

Kwasi Wiredu’s Critique of Marxism: Its Philosophical Application to the “African Socialism” via Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré

by

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Abstract

This paper explores Wiredu’s critique of Marxism as a framework for a critique of “African Socialism,” as conceived and propagated by three famous philosopher-statesmen of Africa – Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré. The paper ultimately argues that “African Socialism,” especially the variants espoused by the trio, may not after all hold the key to Africa’s socio-political emancipation, as its proponents would want us to believe.

Key Words: Marxism, African socialism, Wiredu, critique, philosophy, politics.

Introduction

For a long time in postcolonial Africa, Marxism was the default philosophical and ideological temperament. Contemporary African philosophers were largely sympathetic to leftist ideologies, and this sympathy reflected in their attempt to fit their ideas into Marxist categories. One reason for this Marxist bent was the political influence wielded by Communism/Socialism after World War II and the ensuing Cold War. Another reason – and I think this is more important in our present context – was the larger-than-life influence of postcolonial African leaders like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Sekou Touré of Guinea, who themselves leaned towards socialism. The charisma of these African leaders contributed greatly in giving a general Marxist coloration to the intellectual and political atmosphere of the young African nations in the 60s and 70s. In this paper, I focus on Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré, who called their own brands of Marxism “African socialism,” perhaps to underline the supposed distinctiveness of their species of Marxism.

It is against the backdrop of the influence of Marxism on the Continent that we must appreciate the intellectual courage of Kwasi Wiredu, who challenged Marxism in his 1980 groundbreaking work: *Philosophy and an African Culture*. Two important chapters of the book are devoted to the critique of Marxism. Wiredu's critique touches upon the notions of *truth, ideology, philosophy, morality and historical materialism*, which he considers fundamental to any analysis of Marxism. He analyzes these notions in order to draw attention to aspects of Marxist philosophy that "provide the fundamental explanation of the tendency to authoritarianism hitherto noted in many Marxist regimes" (Wiredu, *Philosophy and the African Culture*, p.86, henceforth abbreviated as "PAC").

My main objective in this paper is to use Wiredu's critique of Marxism in *Philosophy and an African Culture* as a paradigm or framework for a thoroughly fundamental critique of "African socialism," as professed by the trio of Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré. In his critique of Marxism, Wiredu explores the questions of truth, ideology, morality and the unrealistic promises of a 'perfect' or 'near-perfect' society.

Therefore, I shall critique "African Socialism" exploring these same aspects. Regarding the notion of truth, I argue that the three proponents of "African Socialism" – Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré – subscribed to the belief in "absolute truths" which they equated with their personal ideas, and that this explains the high-handedness and zeal with which they suppressed dissent. On the issue of ideology, I maintain that the three leaders sustained highly ideological systems, despite all pretensions to the contrary. Their muting of dissent, subscription to one-party system, centralization of state instruments of coercion, use of propaganda machinery and a host of other measures all played into the ideological templates of these supreme leaders. Concerning morality, I maintain that, despite their propensity to 'moralize' (as seen in their lengthy discourses extolling "African values"), the ideologies of the three proponents of "African Socialism" were rather morally deficient in some respects. Finally, I challenge their claims that "African Socialism" is the 'best' system for Africa on the ground that there is no concrete evidence supporting the presumed 'perfection' of the pre-colonial African society. And, even if there were, I argue that it would be impossible to re-enact such a pristine situation in a post-colonial Africa, 'corrupted', as it were, by diverse foreign influences. My critique will focus mainly on their theoretical constructs, but will also make reference to concrete policies insofar as the policies are directly informed by the theoretical constructs of "African Socialism."

The present study is significant for the project of African Contemporary Philosophy in two inter-related ways. First, it represents an important attempt to critique the three philosopher-kings of early postcolonial African Philosophy based on their Marxist philosophical and ideological rootedness. Second, it represents the first attempt, as far as I know, to synthesize Wiredu's rather eclectic critique of Marxism, employing it in the critique of the so-called "African socialism."

At this juncture, I begin by discussing the key philosophical insights of the three philosopher-presidents under consideration.

“African Socialism”: Perspectives from Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré

The influence of Marxism in contemporary African philosophy comes largely in the form of “African Socialism,” a species of socialism that came to dominate the intellectual and political space of the Continent for a long time in the postcolonial era. Its exponents, mainly belonging to the post-colonial political elite, see it as an indigenous variant of Marxism, adapted to the concrete socio-cultural realities of Africa. They seem to be united in the claim that the traditional (i.e., precolonial) setting of Africa was essentially communal, and therefore naturally suited to the socialist system. As the Ghanaian scholar, Kwame Gyekye, nicely observes, “There is hardly any African advocate of socialism in modern Africa who has not averred that socialism is deeply rooted in traditional African socioeconomic thought and practice. Assertions about the traditional matrix of socialism point especially to the communitarian thought and practice in African cultures” (1997: 146).

Apart from this general belief that Africa’s traditional matrix is well-suited for the socialist system, there is a consensus among proponents that capitalism is not only unsuitable for Africa, but has also woefully failed Africa. In fact, the association of capitalism with colonialism and imperialism partly explains the appeal socialism held for the immediate post-colonial intellectual elite of Africa. Kwame Nkrumah expresses this view when he insists: “Capitalism is alien to Africa and it is indeed a form of neocolonialism” (Nkrumah 1965: 41). Despite the differences in individual perception of what “African Socialism” would entail, there was at least a shared aversion for capitalism among proponents, an aversion born out of the unpalatable colonial experience.

The fact that there is a unanimous rejection of capitalism among advocates of African Socialism does not imply an overwhelming endorsement of Marxism. It is safe to say that among proponents of “African Socialism” there are various degrees of intellectual and ideological indebtedness to Marxism. It is difficult to accurately determine the level of inspiration each draws from Marxism. The applicability of Marxism to Africa is generally recognized, but the usual source of controversy is the form it would assume in each cultural or sub-cultural context. A.J. Klinghoffer makes the following submission in this regard: “In fact, African socialists do not deny the applicability of Marxism to Africa. They often claim that Marxism is definitely relevant to their continent but that Marxism is not a dogma and its lessons must be put into practice in accordance with different national conditions” (1968: 70). In other words, there is a good deal of flexibility regarding the application of Marxism to Africa and even in the very understanding of what “African Socialism” amounts to. In what follows, I focus my discussion on the insights of Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré, who are, as a matter of fact, among the well-known proponents of “African Socialism.”

Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, was a highly-trained philosopher and a committed African Socialist, whose socio-political thought is crystallized in what he calls “Consciencism.” He admits that Marxism exerted a great influence upon him, first as a student in the United States, and later as an anti-colonial nationalist, president and statesman. For, as he acknowledges, “It was especially impossible to read the works of Marx and Engels as desiccated abstract philosophies...the conviction was firmly created in me that a great deal in their thought could assist us in the fight against colonialism” (Nkrumah 1970: 5). Concerned with the project of decolonization and emancipation, he frequently identifies capitalism with forces of colonization and imperialism. Thus, he rejects capitalism as “too complicated for a newly independent nation. Hence the need for a socialist society” (Nkrumah 2002: 7).

Nkrumah’s preference for and confidence in socialism is informed by his belief that the socialist path is the fastest and most guaranteed route to Africa’s development. He claims that socialism has a “humanist impulse,” adding that the “ideas of transformation and development ... are properly speaking appropriate to socialism” (Nkrumah 1970: 76). The above remark underscores Nkrumah’s belief that socialism is intrinsically a progressive system, such that any nation or society that adopts socialism would presumably be on an inexorable path to growth. To Nkrumah, socialism is already foreshadowed in the traditional communalistic African society. Insisting that capitalism is irreconcilable with Africa, he connects socialism to African traditional communalism, as he famously avers: “If one seeks the socio-political ancestor of socialism, one must go to communalism” (Nkrumah 2002: 71).

In a typical Marxist temperament, Nkrumah identifies with “scientific socialism.” Though he makes little or no efforts to specify what “scientific socialism” means in his own context, he thinks his ideas could best be described as such. As Klinghoffer unmistakably notes, “Nkrumah claimed adherence to the theory of scientific socialism” (Klinghoffer 1968: 64). Nkrumah demonstrates this adherence to scientific socialism when he claims: “Our socialist ideology, Nkrumaism, is the application of the principles of scientific Socialism to our African social milieu” (Nkrumah in *The Worker*: 31). And, in an apparent display of confidence in the conformity of his ideas with scientific socialism, he is quoted to have contended that “there is only one Socialism – scientific Socialism” (Nkrumah in *Ghanaian Times* 20/12/1965).

A profound Marxist coloration in Nkrumah’s thought is easily discernible. In *Consciencism*, the work that contains the most mature presentation of his philosophy, one finds a heavy presence of such Marxist terms as “ideology,” “contradiction,” “dialectic,” “materialism,” etc. Nkrumah subscribes to dialectical materialism, affirming the priority of matter over spirit. Taunting idealism as a system that suffers from the “God-complex” (Ibid.: 19), Nkrumah declares that “our universe is a natural universe. And its basis is matter with its objective laws” (Ibid.:28). In the same vein, he does not hide his support for dialectics, and he espouses a dialectical conception of history and society. In “African Socialism Revisited,” he writes:

Social evolution is a dialectical process; it has ups and downs, but, on balance, it always represents an upward trend ... The way out is only forward, forward to a higher reconciled form of society, in which the quintessence of the human purpose of traditional African society reasserts itself in a modern context – forward in short, to socialism, through policies that are scientifically devised and correctly applied (Nkrumah 1973: 81-82).

Scientific socialism is thus considered the only way by which Africa can cope with the dialectical movement of history in its inexorable march towards higher ‘reconciled’ levels.

Nkrumah’s advocates a unitary socio-political arrangement, whereby all state machinery is centralized. He believes that national assets would be better managed under state control. And so, as president, he nationalized companies with a view to securing a central economy. On his view, it is not only the economy that should be under state control; a society can also “decide that all its instruments of ‘coercion’ and unity be centralized” (Nkrumah 1970: 61). As a matter of fact, he vigorously pursued this centralization of the ‘instruments of coercion’ as president – and this was done in a high-handed fashion, as I shall later argue.

Nkrumah associates his brand of socialism with African humanism, the humane spirit of solicitude and solidarity in the traditional African society. “The African personality,” he claims, “is itself defined by the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society” (Ibid.: 79). The task of “Consciencism” would, therefore, be that of harnessing this cluster of principles in light of contemporary realities and challenges. Nkrumah’s stress on African humanism serves to distinguish his ideas from any forms of Western humanism, which he thinks proceeds from a non-egalitarian society, whereas the traditional African society was classless, in his reckoning.

Julius Nyerere of Tanzania would explore more deeply this distinction between “African Socialism” and any non-African species of socialism in his concept of *Ujamaa*. He tries to dissociate his ideas from *institutionalized* Marxism (Boesen *et al* 1977: 12). And he distinguishes his *Ujamaa* socialism from what he calls “European socialism.” “European socialism,” he argues, is predicated on the existence of class conflict within the European society, and “sanctified this conflict itself into a philosophy” (Nyerere 1987: 9). He insists, on the other hand, that the traditional African society was basically a classless society. Hence the kind of socialism appropriate to it is unique, and must proceed from the premise of a classless society: “African socialism, on the other hand ... did not start from the existence of conflicting ‘classes’ in society. Indeed, I doubt if the equivalent of the word ‘class’ exists in any indigenous African language” (Ibid.: 10).

Nyerere develops his *Ujamaa* Socialism from an idyllic picture of the traditional African society, where there supposedly existed no exploitation of man by man. “Ujamaa,” a Swahili word for “family-hood,” invites African people to re-embrace the “former attitude of the mind” in traditional Africa – when people cared for the welfare of the entire community and no one grew rich at the expense of his neighbor. *Ujamaa* is a call to brotherhood, freedom, equality and unity. In making this call, Nyerere roundly rejects capitalism and individualism that mark the Western society. He considers capitalism intrinsically evil and unjust, as he repeatedly describes it in uncomplimentary terms.

For him, capitalism must be countered at all cost with *Ujamaa* socialism. To do this, land and other means of production must be snatched from the hands of individuals and placed under state ownership:

And in rejecting the capitalism attitude of the mind which colonialism brought into Africa, we must reject also the capitalist methods which go with it. One of these is the individual ownership of land. To us in Africa land was always recognized as belonging to the community. Each individual within our society had a right to the use of right ... But the African’s right to land was simply the right to use it; he had no other right to it, nor did it occur to him to try and claim one (Ibid.: 7).

Against this backdrop, then, Nyerere pursued a policy of nationalizing all the apparatus of the Tanzanian economy. In line with the traditional African belief-system which sees the individual as a sort of temporary ‘steward’ to all he or she has, Nyerere’s government found it justifiable to dispossess the individual, effectively centralizing the economy.

His commitment to socialist ideals made him pursue the villagization policy, whereby people were lumped into the *ujamaa vijijini* (i.e. socialist rural villages) for co-operative farming. People of these Ujamaa villages lived and worked in the farms with incentives from the government. In a clear reference to this *Vijijini* Policy, Nyerere writes, “In Socialist Tanzania, our agricultural organization was predominantly that of co-operative living and working for the good of all. This means that most of our farming would be done by groups of people who live as a community and work as a community. *A nation of such village communities would be a socialist nation*” [My italics] (Nyerere 1968: 124). Between 1968 and 1973, there were several hundred of such socialist villages all over the country, largely due to the coercion that backed up the enforcement of the policy. Successes were recorded as well as failures and challenges.

Overall, Nyerere’s *Ujamaa* is a form of socialism that idealizes Africa’s traditional past while attempting to construct postcolonial society and economy on the basis of the ideals of the traditional African society. Nyerere maintains that this would require a radical mental and attitudinal transformation. The Tanganyika Africa National Union (TANU), the single-party of the nation, would be in the vanguard of such transformation.

Nyerere would use TANU party members as the ideological foot-soldiers, responsible for implementing party ideology even at the grass-roots level. Nyerere was not as high-handed as Nkrumah and Touré, and is viewed in a rather more positive light than the other two leaders. This point does not, however, take away the fact that his principles leave much to be desired, as I shall later demonstrate.

Ahmed Sekou Touré, the first President of the Republic of Guinea, is another champion of African Socialism. A close friend of Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, he was also a staunch nationalist and Pan-Africanist. He read Marxist literature and, while President, maintained close ties with the Soviet Union, China and Cuba (Touré 1961: 6). Though with a significant Marxist leaning, Touré apparently professes a far more commitment to ‘African-ness’: “We of the Guinean nation have made the rehabilitation of the African people and of the African man our chief preoccupation, because we want Africa with all her prerogatives to liberty and dignity, after recovering full sovereignty, to assert her whole personality and *become an African Africa*” (Touré 1963: 11). Again, he has stated that he is committed to “scientific socialism” only to the extent that “scientific socialism” as a science conforms to societal realities and not the other way round. Marxism, he admits, “has served to mobilize the African peoples and particularly the working class ... towards success,” but it should be “shorn of those characteristics which do not correspond to the African reality” (A.S. Touré quoted in Omi&Anyanwu 1981: 334).

In an effort to underline the distinctiveness of his brand of socialism, Touré adopts the term “communaucracy,” a term used to express the fraternity and solidarity inherent in traditional Africa, upon which Touré aims to build the post-colonial Guinea.

As he writes: “Our Solidarity, better known under its aspect of social fraternity, the preeminence of group interests over personal interests, the sense of common responsibilities, the practice of formal democracy which rules and governs our village life – all of which constitutes the basis of our society – that is what forms what we call ‘our communaucratic realities’” (Ibid.: 343).

Like all proponents of African socialism, Touré is a fan of the traditional African culture and its “communaucratic” features that ensure that individual interests are always subordinated to communal interests.

His denunciation of capitalism might perhaps be seen against the background of capitalism’s promotion of private interest, something Touré sees as incongruent with Africa’s “communaucratic” culture. He not only sees capitalism as irreconcilable with Africa’s ideals, but also maintains that it played a big role in the exploitation and impoverishment of Africa through colonialism. Touré describes this exploitative pattern vividly and in unambiguous terms: “The colonial system took our goods at a very paltry price and sold them at a very high price.

The profits ... did not go to the producers who were the real creators, the true owners of the products; they went through many middlemen ... into the cash boxes of the colonialists” (Touré 1959: 39). He condemns this exploitative system in strong terms. Touré associates capitalism with imperialism, and staged an epic resistance against French imperialism, a fight that culminated in the independence of Guinea in 1958. It is noteworthy that Guinea became the first French African state to gain independence – thanks to Touré aversion for capitalism and imperialism.

Touré’s species of “African Socialism” is closely linked with Pan-Africanism. Among the first crop of African Postcolonial elite, Touré and Nkrumah demonstrated the most passion in the Pan-African project. This passion for the Pan-African enterprise reflects itself in the broad claims he makes to this effect. To him, “Pan-Africanism is not founded on the will of some States;” rather, it is “essentially founded on Africa of peoples, peoples who cover entirely the geographical boundaries of our continent and overflows towards the Americas” (Touré 1978: 174). This broad scope to Pan-Africanism gives expression to his belief that, in the definition of Africa, emphasis should be laid on “the primacy of people” rather than geographical boundaries of states (Ibid.: 175). For, he is a firm believer in a unified “African culture,” a fact that must be asserted as a means to combat the divisive tendency that sacrifices Africa’s larger interests at the altar of parochial interests. Touré strongly criticizes those who settle for parochialism, denouncing their logic as “paltry argument which does not manage, for conscious minds, to disguise the nature of duplicity to which they sacrifice the major interests of Africa” (Ibid.: 151).

As president, Touré sustained his 26-year regime with political recklessness and sheer autocracy, despite his nice rhetoric of “African Socialism.” At the time of his death in 1984 he was the longest sit-tight leader in Africa south of the Sahara. The party, PDG (Democratic Party of Guinea), served as the propaganda machine, through which he enforced his ideology, guised under such euphemisms as “African socialism,” “culture,” “fraternity,” etc. One observes a similar pattern in both Nkrumah and Nyerere – namely, authoritarianism disguised in rhetoric. I shall elaborate on this later.

Having discussed in a nutshell the most important features of “African Socialism,” as conceived by Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré, it is germane at this point to present Kwasi Wiredu’s critique of Marxism.

Wiredu’s Critique of Marxism

Wiredu’s opus magnum, *Philosophy and an African Culture* (abbreviated as PAC in this paper) was published in 1980. The work is a collection of essays, each of which now constitutes a chapter of the book. Two of these essays, “Marxism, Philosophy and Ideology” and “In Praise of Utopianism” are exclusively devoted to the critique of Marxism.

However, Wiredu also makes several remarks in other parts of his book that demonstrate his critical outlook towards Marxism. I consider Wiredu's critique of Marxism significant for African philosophy precisely because of its iconoclastic standing in the Cold War era, a period when political Marxism was still waxing strong, and Marxism-Socialism was, as it were, the default intellectual and ideological outlook among African scholars. I shall outline, in what follows, the main points of Wiredu's critique of Marxism in PAC, while bringing in relevant ideas and remarks from other works of his.

Wiredu clearly announces the major aims of his critique as that of providing "the fundamental explanation of the tendency to authoritarianism hitherto noted in many Marxist regimes" (PAC p. 86). He frowns at this "tendency to authoritarianism," and locates the root of it in the theoretical foundations of Marxism, with its conception of truth, philosophy, ideology and morality.

He begins by investigating the notion of truth in Marxism with a view to establishing how its idea of *absolute truth* would lend itself to authoritarian interpretations. In chronicling the evolution of the notion of absolute truth in Marxist philosophy, he first recognizes that, for a long time, Marxist philosophy had maintained a 'healthier' conception of truth, whereby the idea of *absolute truth* was unequivocally rejected. Marx and Engels had recognized the limitation of all acquired knowledge, hanging their disavowal of the idea of absolute truth on this limitation. Wiredu applauds this view, referring to it as "beautifully humanistic" (PAC, p. 66).

Tragically, Marxist philosophy, Wiredu observes, would soon deviate from this "humanistic" rejection of the idea of an absolute truth to an arrogant self-endorsement as the *absolute truth*. Wiredu chronicles this gradual departure from the "humanistic" conception of truth to an authoritarian stance that reaches its climax in Lenin: "By the time we reach Lenin a kind of epistemological absolutism has unmistakably set in. Engels himself, never perfectly consistent, already compromises his conception of truth by making some concessions in *Anti-Düring*" (PAC, p. 68). For, as Engels famously maintains in a passage in *Anti-Düring*:

But in spite of all these, are there any truths which are so securely based that any doubt seems to us to be tantamount to insanity? That twice two makes four, that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right-angles, that Paris is in France, that a man who gets no food dies of hunger, and so forth? Are there then nevertheless eternal truths, final and ultimate truth? Certainly, there are (Engels 1962: 122).

In the same *Anti-Düring*, Engels similarly allows certain items he considers "platitudes and commonplaces" to pass for absolute truths. Engels' "platitudes and commonplaces" that must presumably be taken for granted include such propositions as: "Men cannot live except by labor," "There are rulers and the ruled," "Napoleon died on May 5, 1821" (Ibid.: 125). While it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which Engels would give up his earlier skepticism about the existence of absolute truth, Wiredu unmistakably pinpoints Engel's greater disposition towards the idea of absolute truths, and associates this with a corresponding zeal to put Marxism at par with positive sciences.

Engels would accord the status of absolute truth to knowledge obtained through the procedure of the exact sciences. He argues: “It can be asserted that certain results attained by these sciences are known as eternal truths, final and ultimate truths; for which reason these sciences are known as the exact sciences” (Ibid.: 123).

The problem Wiredu finds with Engels’ increasing obsession with scientific exactness is that it would inspire the likes of Lenin to affirm rather fanatically that “Human thought then by its nature is capable of giving, and does give, absolute truth” (Lenin 1947: 313). This obvious endorsement of absolute truths paved the way for the lofty claim that the Marxist doctrine is objective and scientific – and therefore an “ultimate truth” (PAC, p. 69). Marxism would appropriate for itself the title of veritable science of society, able to capture society as it really is. This means that the ‘truths’ of Marxism would be considered as accurate as those of the exact sciences. Wiredu finds this rather dangerous. “One thing is clear,” he laments, “with Lenin, truth has recaptured its possibilities for authoritarian use” (PAC, p.70). And, in a chapter captioned “Truth as Opinion,” he further avers that “The concept of absolute truth appears to have a tendency to facilitate dogmatism and fanaticism which lead, in religion and politics, to authoritarianism and, more generally, to oppression” (PAC, p 122).

The reason Wiredu takes exception to any form of endorsement of absolute truth is not far-fetched. He canvasses for a recognition of the multi-dimensionality of truth. He invites us to draw some lessons from his local Akan language in which “there is no one word ... for truth” (Wiredu in Bodurin 1985: 46). The fact that the Akan have many words for truth buttresses the point that truth is essentially multi-dimensional. This opens up the possibility of wide-ranging interpretations of truth and reality, without privileging only one single interpretation. More importantly, Wiredu has famously defended the idea of truth as *opinion*. Two articles, which respectively constitute chapters eight and eleven of *Philosophy and an African Culture*, have been dedicated to this thesis: “Truth as Opinion” and “In Defense of Opinion.” At first value, one might be put off by the term “opinion” which seems to promote relativism. For Wiredu, there is more to “opinion” than meets the eye. He strongly argues that, though he abhors a rigid notion of truth on the one hand, he does not on the other hand approve of relativism. For him, “opinion” has a “weak” sense and a “strong” sense; the realm of truth belongs to the strong sense of “opinion.” Even Odera Oruka, his major detractor on this thesis of truth as “opinion,” writes quite endearingly about this distinction:

Prof. Wiredu distinguishes between the weak sense and the strong sense of an opinion. The former has to do with belief, opinion and judgment in which the evidence is scanty and therefore held only with a doubtful or uncertain conviction. In the latter sense, opinion equates with a view or judgment maintained with full certainty or as an outcome of a systematic mental effort. In the strong sense, therefore, Wiredu considers opinion as a thought advanced with full assurance from a particular point of view. He refers to this sort of opinion as a “considered opinion” (Oruka 1988: 3).

The reader should note how Wiredu carefully maintains a delicate position that rejects relativism but disavows absolutism at the same time. For Wiredu, truth is not weak and flimsy; indeed, it is a reasoned “mental effort” and must be well-thought-out. Though a product of a rational process, no opinion should be held dogmatically, for it is at best a “considered opinion,” a point of view. This point markedly distinguishes Wiredu position from Marxism, which passes itself off as an absolute truth and not just a point of view.

Besides the idea of *absolute truth*, Wiredu criticizes the concept of *ideology* in Marxism. Not only does he see the two as reinforcing each other, he also sees Marxism’s concept of ideology as a factor that accounts for its authoritarian tendency. He provides a brief ‘genealogy’ of the term “ideology” in Marxist literature in order to show how it has come to take on an overall negative connotation among Marxists. It has become, for Marxists, a byword for anything that is thought to be false, deceptive, illusory, unscientific and irrational. There is a general polemical air that accompanies its usage, especially when employed in the critique of the bourgeois-capitalist society: “An ideology, for Marx, is a system of beliefs and attitudes that distort reality, and that result from social forces, characteristic of class societies, having no tendency to bring ideas in line with reality” (Miller 1984: 45). Sometimes, it serves as a self-justificatory tool to reassert the ‘scientific’ status of Marxism in contrast with other social disciplines that allegedly do not stand the test of ‘scientific’ rigor. At other times, it is used in a radical manner to describe every other method of studying society outside Marxism. As H.N. Drucker observes,

It is well known that Marx characterized all thinking prior to his own – and not only bourgeois thinking – as ideological. By way of contrast, his own thinking was ‘scientific’. Characteristically, he offers in the preface to the *German Ideology* to exorcise the “phantoms” from men’s minds. Later he lumps all these phantoms together under the heading of ideology (Drucker in *Philosophy* 1972: 157).

Religion, politics, morality, all pre-Marxian economics come under the term “ideology” which now takes on a pejorative connotation. Even philosophy is not spared. As “ideology,” Marx and Engels regard philosophy as an empty talk, mere speculations and abstractions about consciousness, out of touch with reality, for “When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses its medium of existence” (Marx & Engels 1983: 48). For all practical purposes, “ideology” for Marxists has come to represent anything that they do not approve of.

Now, Wiredu disapproves of this self-righteous, intolerant tinge to the Marxist understanding of “ideology.” He tries to expose the fact that Marxism itself has an ideological character, despite all pretensions to the contrary. “If all philosophical thinking is ideological,” Wiredu argues, referring to Marx and Engels, “then their own philosophical thinking is ideological and, by their hypothesis, false” (PAC, p.76).

He invites us to concede for a moment that Marxism, despite being “recognizably philosophical,” is exempted from being ideological, based on its claim to being “scientific.” To this, Wiredu retorts, “To say that a proposition is scientific is not necessarily to say that it is true” (PAC, p.75). To say that a proposition is “scientific” is not necessarily a truth-claim, but just a statement of the procedure through which it is arrived at, namely, the scientific method.

Wiredu reasons – and rightly so – that this Marxist arrogance in designating anything outside of itself as “ideological” and “unscientific” (in their own terms) is a recipe for authoritarianism. Absolutely convinced that they hold the objective, ‘non-ideological’ truth while others wallow in error, Marxists have no qualms whatsoever imposing this “truth” on the masses wherever they hold political power: “One can be sure that when it comes to impressing upon the masses the absolute nature of the objective truth corresponding to scientific socialism all thoughts of its ‘relativity’ would be shelved” (PAC, p. 70). There would be no chance for alternative facts when a given position has been declared the “absolute truth.”

Another area Wiredu explores in his critique of Marxism is morality. On Wiredu’s view, Marxism is a decidedly “amoral” system, hardly interested in moral questions and providing little or no clear moral compass to its adherents. He suggests that the reason for the lack of interest in moral questions is that morality is considered by Marxists as belonging to the sphere of “ideology” which only serves class interests. As a mere social epiphenomenon, morality would certainly become useless at the dawn of the *classless society* envisioned by Marx and Engels. Wiredu’s verdict finds apparent justifications in Marxist texts. In *German Ideology*, for instance, Marx and Engels argue regarding morality: “The communists do not preach morality at all ... They do not put to people the moral demand: love one another, do not be egoists, etc.; on the contrary, they are very well aware that egoism, just as much as self-sacrifice, is in definite circumstances a necessary form of the self-assertion of individuals” (Marx & Engels 1983: 104-105). Similarly, Marx has attacked some ‘traditional’ political and ethical categories of ‘correctness’ in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*, refusing to give them any place in the ranks of party members. For instance, the notions of “equal right” and “fair distribution” are considered a “crime” not to be imposed on their Party because they are “dogmas, ideas which in a certain period had some meaning but have become obsolete verbal rubbish ... ideological nonsense about right and other trash so common among the Democrats and French Socialists” (Marx & Engels 1959: 119-120).

Wiredu, therefore, criticizes what he calls “ambiguous amoralism” in Marxism, insisting that “it has led to some of the most unattractive features of communist and pro-communist tactics” (PAC, p. 79). Vittorio Hösle argues that totalitarianism could be one of such inevitable “unattractive features” of a system that provides no moral compass. He has this to say regarding Marx:

“Even the true foundational problems of ethics remained foreign to him. He made contributions to normative political theory only in his early work, while ignoring liberalism’s lasting insights on the necessity of separation of powers, indeed sweeping them aside as ideological – and to that extent he at least favored through an enormous sin of omission, the rise of totalitarianism” (Hösle 2013: 140).

Wiredu is as much concerned about totalitarianism as he is about general recklessness that could result from this lack of moral guide on the part of Marx and his followers. He is worried that without a fundamental ethical principle, a system that has set for itself the goal of enthroning the proletariat and dethroning the bourgeoisie could resort to – and has often resorted to – morally reprehensible means. For him, the silence of Marxists on moral issues raises the question as to the principle upon which moral choices or discriminations might be made. And even in communist or socialist society, questions would still be raised about the “the basis of the morality that should govern inter-personal relations,” and other practical moral issues (PAC, p.80).

There is yet another aspect of Marxism that Wiredu explores in his critique. It borders on the presence of fallacies in the core Marxist claims. One of such fallacies, according to Wiredu, is the assumption that the three fundamental components of the Marxist theory, namely, dialectical materialism, historical materialism and scientific socialism are inextricably linked. Wiredu points out that these key components are not necessarily connected, and to try to link them would involve fallacies and unwarranted logical leaps: “This fallacy consists in the false supposition that a doctrine which claims to state the general nature of existence can *logically* imply a scheme of valuation, which is what scientific socialism is, in part” (PAC, p. 83). He reasons that “dialectical materialism” is essentially a doctrine about nature. For it is essentially a doctrine that posits the primacy of matter over mind or spirit. In turn, “historical materialism” is a doctrine which holds that material economic forces are the key drivers of history. He therefore wonders how a mere doctrine about matter in its neutral sense would be necessarily tied to a doctrine about matter in its evaluative sense (PAC, p. 84).

In the same vein, there is no necessary connection, in Wiredu’s view, between the idea that material economic forces are the determinants of history (i.e. “historical materialism”) and the judgment that the movement of history so determined will inexorably lead to communism-socialism, and that this form of social arrangement is the ideal for society:

As for the automatic jump from historical materialism to scientific socialism, why, if material factors are the most determinative in history, must it be true, simply in virtue of that supposed fact, that capitalism will break down, or that socialism is good? Is it not logically consistent to say both that the material factor is the most important in human history and that capitalism will go from strength to strength? (PAC p. 86).

In the above citation, Wiredu not only challenges the “automatic jump” to socialism, he also questions the unsubstantiated faith in socialism as the “best mode of social and economic organization” (PAC, p. 84). For it is one thing to predict the advent of communism-socialism and yet another thing to hold that it is the best form of societal organization.

In the essay, “In Praise of Utopianism,” Wiredu pointedly refers to Marxism as a species of utopianism. Though he finds nothing essentially wrong with lofty social ideals, Wiredu thinks that there is something rather unrealistic about the claims and promises of Marxist socialism. He makes a particular reference in this regard to the socialist dreams of an entirely classless society, the eradication of wage-labor, etc. The “curious ambivalence,” as he calls it, of the above Marxist claims contributed to the general “disrepute which has overtaken utopianism” (PAC, p. 90).

As we shall see, the immediate postcolonial elite of Africa, especially Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré, fell for the ‘utopian’ fallacy that socialism guarantees the best possible world. This was a historical mistake whose hangovers Africa is perhaps yet to recover from.

Having discussed the key elements of “African Socialism” as conceived by Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré, and detailed Wiredu’s critique of Marxism, the ground has sufficiently been cleared for a critique of “African Socialism” on the basis of the issues raised by Wiredu in his critique of Marxism.

A Critique of “African Socialism” on the Basis of Wiredu’s Critique of Marxism

My task in this section is to render a critique of “African Socialism,” as conceived and implemented by Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré, using the framework of Wiredu’s Critique of Marxism. To do this, I shall draw on the most salient points in Wiredu’s critique of Marxism. These include the notions of a) truth, b) ideology, c) morality and d) the claim that “African Socialism” is a ‘perfect’ system for Africa. My critique will explore these notions, and will make reference to concrete policies insofar as the policies are directly influenced by the theoretical understanding of these notions. Indeed, ideas and policies are quite inseparable when the proponents of such ideas are people who possess actual political powers. Before I go further, it is germane to make this point clear: the critique I shall outline, insofar as they target the philosophical foundations of “African Socialism,” are not meant to tarnish the image of the three leaders nor are they intended to diminish some of the positive pioneering roles they played in the politics of their various countries. Perhaps the deterioration of the overall quality of leadership in contemporary Africa might even make one look at the days of these three philosopher-leaders with a justifiable nostalgia, their imperfections notwithstanding. Having made these clarifications, let us confront the issues head-on.

From our presentation of “African Socialism” in Section One, the Marxist influence on Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré is easily discernible. They have, in varying degrees, acknowledged this influence. However, they are always quick to point out how ‘special’ their theories are, by exploiting the adjective “African” in various ways to underscore this presumed ‘uniqueness.’ The reference to “Africa” has craftily been used as a disclaimer for dissociating their systems from any negative aspects of Marxism, both in theory and in practice. One notices a general attitude of ‘self-righteousness’ in their claims. Applying the issues raised in Wiredu’s critique of Marxism to these three philosopher-kings is, therefore, an important way of challenging their exonerating claims vis-à-vis the theory and practice of “African Socialism.” I show that “African Socialism,” as propagated and practiced by Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré, is not free from the same weaknesses identified by Kwasi Wiredu against Marxism. I argue that all the claims, by the proponents of “African Socialism,” of its being “humanistic,” humane, pro-masses, and “revolutionary” are perhaps disingenuous pretenses meant to obscure the ugly realities of the system. My position finds appropriate support in the following citation, where Wiredu himself takes on African leaders, especially those of “Marxist” persuasion:

I have never ceased to be puzzled, amazed, and disheartened by the total insensitivity to the problem of political inequality on the part of many people who claim to be Marxists. On our own continent examples are not scarce of socialist politicians who have sought and obtained power on the platform of the well-being of the ‘poor and oppressed’ and have thereupon proceeded to set up dictatorships not *of* the proletariat – for that is a figurative contradiction, in any case – but *over* the proletariat. Since in Africa political power often means easy wealth, their egalitarian slogans are revealed to be doubly hollow (PAC, p. 95).

Here, Wiredu exposes the hypocrisy of these leaders who do not practise what they preach, thereby contradicting their much-vaunted “revolutionary” manifestoes. It is important to note right away that Kwasi Wiredu adopts an overall critical stance towards African Marxists. He criticizes Nkrumah, his own president, whose Marxist style he judges to have failed Ghana. “Ghana benefited little from Nkrumah’s Marxism,” he remarks (Wiredu 1996: 151). Elsewhere, he excuses any contemporary African philosopher who might express some “mixed feelings” regarding the activities of the immediate post-colonial Marxist philosopher-kings (Ibid.: 146).

Therefore, the critique of “African Socialism” I shall outline in what follows finds its basis and justification in Wiredu’s overall philosophical posture. The revelations, facts and arguments I present will surely validate his own verdict.

As we saw in the preceding section, one of the central issues Wiredu has with the Marxist theory is that it lends itself all too frequently to authoritarian interpretations. In this respect, I wish to point out that the three philosopher-presidents under consideration fit properly into the authoritarian category. The three figures display and embody all the features identified by Wiredu as accounting for authoritarian propensity.

Truth

On the notion of truth, Wiredu points out that dogmatism, a fanatical attachment to one's own theories and ideas as though they were the *absolute truth*, frequently leads to authoritarianism. In his critique of Marxism, he had associated dogmatism with the Marxist claim that their system offers the most perfect and scientific way of studying society. In the same vein, the three leaders displayed an opinionated and fanatical attitude towards their versions of "African Socialism," and tried to force their ideas down the throats of the masses through brutal ideological means. As leaders, Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré thought they knew what was best for their people – hence the people should not object to what was considered 'good' for them. Nkrumah, for instance, maintains that "The true welfare of a people does not admit of compromise" (Nkrumah 1970: 103). Nyerere and Touré adopt a similar "uncompromising" stance when they pontificate on what they take to be the "true welfare" of the people. When Nyerere declared that "All land now belongs to the nation," effectively decreeing state ownership of land, he justified it by suggesting that it was 'good' for them, claiming further that it "was not an affront to our people it was the concept of freehold which had been foreign to them" (Nyerere 1968: 84-85). What should not be missed out is the streak of 'messianism' that accompanies their epistemological dogmatism. This 'messianic' thinking consists in the belief that only their views could save the people, who otherwise would presumably be directionless like sheep without a shepherd.

There would, therefore, be one 'truth' which necessarily corresponds with the leader's version of "African Socialism." And because this 'truth' is at the same time the only 'good' for the people, it does not admit of dissent. It is no surprise that the three leaders are strong advocates of "democratic centralism". In Section One, I showed how Nkrumah argued that a society could decide to "centralize" its "instruments of coercion." He would soon explicitly endorse and justify this "centralization" and "coercion."

Coercion could unfortunately be rather painful, but it is signally effective in ensuring that individual behavior does not become dangerously irresponsible. The individual is not an anarchic unit. He lives in orderly surroundings, and the achieving of these orderly surroundings calls for methods both explicit and subtle (Nkrumah 1970: 66).

The above citation reinforces the point that dissenters are viewed with suspicion and branded "dangerously irresponsible." As a matter of fact, the tyranny that marked Nkrumah's administration is explainable in terms of a mindset that wants to "centralize coercion" and is suspicious of dissent. In his book on the social and political thoughts of Nkrumah, Ama Biney outlines a number of epithets used to describe Nkrumah's tyranny, some of which include "the Leninist Czar," "the Bonapartist benefactor" and the "tyrannical megalomaniac" (Biney 2011: 5).

The situation is not different with Nyerere and Touré regarding the use of “centralized coercion” and brutality to enforce what they believed to be ‘true’ and ‘right’. For example, the villagization policy of Nyerere mentioned in Section One was enforced with coercion and brutality. People were not convinced of the need to live in the *Ujamaa Vijijini* (socialist villages); they were simply uprooted and forced to live and farm there. Michael Jennings, who conducted a detailed research on Nyerere’s Tanzania, notes “the use of police and military troupes in resettling families” (Jennings 2008: 172). The reader should not miss the point that Nyerere’s brutal policies were directly influenced by his theoretical belief that his version of “African Socialism” has the monopoly of truth. A leader who believes that he possesses a monopoly of truth would have a hard time making the masses key into his policies. He would only resort to “centralized coercion” in order to achieve his aims. From a theoretical standpoint, subscribing to “centralized coercion” is deplorable; using it on the practical level could lead to failures. In turn, Touré’s brutality knew no bounds; everybody had to be coerced into his ‘truths’. Of the three leaders, he was noted to be the most ruthless. Lansiné Kaba, a renowned scholar and historian of Sekou Touré’s Guinea, provides a detailed picture of Touré’s administration. This deserves a lengthier reference.

Guineans are denied such basic rights as freedom of expression and travel. To criticize Touré’s reports is considered a counter-revolutionary move, and leads to imprisonment, as it did in the case of Balla Camara, an able administrator arrested at a conference in 1969, and later condemned to death...To make a public speech without quoting Touré is seen as a sign of intellectualism contrary to revolutionary ideals, and hence endangers your promotion, if not your life. The failure by a student to show a mastery of the President’s theories by large quotations of his philosophical and poetic works leads to academic failures (Kaba 1976: 32).

True to type, Touré uses the term “counter-revolutionary” as a weapon to intimidate opponents and suppress dissent. The implication here is that the President’s standpoint is a “revolutionary” one which embodies all that is good for the people. Hence, anyone who opposes it is automatically an enemy of the state. As “revolutionary”, this standpoint had to be memorized and quoted by students – on the pain of academic failure – as evidence that they keyed into it.

I have made the point that “African Socialism” of the brands of Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré claims to have a monopoly of truth, an idea that has, in turn, led to their authoritarian tendencies. It should be recalled that Wiredu makes a similar observation in the preceding section regarding Marxism when he said that “with Lenin, truth has recaptured the possibilities for authoritarian use” (PAC, p. 70). A further proof of this monopoly of “truth” and its subjection to “authoritarian use” is the fact that these three leaders ran a one-party state. Wiredu frowns at this state of affairs in a veiled remark that was most likely directed at the three leaders: “Meanwhile, on the political side, a highly democratic one party system is established that will brook criticism.

Incidentally, the opposite of subversive criticism is something described as ‘constructive criticism’, which, contrary to what a naïve student of political terminology might imagine, consists of an amply worded recognition of the noble and infallible achievements of the revolutionary leaders of the party” (PAC, p. 97). “Constructive criticism” is here used in a pejorative way to underline the irony of having the ruling party peopled with praise singers and cheerleaders, who only fawned on the president. Nkrumah had his CPP (Convention People’s Congress); Nyerere had his TANU (Tanganyika African National Union); Touré had his PDG (Parti Démocratique de Guinée). They were supreme leaders of these parties, and the policies of these parties were, for all practical purposes, their personal policies. (In fact, Sékou Touré personally wrote the Constitution and Manifesto of PDG). Furthermore, the belief that they were the repository of “truth,” and that no other person was qualified to rule, most likely explains the propensity for being sit-tight leaders. Only death could remove Touré from office after ruling for twenty-six long years; Nyerere ruled for twenty-four years; Nkrumah would have gone that long, had he not been forced out by a coup when the people found his tyranny intolerable.

Ideology

I now turn my attention to the issue of ideology, again using Wiredu’s critique of Marxism as a framework that underlines the authoritarianism I have likewise identified in the three African socialists. It should be recalled that, in the last section, Wiredu declares that Marxism is itself ideological, despite the habit among Marxists of regarding almost any idea different from Marxism as “ideological.” The self-righteous habit of calling other ideas “ideological” seems to provide Marxists with enough reason to be intolerant of such ideas. Now, one notices a similar attitude among the three champions of “African Socialism” under consideration. They demonstrate extreme aversion for other ideas outside of theirs, also branding them “ideological” or “counter-revolutionary” (since they perceive theirs to be the only “revolutionary” ideas). And being men of authority, they went ahead to persecute those who held “ideological” or “counter-revolutionary” opinions.

We see this intolerance of other ‘ideologies’ in their scathing attack on capitalism and liberal democracy – and this is typical of leaders who draw some inspiration from Marxism. Nkrumah has no good word for capitalism. For him, capitalism is ideological and represents all that is negative about society. He sees capitalism as intrinsically “unjust” (Nkrumah 1970: 76) and characterized by “unfeeling competition and pursuit of supremacy” (Ibid.: 50). For this reason, he thinks capitalism would be utterly destructive to the newly-independent countries of Africa. Nkrumah views liberal democracy, on the one hand, as “bourgeois ideology” while socialism and communism are seen, on the other hand, as “ideologies of the working class, and reflect its aspirations and politico-economic institutions and organizations” (Nkrumah 1970b: 23). Nyerere and Touré were never tired of cautioning citizens against the risk or temptation of developing a ‘capitalist mindset,’ and never failed to identify and punish those perceived to harbor such a ‘dangerous’ mindset.

I propose here that the habitual demonization of capitalism or any other opposing ideas itself served as an ideological tool. An ideology cannot take root in a people if all opposing ideas are not destroyed or sufficiently demonized and the proponents of such ideas treated as lepers. This was the case in Ghana, Tanzania and Guinea. The party members of the one-party states ran by Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré were propaganda mercenaries, employed to advance the ideologies of the party. Wiredu points out the ideological role of the “one-party environment” in a direct reference to these three leaders in his *Cultural Universals and Particulars*.

But how were the philosophies of our philosopher-kings disseminated in their respective countries? In trying to answer this question one is painfully conscious of a certain encompassing negativity. As is well known or can otherwise easily be verified, the process usually took the form of sloganized propagation by a party machine in a one-party environment in which dissent was equated with subversion. This was true in Tanzania, notwithstanding all the noble and kindly appearances to the contrary, as it was in Ghana or Guinea (Wiredu 1996: 146).

It is no coincidence that Wiredu clearly mentions Tanzania, Ghana and Guinea, countries ruled by the three leaders. Their ‘philosophies’ were propagated as slogans and imposed upon the people through the propaganda machinery of a one-party set-up.

Indeed, each of the three leaders took very radical steps in entrenching their ideologies. Let me briefly examine these steps. In 1961 Kwame Nkrumah established the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute (KNII). In a speech delivered at the inauguration of KNII, Nkrumah publicly declared the agenda behind the establishment of the Institute: to create a “great monolithic party,” whose members are composed of potential alumni of KNII, drawn from “members of the Central Committee to the lowest propagandist in the field” as well as “Party Vanguard activists, farmers, co-operators, trade unionists, and women organizers” (Nkrumah in Obeng 2009: 273-276). The major course orientation of KNII was “Nkrumahism.” Nkrumah’s aim of creating a “great monolithic party” is not to be played down, for he effectively made the Convention People’s Party (CPP) a “monolith” in 1964. The road towards this goal of a “monolithic party” was most probably cleared by the ideological activities of KNII, because it later became mandatory for civil servants and students entering college to pass through a two-week ideological orientation at KNII.

A similar pattern could be observed in Nyerere. He was equally obsessed with entrenching his ideology. The TANU party played an important role in this regard. TANU has been referred to as “the *institutionalized ideology*, which step by step politicizes the whole society, spreading the socialist attitudes” (Boesen *et al* 1977: 13). Again, the enforcement of Swahili as the national language played an all-important role. While there is nothing wrong for a country to adopt an indigenous language while rejecting English and other colonial languages, the ideological reasons behind it was far more than meets the eye.

For Nyerere, Swahili was an instrument of conceptual uniformity and ideological conformity. The very concept of *Ujamaa* was much more than a call to unity and brotherhood; it was indeed ideologically loaded. The ideological significance of the concept of *Ujamaa* has been underscored in the following remark by J. Boesen *et al*:

When President Nyerere of Tanzania first identified his ideology of Tanzanian socialism with the *ujamaa* concept it still had strong traditionalist connotations. But as it developed over the years and was translated into actual policies these connotations have tended to disappear and *ujamaa* is now almost exclusively understood to mean the contemporary Tanzanian socialist ideology and policies, with a strong emphasis on state-controlled or collectivist production (Ibid.: 11).

The above remark recounts how *Ujamaa* morphed from a mere slogan for a return to Africa's traditional values into an ideological tool. At any rate, this buttresses my point that Nyerere's species of "African Socialism" is ideological in character.

With Touré, one sees an intolerantly ideological application of the term "counter-revolutionary." I have earlier shown how the term, "revolutionary," served to confer on Touré's own ideas the status of "truth" that must be memorized. But this was so because there was an ideology to be advanced. That ideology was presumably "revolutionary," and all citizens were required to key into it. In an article titled "The Cultural Revolution, Artistic Creativity, and Freedom of Expression in Guinea," Lansiné Kaba recalls that the term "counter-revolutionary" was used by Touré to victimize Guinean intellectuals critical of his regime. He saw intellectuals who did not subscribe to his ideology as a threat: "To Touré, every educated Guinean is primarily an individual with political ambitions, and hence a possible competitor and traitor" (Kaba 1976: 213). The famous Guinean intellectuals, Camara Laye and Fodéba Keita, would belong to this class of "counter-revolutionaries," a designation which culminated in the exile of the former and the arrest and death of the latter. The point I am trying to establish is that Touré had an obvious ideological agenda under the cover of a "revolution," an agenda or "revolution" that did not want to be compromised by any "counter-revolution." Sometimes, Touré disguises his ideological warfare under the name of "cultural revolution," as the above-mentioned title of Kaba's work highlights. The so-called "cultural revolution" was nothing more than a massive conformity to the ideas, lifestyle and even mannerisms of Touré himself; it consisted in "dressing like the President, speaking like him, writing pamphlets in his honor, ending letters and answering the telephone with 'Pret pour la révolution' instead of the old formulae of courtesy" (Ibid.: 212). Even the sloganized notion of "revolutionary literature" was nothing over and above discourses that "effectively ventriloquized the omnipresent leader," to use Dominic Thomas's expression (Thomas 2002: 37).

There is no gainsaying that the foregoing issues that have been discussed – namely, high-handedness, brutality, intolerance, political dishonesty, propaganda, etc. – touch upon the question of morality. From the moral standpoint, they should be considered deplorable. Before making any further moral evaluations, I wish to refresh the reader’s mind on what Wiredu says about Marxism vis-à-vis the question of morality – and this is consistent with our overall aim of using Wiredu’s critique as a framework.

Morality

In Section Two, we saw how Wiredu accuses the Marxist system of “ambiguous amoralism,” pointing out how this moral apathy and, sometimes an outright rejection of morality, provided fodder for abuse of power in Marxist regimes. He cites where Marx and Engels call the traditional political and ethical concerns about equal right and fair distribution “obsolete verbal rubbish” and “ideological nonsense.” Marx and Engels had also urged committed communists not to “preach morality” or make moral demands like “love one another,” “do not be egoists,” as certain circumstances dictate when egoism is “necessary” and when self-sacrifice might be convenient (Engels & Marx 1983: 104-105). Wiredu would see this line of reasoning that makes moral choices a matter of expedience as a symptom of a lack of moral compass.

Now, it would be dishonest to apply the same criticism of *moral indifference* to the three African philosopher-kings. On the contrary, they moralized a lot in their speeches and discourses. Each of them produced whole corpuses of rich, albeit self-righteous, moral guidelines for the citizenry. They had a common idiosyncrasy of discrediting “un-African,” especially Western, values, while urging the people to embrace the traditional values of Africa, painted in idealistic imageries. All of them pontificated on African “humanistic” values of solidarity, selflessness, truthfulness, brotherhood (*Ujamaa*, in Nyerere’s slogan), and cultural revolution. So, it would be wrong to say they were indifferent to moral questions. They are clearly not guilty of “amoralism” or moral indifference.

I contend, however, that their problem was that they operated with a ‘peculiar’ sense of morality, entirely subjective to them. Viewed from a different moral standpoint, their sense of morality might be considered rather warped. Expectedly, anything that fits into the so-called “revolutionary” agenda would be considered ‘moral’ and must be vigorously pursued in total disregard of what the masses feels about it. So, morality and justice now become a question of political expedience, in line with the ideals of the “revolution.” And because they thought that their preferences embodied the collective will and the general good of the people, they could employ morally reprehensible means to achieve whatever they wanted for the people. For instance, Ama Biney writes that Nkrumah believed he and his CPP “embodied the common aspirations of the nation as a whole.

If this was accepted, Nkrumah could not envisage the CPP acting against the interest of the people. Such a paternalistic concept of power and the people was inherent in his concept of CPP as the commoner's party" (Biney 2011: 98). It was never imagined that their actions could have been unfair or infringed upon the rights of some individuals or a whole people. They never felt any qualms sacrificing individual citizens on the altar of aggressive policies. This fact, once more, provides a good explanation for the poor human rights records in the regimes of the three philosopher-leaders. Again, it is easy to see how their idea of morality is intertwined with what has been said earlier regarding truth and ideology.

The mind-boggling corruption, nepotism, cronyism and misappropriation of public funds that marked their regimes are also condemnable, from the moral standpoint. One would have expected leaders who rose to power on the wings of 'messianic' promises of the people's absolute wellbeing to act accordingly. But the opposite was the case. As has earlier been suggested, the use of power for personal aggrandizement or self-enrichment, contrary to 'messianic' rhetoric of the pursuit of the people's primary wellbeing, is morally reprehensible. Our three philosopher-leaders (Nyerere in a less pronounced fashion) indeed epitomize such abuse of power. Hence, Wiredu unmistakably identifies the ugly phenomenon of nepotism in these leaders, and derides the practice of filling juicy positions in government corporations with cronies and party members. "So-called socialists, vociferous in championing the cause of the poor," he laments, "soon become part-time directors or full-time managers of government corporations with salaries and privileges to which any son of the bourgeoisie might aspire" (PAC, p. 97).

"African Socialism" and the Promise of a 'Perfect' African Society

I wish to explore one final point in the present critique: the question of whether "African Socialism" of the species of Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré really offers the hope of a 'paradise' for the African continent, as its advocates would have us believe. Our discussions so far have revealed the enormous faith the three leaders had in "African Socialism." The writings and political speeches of Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré portray leaders firmly convinced of the efficacy of their methods, summed up in the notion of "African Socialism," in fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of African people. Nkrumah does not mince words when he declares that "the restitution of Africa's humanist and egalitarian principles of society requires socialism" (Nkrumah 1970: 77).

Against the backdrop of this faith in "African Socialism," it has become imperative to pose the question as to the basis of this lofty hopes in the African socialist system. Wiredu, we could recall, asked a similar question regarding Marxism's equally lofty claim of being the "best mode of social and economic arrangement" (PAC, p. 84). So, could "African Socialism" possibly be the best form of socio-political and economic arrangement for Africa?

To address this question, I invite the reader to ignore for a moment the earlier criticisms I have leveled against its three most famous advocates – Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré. For, if we were to evaluate “African Socialism” on the grounds of the leadership scorecards of the three Presidents, the system would already be showing itself weak and unpromising. So, let us just assume that all the negative features earlier identified in the three leaders were mere accidental ‘abuses’, unconnected with the very essence of “African Socialism.”

Let us look at two core features of “African Socialism,” namely, the rejection of capitalism and the call for a re-appropriation of the communalistic lifestyle of traditional Africa and the attendant values of solidarity and fraternity. Now, would the rejection of capitalism and the re-appropriation of so-called ‘traditional’ African values, *per se*, guarantee an ideal society?

In the first place, I argue that it is impossible to fully recuperate pre-colonial attitudes and values, in the face of the ongoing ‘corrupting’ experience of cultural imperialism, modernity and globalization. Secondly, even if it were possible to fully return to the pre-colonial mindset, “African Socialism” would not *necessarily* offer a just and prosperous African society. For, the traditional (pre-colonial) African society was indeed far from being ‘perfect’. To be sure, it was not egalitarian; there existed social inequalities. Also, family feuds, inter-community wars and other social ills were rife. Communities and villages raided one another and the victors enslaved or sold off the vanquished (Nunn 2008: 142-143). In terms of prosperity, there was hardly an incontrovertible proof that pre-colonial Africa fared better than other parts of the world. Perhaps it would be more modest to maintain that the African pre-colonial order had its strengths as well as weaknesses. The foregoing argument, at least, serves to show that the past to which “African Socialism” seems to be summoning us may not be the best of all possible worlds, after all.

Conclusion

In the foregoing discourse, I have presented the key philosophical and political insights of Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré; they are insights which have a great deal of Marxist tinge. I outlined the main points of Kwasi Wiredu’s critique of Marxism, and thereupon launched a critique of the “African Socialism,” as espoused by three leaders, using the framework of Wiredu’s critique of Marxism.

I traced their intolerance, authoritarianism and administrative recklessness to their basic understanding of the philosophical notions of truth, ideology and morality.

Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré are not the only leaders guilty of high-handedness. It seems that the history of African politics since the dawn of independence in the 1960s has largely been a gory tale of different degrees of despotism. Chinua Achebe, the renowned Nigerian intellectual once famously declared that the “The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership” (Achebe 1983: 1).

The same is true of all African countries. Africa is not less endowed in natural and human resources than other parts of the world. In line with Achebe's verdict, I believe that the problem of the Continent is that of bad leadership. And the reason for this might be traceable to a political tradition whereby some leaders wrongly think that they have a monopoly of truth. Like Nkrumah, Nyerere and Touré, some of Africa's leaders still operate with the mentality that their ideas are "absolute truths," and should therefore not be challenged.

In a continent beset with such a fundamental challenge bordering on the notion of truth, it has, therefore, become imperative to explore and embrace Wiredu's idea of truth as "opinion." As earlier explained in Section Two, "opinion," for Wiredu, is always in the "strong" sense. It is not a weak and flimsy reason but a "considered opinion," which is a product of rational and often deliberative process. "Considered opinion" avoids the extremes of subjectivism, on the one hand, and opinionated dictatorship, on the other hand. "Considered opinion" recognizes that it does not possess a monopoly of wisdom. Interestingly, this beautiful idea is not alien to African people, since Wiredu derives it from his Akan background, where kinsmen sat together to deliberate on issues, none imposing his will on the other.

Wiredu's concept of truth as "opinion" presents us with a viable alternative to dictatorship. When fully explored and embraced, it could be an idea that might redeem Africa from the quagmire of bad leadership. Africa could build its democracy on this idea of truth as "opinion," whereby the divergent viewpoints of the citizenry are recognized and valued.

The present work has only laid the foundation. It is my sincere hope that future researchers, particularly of African extraction, mine more deeply into Wiredu's ideas, especially the possible use of his concept of truth to combat despotism in Africa. Wiredu's philosophy will contribute in no small measure to the development of the Continent.

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