

REORIENTATION OF NIGERIAN IDEOLOGIES

BY

Rt. Hon Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe,
Owelle of Onitsha.

Lecture Delivered in the
New Science Lecture Theatre,
on 9 December 1976, on the eve
of the launching of the Endowment Fund
at the Nsukka Campus of the University.



REORIENTATION OF NIGERIAN IDEOLOGIES

Lecture delivered by the Rt. Hon. Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, First Chancellor of the University of Nigeria, in the New Science Lecture Theatre, on 9 December 1976, on the eve of the launching of the Endowment Fund at the Nsukka Campus of the University.

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Sixteen years ago, this institution of higher learning was born, thanks to the humble palm oil, which supplied the initial revenue for founding the University of Nigeria and maintaining its essential services for five years. Now that this seat of learning has decided to inaugurate an endowment fund, I am greatly honoured to be numbered among other distinguished Nigerians to officiate on this historic occasion.

The launching of the endowment fund during this period of its rebirth and consolidation, should elicit a spontaneous and hearty response from friends and wellwishers, including its illustrious alumni and all who believe in the historic mission of Nigeria's "first fully-fledged and indigenous University". It is a challenge which must be accepted without hesitation, because our humble contributions will help to create an awareness of the intrinsic needs of the University in its efforts to realise its aims and objectives as "a repository of learning, conservator and defender of our culture and keeper of the national conscience."

One of the objectives of the University, as reaffirmed recently, is "to develop and promote indigenous culture." This harmonises with the views recently espoused by the Head of the Federal Military Government, Lieutenant-General Olusegun Obasanjo, that Nigerian Universities can influence our society by identifying themselves with it and endeavouring to improve the community in which they live.

In view of the prevailing dialogue on the need to define the ideological commitment of Nigeria, for the purpose of nation-building, I consider it timely to make a brief analysis of Nigerian ideologies and demonstrate their existence and the need for reorientation.

I disagree with the views of those who advocate a new ideology for Nigeria. They claim that since Nigeria has no ideology, it is necessary to fill this gap. In my humble opinion, this is not only an erroneous view but it is a misconception arising from palpable ignorance of cultural anthropology. No racial or linguistic or cultural group exists without an ideology. Nigeria is a nation which comprises homogenous racial, but heterogenous linguistic and cultural groups. Therefore, Nigeria has an ideology, if we appreciate the denotation and connotation of this terminology.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

What is an ideology? Let me offer three explanations, among others. First, it is a systematic body of concepts about human life or culture. Secondly, it is a manner of content of thinking characteristic of an individual or a group. Thirdly, it implies the integrated assertions, theories, and aims that constitute a sociological

programme. In other words, the complex of philosophical abstractions and sociological realities which express Nigerian epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, and eschatology constitute Nigerian ideology or what should be identified as Nigerianism.

To avoid ambiguity a definition of terms is pertinent. Since many people have been discussing this intriguing topic of "ideology," think for the sake of clarity, that I should enunciate precisely at I have at the back of my mind when I expound the need for re-orientating Nigerian ideologies.

"Reorientation" connotes an adaptation of principles and facts.

"Nigeria" means a macrocosm that is a complex of diverse language groups and multifarious cultures with a common racial identity.

"Nigerian" implies a microcosmic component of the macrocosm. That is, a member of a language group, or what is popularly described as a tribe of a clan.

"Atheism" means disbelief in the existence of God and rejection of all religious faith and practice.

"Authoritarianism" means blind submission to authority and includes concentration of power in one person as a leader or in an elite not constitutionally responsible to the people.

"Autocracy" means a government in which one person possesses and exercises absolute power.

"Deism" means a system of thought which advocates natural religion that is based on human reason rather than revelation and it emphasises morality in human relations.

"Democracy" means rule of a people by its majority inhabitants and includes a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation, usually involving periodically held free and fair elections.

"Eastern Democracies" means a 'Peoples Democracy' as practised by certain African Asian, European and Latin-American States, including Albania, Bulgaria, China, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, North Korea, North Vietnam, Poland, Rumania, USSR, Yugoslavia etc.

"Eclecticism" means a theory based on the selection of what appears to be best in various doctrines, methods or styles that is a composition of elements drawn from various sources.

"Egalitarianism" means a social philosophy which advocates the removal of inequalities among human beings and includes belief in human equality with respect to social, political and economic rights and privileges.

"Pantheism" means a religious doctrine that equates God with the forces and laws of the universe.

"Proletariat" means the lowest social or economic class of a community and includes industrial workers who lack their own means of production and sell their labour to live.

"Theism" means a belief in the existence of one God viewed as the creative source of man and the world.

This egalitarian concept and practice fosters social equality with certain specific discrimination against women. For example, they may not be political or religious heads; they may not be soldiers; they may not be members of certain titled societies exclusively reserved for menfolk. Apart from these deliberate disabilities, women exercise political and social rights on the basis of equality with men, other things being equal.

Turning to the Western and Eastern democracies, we note that in many instances, they foster discriminatory practices based on race, class, sex, religion and station in life, necessitating, as late as 1948, the promulgation of an international bill of rights. In other words, it took these enlightened nations about two thousand years before many of them adhered to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is regarded by the General Assembly as part of "the law of the United Nations.

In the sphere of economics, Nigerian economic ideology is welfarist in its purest form; what I choose to identify as proto-welfarism. It promotes the idea of material prosperity for Nigerians, according to the resources of each individual. Its objective is to guarantee to every Nigerian an element of economic security animated by the goodwill and humanitarianism of each kindred through the family as a unit of the clan. Motivated by the philosophy of live and let live, the socio-economic problems of Nigerian society are assumed by the elders, as trustees, who should find a practicable solution for its stability and survival.

As for the Western Democracies, with capitalism as their way of life, their economic ideology is based on the welfare of the individual, by making the rich richer and the poor poorer. The Eastern Democracies promote the material prosperity of the proletariat.

Nigerian jurisprudence depends upon the principle and practice of equity. It is based on the concept of settlement of disputes by conciliation. It emphasises the need for amicable settlement of disputes by mutual compromise. It discourages litigation which could lead to arbitration with its undesirable social consequences. In its operation, the machinery of Nigerian justice shuns technicalities but places more emphasis on redress, impartiality, reasonableness and fairplay. Instead of relying on cunning, wit, and subterfuge to administer justice, the pristine legal system of Nigeria seeks to prevent the perpetration of injustice and to enthrone equity, on the understanding that no person should be unjustly enriched or denied the elementary principles of natural justice or allowed to escape scotfree from the natural consequences of any criminal act committed.

The jurisprudence of the Western Democracies is based on fairplay and equity; nevertheless, it follows the rules of warfare and relies on technicalities not only to absolve prima facie criminals from punishment but to evade the just interpretation of the law strictly on merit, apart from other aberrations. The legal system of the Eastern Democracies compares favourably with ours but it is highly personalised in the almighty commissars and spiced with doctrinaire propaganda. I hope I will not be accused of prejudice in this respect.

Philosophically, Nigerians believe in the universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of Nigerians. Our philosophy is based on the concept that the spirit of our ancestors permeates the fabric of our society and should guide our thoughts and activities accordingly. In their pursuit of wisdom and search for truth, they rely more on experience than on reason. Their myths and folktales are functional and their superstition confounds logical thinking. But their proverbs rely on logic to influence their thought-processes since they are self-evident truths. Hence Nigerian philosophy has its fair share of paradoxes!

Nigerian religious ideology is animistic. It conceives God as the Great Spirit which pervades the universe, embracing the spirits of the dead, which invigorate the spirits of the living. The ancestral spirits serve as a link to reconcile the living with the dead. Thus Nigerian animism is a religion which emphasises the need to venerate our ancestors not only as the originators of our lives, traditions and mores, but also as the systematisers of our ethics and morals, to guide us to live the good life on earth as human beings, who are involved in a cyclical journey from the unknown to the unknown.

In practice, Nigerians grope for a reasonable answer to the problem of living, hoping that when death comes, they would join their ancestors wherever they may be in the universe or what is popularly identified in their folklore as the spirit world. Thus the veneration of the past as a lesson for the present and guide for the future, forms a corner-stone in our religious beliefs as animists. These discount the existence of a personal God. Nigerians are, therefore, deistic.

The Western Democracies are theistic in their religious concepts. Recalling the persecutions of the early Christians and the religious wars of the pre-Reformation period, I think it fair to assume that most European countries within the orbit of the Western Democracies embrace Christianity as their religion. They maintain that there exists a personal God, who intervenes in the laws of the universe. He knows all, sees all, is most powerful and pervades the whole cosmic space. On judgment day, the dead will resurrect and with the living they shall give an account of their stewardship. That is how the Athanasian and Nicene creeds explain this aspect of Christianity.

Certain oriental states which embrace the liberal democracy of the Western countries are pantheists but deistic in the sense that their pantheism is based mainly on ethical doctrines. I have in mind the devotees and adherents of Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism etc. India, Japan, Sri Lanka and Taiwan are examples. Of course, Islam as an oriental religion is theistic.

The Eastern Democracies are atheistic. They deny the existence of a personal God and regard material prosperity on earth as the summum bonum of life. They see religion as an opium to justify the oppression of the have-nots by the haves. Life would be meaningless if human beings must endure poverty and misery on earth, hoping against hope for Paradise. In their way of thinking, the strong would always prey on the weak, the wealthy would always exploit the poor, unless the latter marshal their energies and overthrow the status quo. They refuse to conceive of a God who created millions of poor people and allowed them to vegetate.

DIALECTIC AND DISPUTATION

I wonder whether the pundits who grope for a Nigerian ideology realise that no racial, linguistic or cultural group in Nigeria is without a systematic body of concepts about human life or culture? Do they appreciate that none of the above groups is bereft of culture, whose content of thinking is a characteristic? Do they know that the knowledge, values, morals and mores of the various racial, linguistic and cultural groups in Nigeria form integrated assertions, theories and aims which constitute the Nigerian way of life, that is Nigerianism?

If the above facts of ethnography are conceded, then the agitation for a Nigerian ideology is misconceived and misconstrued because it is misdirected the calculated to confound Nigerians and leave them under a misapprehension that they are culturally naked. It is an elementary fact of anthropology that no human society, primitive or sophisticated, is culturally naked. Therefore, what Nigeria needs is an ideological reorientation and not an ideological imposition.

In this cycle of cultural parallelism and diffusion, we can interpret what tantamounts to political, economic, social and religious ideology Nigeria wise. Politically, it is now obvious that, with minor exceptions, Nigerians are essentially democratic in their institutions. Economically, many Nigerians are welfarist, in that they own and share land in common, whilst they regard themselves as their brother's keeper, by avoiding a paradoxical situation where one sector of the community waxes in wealth unmindful of the abject poverty encircling the rest. Socially, our extended family system demonstrates a practical example of utopian socialism in action. Religiously, our ancestral worship enjoins us to foster continuity between the dead and the living so as to justify the raison d'etre of life, leaving the issue of life after death as a matter of speculation.

I deduce from these facts and postulates the following proposition: that human beings will attach less importance to their racial, linguistic and cultural origins, so long as (1) their individual liberties are insulated from tyranny, (2) their group attachment is insured from want, and (3) the environment in which they live is conducive to social happiness.

By individual liberties I mean basic freedoms and fundamental rights, to wit; the right to life; the right to security of the person; the right to education; the right to private property; the right to privacy and to family life; the right to free and fair elections; the right to participate in the government of one's country; the right to a public and fair trial; the right to a guarantee against retroactivity of the law, as far as individual freedom is concerned; freedom of thought and of conscience; freedom of religion and worship; freedom of expression including freedom of the press; freedom of assembly; freedom of association; freedom of collective bargaining; freedom from discrimination on ground of race, tribe, religion, class etc ; freedom from torture; freedom from fear; freedom from want.

These rights and freedoms, among others represent man's quest for happiness from the earliest times. In 1948, they were embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 1952, the General Assembly of the United Nations endorsed the Convention on Political Rights of Women. In 1966, the General Assembly adopted the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the ~~the~~ Optional Protocol to the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In 1974, the General Assembly endorsed the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties.

Social happiness is an abstraction which can be concretised. Abstract in the sense of the psychological, but concrete in its relation to satisfying the material needs of economic man and woman. In the latter, that is, concrete satisfaction, two systems have been tried; the capitalist and the socialist. A third force has emerged: the welfarist.

Capitalism is an economic system characterised by private ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision rather than by state control. It is an instrument of private enterprise through which prices, production and distribution of goods are determined in a free market. An essential feature of capitalism is the profit motive or individual welfare.

Socialism is a political and economic theory characterised by public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Its main feature is the emphasis on public welfare. Its objective is that every person should be given equal opportunity to develop their talents, and that the wealth of society should be fairly distributed.

Welfarism is a system based upon the assumption, by a state, of primary responsibility for the individual and collective welfare of its citizens, usually by enactment of legislation for specific public policies, such as education, health, unemployment insurance, old age benefits, control of prices and rents, minimum wages, family assistance, subsidies to agriculture, housing, and other sectors of

ECLECTIC APPROACH

The means of attaining happiness and guaranteeing same for Nigerians to be insulated from tyranny and want, can be through a capitalist or socialist or welfarist framework. Whether that will be sufficient inducement to attract the allegiance of its racial, linguistic and cultural groups will depend upon the rigidity or flexibility of such guarantees, the temperament of those concerned, and the calibre of leadership in the country.

To reorientate our ideologies, we should decide whether we prefer the capitalist way of life we inherited from Britain, or experiment on a socialist ideology, with which our extended family system is correlated, or break new ground and adapt our traditional systems of social theory and political economy to a more reasonable and practicable philosophy of life. I would much prefer the latter. One of our leading thinkers in economics, Mr J.O. Obioha, advised as follows (see Peoples Guardian, 16th August 1967):

We may be inclined to reject the American system, because of the automatic mechanism of wastes inherent in it. The American system hardly brings about social balance and, generally speaking, more people suffer than benefit.

The Russian system might not appeal to us because of the gross inefficiency inherent in that system. Bureaucratic red-tape is too strong to warrant any trial for the system. Consequently, it engenders wastes as well.

Needless to suggest the adoption of Britain's mixed economy, for already Britain herself does not seem to have enough faith in its efficacy.

Therefore, let us try to evolve our own system. It is to be a system which will ensure not only general economic equilibrium but also social equilibrium. It is to be a system which will generate least waste. It is to be a system which would guarantee ultimate utilization of our potential, which, in turn, will generate balanced economic growth. To achieve these, the role of the government should be one of directing, which is neither "free for all" nor "controls".

My suggestion for reorientation of Nigerian ideologies is eclectic. We are familiar with the evils of the capitalist system, in spite of sincere efforts made by Thorstein Veblen, Lord Keynes and others to reform it. We know from personal experience and from what obtains in the capitalist world, how citizens live in want in the midst of plenty. This way of life does not appeal to me.

We are familiar also with the evils of the socialist system. As a humanist movement, the ideology is commendable; but its methods of controls and planning have tended towards regimentation, totalitarianism and bureaucratic inefficiency. We are living witnesses of the fissiparous tendencies of socialism, with its schools of thought, ranging from Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism and Trotskyism to Maoism, Titoism, Fabianism and Nkrumahism.

Our traditional ideologies are more pragmatic, because they blend the capitalist with the socialist systems. But they were primordial and not intended for a complex society in a sophisticated civilisation. Yet they come closer to the concept, if not the practice, of the ideal welfare state.

As I said earlier on, welfarism may be defined as the assumption by the state of primary responsibility for individual and social welfare. This is realised by the adoption of specific policies, backed by legislation, to guarantee education to the citizenry, dispense health and unemployment benefits, provide full employment where practicable, control rents and the price mechanism, provide houses on reasonable terms etc. A more concise definition is that welfarism is

the complex of policies, attitudes, and beliefs designed to ensure the welfare of the citizen by means of legislation and administrative control.

By being eclectic, I select what appeals to me to be pragmatic in the capitalist, socialist and welfarist systems, and at the same time reject a single, unitary and exclusive interpretation, doctrine or method. This methodology emphasises freedom of the will to decide what to accept and what to reject for the purpose of combining whatever idea or practice is accepted into a satisfactory system of ideas or set practices.

THE ABUNDANT SOCIETY

The capitalist system trends towards affluence of the few; but it is based on a laissez faire attitude of unconcern by the state and the abandonment of the not-so-rich to the grinding-wheels of the "law" of supply and demand, as manipulated by the few who have accumulated wealth or controlled land, housing and the means of production, distribution and exchange. It emphasises the welfare of the individual at the expense of the community.

The socialist system trends towards affluence of the not-so-many, through economic planning, but it is based on the belief that a few "commissars" are superhuman, and their infallibility is incontestable. The road which leads to the socialist paradise is divided into a multiplicity of sectal lanes that one can be lost in the sloughs of doctrines and wilderness of ideation not to mention its tendency towards dogmatism, monocracy and the personality cult.

Therefore, I am opting for a neo-welfarist system of ideology with less emphasis on the affluent society, which is a paradox where poverty co-exists with wealth. I prefer to place more emphasis on the abundant society, which would make it possible for all to have enough, to care enough, and to give enough.

History has shown that neither the capitalist nor the socialist or the welfarist system exclusively can guarantee freedom from want, in spite of the relative affluence of the individual and collective components of such societies. We can try a system which should guarantee abundance, to enable all to have abundant food, abundant shelter, abundant clothing, abundant necessities of life, and abundant amenities of life, within reasonable cost and within the reach of the many.

We can make this experiment by using our aboriginal and traditional social, political, economic, legal and religious ideas and practices as a foundation to carry to props of a neo-welfare state on which we can build and superstructure that harmonises the best in capitalism, socialism and welfarism and thereby create an abundant society in our country.

The nature of such abundant society will have the best ingredients of capitalism, socialism and welfarism; but it will not be capitalist; it will not be socialist, and it will not be welfarist. Rather, it will be a harmony of opposites atop of our extended family system to further the frontiers of state responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. In such a society, the state will not adopt a nonchalant attitude to social injustice, and it will not assume to transform citizens into thoughtless, purposeless nonentities, who are mere puppets of the constituted authorities.

If such a commonwealth can be born in Africa, it should be a lamp to guide and show the way to abundant life to humanity at large. It should demonstrate that human beings can live together, in an atmosphere of security and prosperity, without any of its segment employing the weapons of fear and want to enslave the weak and poor, to mere accident of history.

At present the capitalist system cannot guarantee freedom from fear and freedom from want for the many. Nor can the socialist or the welfarist. But the new-welfarist, which I am advocating, has great potentialities to do so. We can give it a trial right here, in equatorial Africa.

Therefore, I suggest the ultimate revision of our Republican Constitution so as to effect two changes, among others: first, to entrench adequate safeguards to buttress basic freedoms and fundamental rights without imprecise provisos; secondly, to provide citizens of Nigeria with a Government which will plan for plentiful avenues for obtaining a balanced diet, wholesome water, comfortable and inexpensive shelter, a reasonable and frugal wardrobe, in addition to easy access to the necessities and amenities of contemporary life, above the minimum subsistence level.

If these constitutional, political and economic guarantees can be underwritten in a government-directed welfare system, such evidence of humanitarianism will work wonders in Nigerian society. The wants of human beings are few and if satisfied they become an insulation from subversion. History shows that why some societies became turbulent and unstable is because those who governed failed to discover this secret yearning of humanity.

By adapting the best elements so far experienced by human beings, all over the world in the practice of capitalism, socialism and welfarism, it is my honest conviction that reorientated Nigerian ideologies, based on the eclecticism now universally appreciated as welfarism are, the right incentive to inspire the genius latent in us, to build an abundant society, where there will be full employment for healthy, well-educated, skilful and prosperous citizens, who should be more patriotic and loyal to their country.

THE PRAGMATIC APPROACH

I am a realist but I can dream dreams as well. I have a deep and abiding faith in pragmatism as a useful philosophy to guide the individuals of any nation to accomplish their aims. Reason, experience and practice should guide us to make our dreams come true.

Surely, our ancestors survived the struggle for existence in what is now geographically identified as Nigeria. It is true that they were racially homogeneous, since they belonged to the Negroid race, on account to their skin colour, hair texture, nose structure, lip formation, facial angle and other morphological characteristics. As a matter of fact, they were identical in appearance, and were distinct from the white and yellow races.

However, we have observed that some indigenous Nigerians speak a common language and acquired a common culture. We have discovered also a bitter truth that some indigenous Nigerians speak different languages but acquired a common culture. For example, the Edo, Efik-Ibibio, Ekoi, Gwari, Idoma, Igala, Igbira, Igbo, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Jukun, Nupe, Tiv, Urhobo and Yoruba-speaking peoples, as well as other linguistic groups in Nigeria hitherto identified as Sudanic or semi-Bantu-speaking, belong to the first category. But the Fulani, Hausa, Kanuri, and other linguistic groups in Nigeria, classified as Hamitic-speaking, fall in the other categories. Yet all of them settled permanently in Nigeria and became citizens of one country as a result of the interplay of social and economic forces.

Since only the factor of race unites the great majority of Nigerians, and the factor of language unites or disunites them, only to be united or disunited further by the factor of culture, we can take comfort in knowing that, in spite of these vagaries of anthropology, our ancestors settled permanently in certain definitely demarcated language and culture areas. They conquered the elements in the process and asserted their dominance in their different environments.

understand that our ancestors were not a landless peasantry and that they established what is tantamount to a socialist society, which approved of the ownership of private property and encouraged individual enterprise, why should we swallow wholesale any doctrine which purports to indoctrinate us with ideas which are definitely contradictory to our own tried and tested native philosophy of life?

I know that my premises and conclusions are concerned with primitive and simple societies; but assuming that we are honest in seeking solutions to the problems raised in twentieth century Nigeria, by the dilemma of Western and Oriental civilisations, then it is obligatory for us to adopt a tolerant scepticism in respect of alien ideologies and examine impartially our aboriginal lore of good living. If we reacted otherwise, then we desecrate the legacy our forbears bequeathed to us. In other words, I am advocating that we should be serious in the creation of a neo-welfarist state in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

In expounding his philosophy of pragmatism, William James urged that logic should be relegated to the back-ground in favour of "reality, life, experience, concreteness and immediacy". He explained that any idea which is found to be worthwhile takes on a character of truth in so far as it bears a direct relation to the facts and experiences of daily living.

Viewed pragmatically, it is obvious that our people will cease to harbour grievances about political iniquities, economic inequities and social inequality, when they have a country dedicated to the effective amelioration of social disabilities. I honestly believe that when a team of dedicated Nigerians with a sense of mission, patriotic vision and inspired imagination assume the reins of government, as we now have under General Obasanjo, they cannot fail to read the writing on the wall.

Finally, as I have analysed the problem of ideological commitment, the issue is not whether capitalism or socialism or welfarism is right. Our main concern is what is right for Nigeria. Zik!

