



Nkrumahism and post-colonial reconstruction: Building socialism

أيديولوجية نكروما وإعادة الإعمار بعد الاستعمار: بناء الاشتراكية

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Abstract:

In his capacity as Prime Minister from 1957, when Ghana formally became independent, and then as President of the Republic of Ghana from 1960 to 1966, Kwame Nkrumah attracted worldwide interest as the leader of the first independent black African nation. During his governorship, ideology played a crucial role in the process of post-colonial reconstruction and development. This ideology was given the name "Nkrumahism". This conception has three basic tenets: socialism; non-alignment and anti-imperialist movement; and the complete unity of all-Africa. The aim of the present paper is twofold: first; explaining one of nkrumahism's tenets 'socialism' and its categories that are of fundamental importance; and second, examining Nkrumah's thoughts concerning this ideology.

Keywords:

Kwame Nkrumah; Nkrumahism ; socialism.

الملخص:

جذب كوامي نكروما الاهتمام العالمي كزعيم لأول دولة أفريقية سوداء مستقلة منذ أن شغل منصب رئيس الوزراء في عام 1957 ، عندما أصبحت غانا مستقلة رسمياً ، ثم كرئيس لجمهورية غانا من 1960 إلى 1966 . خلال فترة حكمه ، لعبت الأيديولوجية دوراً حاسماً في عملية إعادة الإعمار والتنمية بعد الاستعمار. أطلق على هذه الأيديولوجية اسم "Nkrumahism" هذا المفهوم له ثلاثة مبادئ أساسية: الاشتراكية. حركة عدم الانحياز والمناهضة للإمبريالية ؛ والوحدة الكاملة لأفريقيا و تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية

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الى التعرف على شقين: أولاً شرح أحد معتقدات نكروما "الاشتراكية" وأصنافها ذات الأهمية الأساسية وثانياً ،
دراسة أفكار نكروما بخصوص هذه الأيديولوجية.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

كوامي نكروما، أيديولوجية نكروما، الاشتراكية

1. Introduction

Before independence, Nkrumah concentrated on the achievement of political freedom. He saw the latter as a necessary condition for the post-colonial reconstruction. He was convinced that Africa's problems of economic development could only be solved when the African continent was totally liberated, and when the African states were politically united in an All-African Union Government. After independence, political, economic and social programmes were initiated for the well-being of the people. The African masses wanted to see the fruits of the end of the colonial rule: good prices for their products, employment opportunities, educational and health facilities... .They wanted their government to provide those essential conditions that would satisfy their daily necessities.

Thus, a considerable progress was made, but it was not purely for the benefit of the Ghanaian people. The post-colonial schemes were largely a policy of how to ally the neighbouring states with the fortunes of Ghana. Nkrumah admitted that the revolution against imperialism and neo-colonialism required the achievement of African unity and the building of socialism as a substitute for the capitalist system. He asserted that socialism was the target of his government as he declared: "We have embarked on the socialist path to progress" (Nkrumah, 1963: 119) . Socialism for Nkrumah and many other



African leaders represented a break from the imperial ruling tradition.

In his writings and speeches and in the early development of his ideas, Nkrumah described himself as a Marxist. His pronouncements were compared both to Marx's theory itself, and to Marx as interpreted by Marxists. His ideas were also compared with those of Engels and Lenin. The two focal points of comparison were the nature and the importance of the party, and the nature of imperialism. Nkrumah described himself as an 'African socialist'; in fact, his ideas were compared to those of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, and Leopold Senghor of Senegal. An attempt is made to understand what it is to be an African socialist and how compatible this is with Marxism-Leninism. More details will be dealt with in this work. However, it is noteworthy before to define the concept of socialism and its origins.

2. Building socialism

The term "Socialism" "stands for equality of opportunity, security of income and employment, equality before the law, the rule of law, individual freedom, universal franchise, state regulation of economic life, state control of vital means of production and distribution, etc." (Chinweizu, 2009:1). In other words, equality, cooperation and collective welfare were all the values, which were incorporated, in the socialist system. The alternative to socialism for the African leaders was capitalism. The latter which was the impetus for imperialism and which eventually led to colonialism was seen as a bad doctrine and undesirable for use in Africa:

*What distinguishes Nkrumah
from other The African leaders
and African national
movements are to an
extraordinary degree*



dedicated ... to the task of repudiating the capitalism whose urges led to the occupation of their continent in the 19th century and of consciously directing their new independent states towards the creation of socialist societies .

(Brockway, 1963: 14).

Resulting from the legacy of colonialism, contemporary African nations found themselves stagnated in circumstances of poverty, economic backwardness, and underdevelopment. Faced with the urgency of transforming this appalling reality, many African leaders had opted for a post-independent path of development, which they claimed, was anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and pro-socialist. For such leaders, “the aim is to remould African society in such a manner that the humanism of traditional African life re-asserts itself in a modern technical community” (Nkrumah, 1967:1).

It is interesting to note that socialism as adopted by the post-independent heads of state had its origins in Marx, Engels and later Lenin. However, according to these scholars the theory of socialism depended on the historical conditions, which formed the context for its application. In accordance with this, the African leaders belonged to two different groups: the African socialists and the scientific socialists.

As far as African socialism was concerned, Friedland and Rosberg distinguished two main aspects: the crisis of economic development; and the dilemma of control and class formation (Friedland and Rosberg, 1964: 10). For economic development, it was



to take place largely in the public sector. Thus, the accumulation of capital was primarily a responsibility of government. Concerning class formation, it was asserted that the African socialists hold a view, which rested on the fundamental characteristics of traditional society, classless, communal and egalitarian. In this context, it is appropriate to recall some African leaders' definitions of the concept of African socialism.

Julius Nyerere, president of Tanzania, said: "my fellow countrymen can understand socialism only as co-operation" (Chinweizu, 2009: 3). He went on to argue that modern African socialism could draw from its traditional heritage the recognition of society as an extension of the basic family unit (Nyeyere, 1971: 246). Senghor, president of Senegal, at the Dakar conference in December 1962, said: "socialism is the merciless fight against social dishonesties and injustice, fraudulent conversion of public funds, rackets and bribes ..." (Chinweizu, 2009:2).

Senghor did not see capitalism and socialism as necessarily antagonistic systems. He suggested a type of peaceful competition between the two in which socialism was the dominant force. He stated that: "Africa can benefit from injections of private capital as long as it fits into development plans and its use is Controlled ..." (Friedland and Rosberg, 1964). Likewise, Metz, wrote: "African socialism is...an attempt to blend what are perceived as the dominant ethics of pre-colonial society with the productive power of modern capitalism" (Metz, 182: 377).

What the African socialists might recapture from the traditional society was not its structure but its spirit of communalism and collectiveness. Within this society, all men contributed to the welfare of the community and the latter in turn took care of the



welfare of individuals. This was reflected in the Nyerere's statement: "In our traditional African society we were individuals within a community. We took care of the community, and the community took care for us. We neither needed nor wished to exploit our fellowmen" (Nkrumah, 1967: 3).

The objective of the African heads of state who espoused African socialism was to use these traditions to find a way to build a nation in which there was a place for everybody, where everybody shared both in poverty and prosperity, and when the focus was placed on the production by everyone, with security for all. Nyerere wanted to extend the feelings, brotherhood, and family hood to the entire nation of Tanzania. He desired all citizens to feel collectively responsible for the welfare of the members of the community of the nation. Nyerere's booklet, *Ujmaa*, described Tanzanian socialism. The principal theoretical aspects of Tanzania socialism could be outlined as follows:

1. Man is the purpose of all activity.
2. The core and essence of socialism is acceptance of the equality of man as a basis.
3. A man centred society must actively promote the dignity of all its members assumption of life.
4. A socialist society is democratic which is the political reflection of human equality.
5. In a socialist society there will be no exploitation of one man by another.
6. The rule of law is a part of socialism. Laws shall be applied equality and people shall not be subject to arbitrary arrest, or persecution by the servants of the society.



7. The humanistic and communalistic values of traditional Tanzania should animate the present effort at socialist construction.
8. A violent revolution may make the introduction of socialist institutions easier; it makes more difficult the development of the socialist attitudes which give life to these institutions. Violence should only be accepted as a necessity when every other road forward is completely blocked (Nyerere, 1971: 238).

The overall policy of Tanzanian socialism emphasized agricultural development and de-emphasized industrialism. The Arusha declaration of 1967 stated that if all of the country's farmers increased crop production (i.e. rice, wheat, sisal, cotton and coffee) they would obtain more food and more money. Since these two are among the most fundamental of development goals, a stress on agriculture was a natural choice. According to Nyerere, the practical implementation of agricultural development required the creation of a network of Ujamaa (cooperative) villages across Tanzania (Nyerere, 1968: 348). The majority of farming was to be done by groups of people who lived as a community and work as a community. People would live, farm, and market collectively. The community as a whole would undertake the provision of local services and small requirements.

In consideration of the above, Tanzanian socialism which represented African socialism was a system that aimed at abolishing exploitation and establishing human equality and democracy. Through evolutionary and non-violent means, it also formed the economic foundation of the new order based on agriculture. Nkrumah differed from Nyerere and the other African socialists. He, a self-declared



Marxist, supported Marxism, which was also known as “Scientific Socialism”. Gamal Nkrumah, Nkrumah’s son, commented:

What distinguishes Nkrumah from other African leaders at the time was that his pan-africanism was not simply African nationalism. Nkrumah made it clear that he was a Marxist, and rejected the African socialism of Julius Nyerere the first president of Tanzania ... for Nkrumah, socialism was the new rather unfashioned scientific socialism. Socialism was universal, and not African, Arab or Asian. Socialism was socialism.

(Nkrumah, G., 1998: 20)

Scientific socialist theory could be distinguished from the ideas of the African socialists in that it lent itself better to association with the idea of the class struggle and with the materialistic conception of history. Both Marx and Engels saw socialism as a necessary outcome of the struggle between two historically developed classes: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The transition to socialism then required the formation of a dictatorship of the proletariat whereby the proletarian government would replace the capitalist economic system and socio-political supports, i.e. the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Marx pointed out that “the dictatorship of the proletariat itself constitutes no more than a transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society” (Nkrumah, G., 1998: 20).



As revolutionaries, the proletarians' role was to assist the exploited workers in three ways: first, to raise their class-consciousness so that they can realize their role in history; second, to overthrow the bourgeoisie; and finally, to establish working class control of the state and its ruling apparatuses (Nkrumah, G., 1998: 20). In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx wrote that after the proletariat seized political power it would begin “despotic inroads on the right of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production” (Marx and Engels, 1968: 38). These measures could be viewed as initial steps in the construction of scientific socialism. What follows are highlights of these steps:

1. Abolition of poverty in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
2. A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
3. Centralization of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with state capital and an exclusive monopoly.
4. Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the
5. state.
6. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the state; the
7. bringing into cultivation of waste lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
8. Equal liability of all to labor.
9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country (Marx and Engels, 1968: 38).

Lenin who presented a three-part plan for the building of socialist society extended the theory of scientific socialism that was



originated by Marx and Engels. The plan contained (1) the industrialization of the country (2) the co-operation of agriculture and (3) the cultural revolution (Friedland and Rosberg, 1964: 1). This kind of revolution was one of the many theoretical contributions that Lenin made to Marx's original work.

3. Nkrumah's theory of socialism

Nkrumah belonged to the scientific socialist tradition. According to him, scientific socialism "seeks to answer the question: what is the source of a nation wealth? The answer it has given is that a nation's wealth in industry and labour. Hence, industrialization" (Nkrumah, 1963: 119). He as an African leader recognized the deep impact which capitalism had had on his country during the years of colonialism, and became aware that socialism was a goal to be sought. Thus, he, like Nyerere and the African socialists utilized the values of the traditional society as a way to eradicate the colonial capitalist system.

According to Nkrumah, the image of the traditional life was to be altered in order to help create a new ideology that would serve the post- colonial reconstruction of Africa. For him the humanist impetus of the traditional African society:

...is something that continues to urge us towards our all-African socialist reconstruction. We postulate each man to be an end in himself, not merely a means; and we accept the necessity of guaranteeing each man equal opportunities for his development. The implications of this for socio-political practice have to be



worked out scientifically, and the necessary social and economic policies pursued with resolution. Any meaningful humanism must begin from egalitarianism and must lead to objectively chosen policies for safeguarding egalitarianism. Hence socialism, hence also scientific socialism (Botchway, 1972: 61)

The bases of this new ideology would be the egalitarianism, humanism and communalism of the pre-colonial system. As a socialist, he shared the same ideas with the African socialists about the role of traditional Africa in the process of transition to socialism. But, as a scientific socialist, he differed from them in his assessment of the unit of the social organization of production.

After he was elected democratically a president of Ghana, Nkrumah was determined to provide the necessary conditions so that his people would be able to live in happiness free from poverty and colonial exploitation. But freedom from poverty and the improvement of social and economic conditions depended on the coming into existence of a new industrial economy in place of the old colonial economy for “poverty is progressively reduced only as productivity increases and industrialization progresses, and part of its surplus can be made available in increased wages better housing and generally improved social conditions” (Smertin, 1987: 124). He held that the drive towards economic reconstruction must proceed along the socialist path. As he claimed “if we are to fulfil our pledge to the people... socialism is our alternative.” (Botchway, 1972: 61).



Nkrumah put forward ten principles of the socialist development. These were found in the “African Interpreter”. First, the state must play the major role in economic activity “because colonialism is preventing the emergence of a strong local capitalist class, because production for private profit is based on exploitation, and because the less developed nations need a high rate of economic growth, the government will be obliged to play the role of main entrepreneur in laying the basis of national economic and social advancement.” (African Interpreter, 1943: 8).Second, national economic planning was the principal lever for all progress. The planning had to embrace economic development and plans in educational, health and other social sectors.

As regards the third principle, Nkrumah thought that the national planning had to be based on socialism. Accordingly, he focused on various elements that were essential for the achievement of his aim. These were listed as follows:

(A) A mixed economy. The economic system was divided into several sections with the state controlling the activities of all sectors through the national plan that it prepared. In the Gold Coast, for example, there would be five sectors: state enterprises, enterprises owned by foreign private interests, enterprises jointly owned by state and foreign private interests, corporations, and enterprises exclusively reserved for Gold Coast private entrepreneurs. A vital consideration here would be that each sector operated within limits set by the state.

(B) New institutions for economic activity must be created to replace colonial institutions.

(C) Relations in agriculture must be recast in order to allow an upsurge in agriculture production and productivity. “This should be a



major priority. Agriculture should be diversified and modernized”. (African Interpreter, 1943: 9)

In this way, skills were developed and foreign exchange is saved for financing the industrialization program.

The fourth principle of socialist development was that foreign capital must be obtained in a manner that would leave full economic control on the hands of the emergent nations. However, circumstances might demand the acquisition of capital from external sources. The ideal arrangement was for foreign capital to form a partnership with the state enterprises and train local personnel for executive and technical posts at all levels. As Nkrumah stated: “we must seek terms that will preserve integrity and sovereignty without crippling economic or political ties to, any country, bloc or system”. (African Interpreter, 1943: 9) He added:

Foreign capital is thus useful and helpful if it takes the form of a loan or credit to enable the borrowing country to buy what it needs from whatever sources it likes, and at the same time to retain control of the assets to be developed (African Interpreter, 1943: 9).

The fifth principle was to deviate from the foreign economic links. This act would afford opportunity for a country to eradicate the dangers of “crippling ties to any one country” (African Interpreter, 1943: 12) and “helps in the drive for stable and better prices for the primary commodities on the world markets” (African Interpreter,



1943: 12). Nkrumah asserted that “stable and high world prices for the products will increase the surpluses that could be ploughed into industrialization, and also put economic planning on firmer footing” (African Interpreter, 1943: 12). Sixth, to change some of the harmful social attitudes of the people. Nkrumah maintained “there will be the lag on economic activity of the extended family system and the habit of squandering large sums of money in social festivities” (African Interpreter, 1943: 12) He demanded “a new spirit of hard work, and savings for production not for festivities” (African Interpreter, 1943: 12). Seventh, to prevent the rising of a new privileged class.

Nkrumah’s eight principle aimed at developing a new budgetary and fiscal system different from what existed during the colonial period. The characteristics of this system “must be a release of initiative for economic production, and husbanding of national financial resources, the efficient and effective direction of investment for national development, and the prevention of the flight of capital away from the country” (African Interpreter, 1943: 16). Ninth, to play a determined role in the economic drive under the leadership of a decisive party: “Economic independence and the objective of socialism cannot be achieved without decisive party leadership” (African Interpreter, 1943: 18).

The final socialist principle urged the necessity of making “...a review of the administrative apparatus, remembering that we got it from a colonial regime committed to a very different purpose what we seek. We must also realize that we are out to establish a new life in a new society based on modern modes of production.” (African Interpreter, 1943: 8)

In order to make his ideas of socialist development concrete, he focused on a number of factors: first, he claimed that with the



implementation of his socialist plan, it would mean a maximization of his country's resources for the benefits of the majority of the people. Second, he argued definitively that the plan would erode the division between those who live in rural and urban areas. In essence, it would link both areas in a unified manner, producing a healthy atmosphere for the development of the entire country. Third, he suggested that private investment from overseas could play an active role in the country's overall development plan. These private investors would be encouraged to participate in sharing plan with the country, so that the majority of the people would benefit from their private projects. However, as the society developed within the socialist view, these private resources would be progressively owned by the state. Fourth, he emphasized that the state would provide training to its people, and exposed them to the theoretical aspects of Marxism in order to build an effective socialist society.

4. CONCLUSION

In consideration of what it has been said, Nkrumah defined his thoughts as it is called Nkrumahism as the ideology of a New Africa, independent and absolutely free from imperialism. His socialism, which is originated in Marxist–Leninist theory, is a part of this ideology. As Africa gained independence, anticolonial nationalism could no longer play the unifying and mobilizing role that it had in the early 1950s. Socialism based on egalitarian principles became a mobilizing slogan to unite Africans around the challenge of economic development in their postcolonial societies. In other words, Nkrumah believed that the drive towards economic reconstruction must proceed along the socialist path. Theoretically based, his commitment to scientific socialism and his principles of the socialist development were profoundly relevant to



free his people from poverty and colonial exploitation; and eradicate the capitalist system from the African continent.

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