is impossible. The point of discussion here is that all men are equal before God, in the sense of being rational human beings. This is beside the existential fact that they all have uneven distribution of capabilities.

From this follows the role of equality in the political societies. On this Nyerere avers that “the people’s equality must be reflected in the political organisation; everyone must be equal participant in the government of his society.”<sup>20</sup> Thus it is seen that the right to equality in democracy gives the people the right to choose their own representatives and legislators.

### Evaluation

In this essay we have presented the thoughts of Julius Nyerere as a socialist. The task now is to look into the feasibility of the synthesis of the African traditional society and the acquired colonial experience, and examine the plausibility or otherwise of the doctrine of *Ujamaa*. But to embark on this evaluation, we examine Nyerere’s *Ujamaa* proposal by addressing certain questions: Does Nyerere present an adequate picture of the African traditional society? Does he understand the Whiteman? Does he take into consideration the course of history? Has the *Ujamaa* the correct blend of both cultures? And lastly, is *Ujamaa* open enough to accommodate the possibility of errors or progress?

For Nyerere the colonialist is the Devil himself, the true descendant of Hobbes’ ‘homo homine lupus’ lacking even in the most minimal of man’s altruistic sense. Thus, the primordial instinct of brotherhood becomes for

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<sup>19</sup> Nyerere, quoted in *Ibid.* p. 245-246.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 247.

Nyerere the only manifestation of the idealistic interpretation of the African society in relation to the colonial experience. The colonialist is the atomic individualist who nonetheless, lives in a civil society and as such only where self-preservation could be attained with co-operation that a collective front becomes a tool for his colonizing mission. This, in his view, explains why education – a good tool of civilization – could become a dangerous recipe for the dehumanization of Africans. Had the colonialist any sense of the value of the human person, the holistic embodiment of a people, a people's *weltanschauung* could not have been utterly disregarded.

Such thinking of Nyerere requires the empathy of the modern African, who, not knowing this dark side of colonialism, should commend Nyerere. Nyerere has a far sighted impression of colonialism for he could see and he envisaged the colonizing and neo-colonizing effects of the many grant-awarding institutions – Islamic banks, the Paris Club and other economic organizations – that dangle poisoned 'economic carrots' in the name of foreign aids. In cognizance of the future emergence of the above, Nyerere insists that man must be made to realize that his future and his conditions depend entirely upon his efforts. Hence, between money and people it was obvious that the people and their own work are the foundations for development. In other words, Nyerere understands the whiteman, at least to an extent.

However, it is likely that Nyerere does not seem to understand the African traditional society; or that if he understands it, his picture of it is positively exaggerated. His picture of the traditional African society seems to be a perfect and 'paradisial' one. He paints Africa with the colours of Paradise. Now, the question is whether this is true; and to know whether this is true we have to have a recourse to history.

Pre-colonial Africa which Nyerere views as a romantic and utopian society had its dark ages in history. For instance, there was a semi-feudal structure cutting across the continent between 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries from the empire of Western Sudan to the Congo Basin and Nile Valley. The empires during this period were ones in which the characteristic semi-feudal structure had no explicit laws or systems governing material possessions, and where such possessions existed they were often signs of

power. It is known that in many African traditional societies with political structures under paramount chiefs and kings, the realities described by Nyerere were exactly the contrary of what he claims of them. Chiefs, military leaders and elders were notorious wealth-amassing individuals in many African societies and such political structures were not infrequently associated with tyranny.<sup>21</sup> As such, they are not situations or events alien to the African experience as Nyerere would want us to believe. Little wonder African social organisation, despite Nyerere's claim, was a fertile ground for sowing capitalism.

Even in the African's sense of brotherhood, distribution of goods and mutual help could be described as having some selfish inclinations. Sharing was in itself not for the protection of the other, but rather for the interest of oneself on the long run<sup>22</sup> as exemplified by Tom Mboya's reflection of African Socialism.<sup>23</sup> In fact, distribution was an investment for the rainy days, which were frequent and ever re-occurring. But would this be said to be the socialist attitude proclaimed by Nyerere? If this is the case, how does it differ from the 'string-attached' foreign aids given by super powers to developing countries? But would we not look at the issue from another perspective? Couldn't ecological necessities be said to have brought about sharing in Africa? Let us assume that the realities of traditional Africa were of misery with an alarming number of people and often an entire population in profound want. Either pastorally or agriculturally, they heavily depended on the natural and unpredictable geographical conditions for subsistence and survival. These ecological necessities and the consequential uncertainties that were concomitant of subsistent economy forced people into co-operation. Wouldn't this have been a probable explanation of African traditional society in relation to distribution and sharing? If this is so, it follows that for Nyerere to make distribution the basis for a "true African socialism" amounts to making

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<sup>21</sup> Masolo, op. cit. p. 423.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 427.

<sup>23</sup> Tom Mboya, "African Socialism" in *Readings In African Political Thought*, G. M. Mutiso and S. W. Rohio (eds.) (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975), pp. 603-4.

the tail wag the dog. "It is going back to the effects but not to the causes of a given overt behaviour as response to an incumbent situation."<sup>24</sup>

But Nyerere would disagree with the above for he would say that it is "attitude of mind" that made the African feel responsible for the welfare of his fellow. It is this that distinguished African socialism from the rigid adherence of modern socialists to doctrinaire socialism. Nyerere would also give the impression that this attitude of mind eliminated the greed for wealth acquisition and extensive ownership of private property. What if we disagree? Couldn't technological development at the time create insuperable physical obstacles to such an acquisitive tendency? Viewed through the eyes of Obafemi Awolowo, one observes that:

In the absence of adequate and efficient communications in the midst of incessant inter-tribal and internecine wars, with their attendant grave insecurity to property and life; and in the absence of portable and durable means of exchange which apart from anything else, would serve as a store of value, the desire and the greed to accumulate the things of this world were reduced to the barest minimum.<sup>25</sup>

Yet Nyerere would insist that "attitude of mind" as against rigid adherence to a standard political pattern in socialism existed in African traditional society. This is removed from reality. What Nyerere fails to tell us is the relationship between "attitude of mind" and reality. His submission seems to be that the socialist attitude of mind is innate, inborn in the African by virtue of his being an African. But the African had proclivity for acquisition despite the fact that he also had profound altruistic tendencies, and so if Nyerere sees the socialist attitude of mind as an innate capability of the African, then there arises a tension between it and the African proclivity for acquisition.

Just as the socialist attitude of mind was associated with the African so also does Nyerere associate equality and classlessness. This is a

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<sup>24</sup> Masolo, op. cit. p. 427-428.

<sup>25</sup> Obafemi Awolowo, *The People's Republic* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 209.

generalization at best, if not an exaggeration. Nyerere is not only comfortable with the position that classlessness was a predominant characteristic of the African traditional society, but also that class structure and class conflict were a consequence of colonial rule in Africa. This assumption is debatable since a number of African political thinkers share the view and others reject it. But then, this attribution of a causal power on colonial rule regarding the emergence of class conflict in Africa raises a question: Had there not been colonization would class conflict not have occurred? In other words, is colonization a necessary and sufficient condition for class conflict in Africa? As Levine and Fraaenkel have shown,<sup>26</sup> it is very unlikely that there is a connection between colonial rule and class conflict. In their respective studies of Ethiopia and Liberia, both scholars argue that class consciousness and class conflict could emerge in the absence of colonial rule. Thus colonialism is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the emergence of classes in Africa.

Granted that the traditional African society might have been comparatively a happier and less problematic one, it was neither classless nor egalitarian. In African traditional society, the kings and chiefs sometimes assumed the positions of demi-gods. There are even historical accounts of slaves being killed as escorts of an important chief or king to the great beyond.<sup>27</sup> What this puts across is the wide divergence of the pre-colonial African political systems, in addition to certain ethnographic data which tend to suggest the existence of different levels of social stratification in African traditional society.<sup>28</sup> This sheds light on a major oversight in Nyerere's *Ujamaa*, namely the inability to accommodate cultural relativity and the effect of manifold customs on African culture.

In other words, for most part of his work, Nyerere generalizes. There is a categorial extension of the values and norms of probably one culture to

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<sup>26</sup> Donald N. Levine, "Class Consciousness and Class Solidarity in the New Ethiopian Elites" in Peter C. Lloyd (ed) *New Elites of Tropical Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) and Merran Fraenkel, *Tribe and Class in Liberia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), cited in L. Adele Jinadu, *Fanon: In Search of the African Revolution* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980), p. 182.

<sup>27</sup> K. B. C. Onwubiko, *History of West Africa* (Onitsha: Africana International Publishers, 1973), p. 185.

<sup>28</sup> Jinadu, op. cit. p. 187.

other cultures as if all the cultures of the different peoples on the African continent are homogenous. Even in this generalization, Nyerere fails to bring out the cultural universal of the African society. However, one may assume that Nyerere's submission is hinged on this argument: since there is a common front by all African nations towards decolonization, it follows that there is one common value in Africa as a whole that is being subverted by colonialism. Whatever this value might be, it is culturally common to Africans and it was being threatened by colonialism. The economist Kofi Kissi Dompere may have a better understanding of this position when he posits that: "The principle of Ujamaa and its practice flow out of a spiritual and material chain that links each African state to one another and connects all Africans into a united economic action."<sup>29</sup>

Besides, "attitude of mind" also raises the question concerning the value of human life. Owing to the socialist attitude of mind, man in Nyerere's contention is relegated to the background as a toll for the service of society. The individual thus becomes a mere instrument, much like the '*homo faber*' of Marx's economic society. Nyerere even asserts that the individual has no sense in himself unless he realizes himself within the whole for only the community matters. This tendency to stress the primacy of the society over the individual is tantamount to a 'reification' of the human person. Furthermore, this position so far reveals a glaring tension: on the one hand, there is the idealist notion of the unity of humankind and the dignity of the human person that forms the basis for the equality of men, and on the other hand, the socialist (materialist?) consideration that places society at the cost of the individual. This tension raises question concerning the value *Ujamaa* places on the individual. In an age of atomization and individualism, how does *Ujamaa* evaluate itself? Is there any room for individual initiative in the socio-economic and political transformation of modern African society?

Even though *Ujamaa* tends to be practised by the common man in the rural areas of Africa, in today's global socio-economic order, *Ujamaa* seems unattainable because the forces of globalization and anti-

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<sup>29</sup> Kofi Kissi Dompere, *Polyrhythmicity: Foundations of African Philosophy*, (London: Adonis and Abbey Publishers Ltd, 2006), p. 160.

nationalism seem intractably inimical to local transformational initiatives. According to Hyden, "it is also clear that the trend towards individualization of, for instance, land tenure systems works in the opposite direction. In fact, the introduction of a monetary economy in African societies has tended to disrupt the traditional patterns of human interaction based on communal entities".<sup>30</sup> But then this position is only partly true. Nyerere's *Ujamaa* may be chiliaristic in its proposal; it may even seem unrealistic in today's world. Yet, it is undoubtedly a formidable theoretical framework for the transformation of Africa. Therefore, if any kind of foray has to be made towards self-determination, Nyerere's *Ujamaa* has set itself as a veritable example to follow as a form of what Falaiye calls "Effective activism". Writing in his "Theoretical Black Activism and Social Change: Beyond Walter Rodney and George Ayittey", Muyiwa Falaiye expresses this same sentiment when he praised Nyerere's leadership foresight and candour for rejecting the language imposition by the colonizers.

In my opinion, one of the greatest achievements in postcolonial Africa was when Nyerere made *Ki Swahili* the official language in Tanzania and mandated that *Ki Swahili* was taught universally. History shows that countries which have succeeded in breaking the yoke of underdevelopment are those which have adopted traditional languages as the medium of instruction and expression.<sup>31</sup>

What this means is that *Ujamaa* is a call towards self reliance. If only for this gesture alone, the Principle of *Ujamaa* merits a study as an authentic African socio-political philosophy.

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<sup>30</sup> Goran Hyden, "The Failure of Africa's First intellectuals" in *Transition* No. 28, Jan. 1967, pp. 14-18. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> Muyiwa Falaiye, "Theoretical Black Activism and Social Change: Beyond Walter Rodney and George Ayittey" in *Sparks of Resistance, Flames of Change: Black Communities and Activism*, Muyiwa Falaiye and Sandra Grayson (eds.), (Lagos: Foresight Press, 2005), p. 52.

### **Conclusion**

As observed in the foregoing analysis, *Ujamaa* tends to be an attempt to bring forward traditional values to modern society. It is a socialism of nostalgia and romance, of the perfection of a world that existed long ago, almost lost forever except when it returns in brief frustrating snatches that troubled the memories of the visionary socialist. Nyerere's socialism has a fixation on childhood, the unattainable and the lost; it is a kind of socialism known as wish fulfillment socialism. Given the state of history and the situation in which contemporary man finds himself, *Ujamaa* may seem an anachronistic ideology for today's rationalized human society, for it is unable to face up with the rough facts of life and history. However, its idealistic recommendation justifies its prescriptive character as a philosophical guide. Its activist tendency and capacity for mobilization of the family, as the basis for social engagement, provides practical grounds upon which change can be effected in the African society. This, other than the theorizing contained in the principles of *Ujamaa*, makes the ideological philosophy a veritable tool for social mobilization of African peoples.