

## Conceptualizing African Political Thoughts: An Exposition of “Zikism” and its Relevance in Modern Nigerian Society

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### ABSTRACT

African social and political philosophy is deeply interlaced with the daily life of African people. Therefore, the paper explores the development of this philosophy; Zikism which is a political philosophy or ideology designed by Nnamdi Azikiwe, aimed at the decolonization of the minds of young Africans, in preparation for a battle against the old Africa, brainwashed by their colonial masters. Bearing in mind that the era of colonization has come and gone, the paper seeks to x-ray the relevance of such theory in ensuring that total emancipation from Political, social and economic neo-colonialism is achieved. What informed the formulation of Azikiwe's political ideas was the prevailing and pervasive contradictions of the colonial state in Africa and Nigeria, characterized by servitude, economic dependency, political domination and colonial exploitation, mass illiteracy, mass poverty, ignorance, fear and superstition, culminating in inferiority complex, which characterized Africans of his early experience. However, this condition has resurfaced in different forms thereby causing any well meaning person to also consider re-awakening of such political ideology like Zikism in order to encourage Nigerian youths to seek freedom from bad leadership, insecurity, poverty, high level of unemployment, ethnicity and corruption which today is bedeviling our society. It adopted the expository method to showcase what the theory stands for, while outline its relevance in Modern Nigeria Society.

Keywords: Zikism, African Social and Political Philosophy, Neo-colonialism, Nnamdi Azikiwe

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### INTRODUCTION

African political philosophy is a less explored field of study in comparison to research areas such as metaphysics, anthropology, theology, sociology and economics [1]. Many people confine this discipline to theories of one or another emblematic African leader such as Nnamdi Azikiwe(1904-1996) Nkrumah (1909-1972), Senghor (1906-2001) and Nyerere (1922-1999). Others reduce this philosophy to both the vicissitudes and hazards of African politics in considering it as a chronicle of ups and downs of African nations. These two approaches

deform the nature of this philosophy and they skip over the effort of African people to frame rationally their social and political organization. As a reflection on the polis, African political philosophy is concerned with people's everyday life, everyday experience of alliances and collective actions. This reality constitutes its roots and nourishing sap. It is advisable speaking of "common world", to make use of Arendt's expression [2]. This idea defines political sphere as a space where people reveal themselves to each other as equal, and where they manifest their desire to build together a humanizing community. This anchoring of political philosophy in the common world is unavoidable and necessary at a time, because it is the means by which this philosophy specifies its object and forges its identity. Three classical concerns of political philosophy can be considered as essential to African political philosophy: the well-being of African citizens, the power, and the suited paradigm for social and political organization. The issue of well-being of

citizens is a permanent topic of political philosophy. From Socrates up to today, nobody omits this topic even if each philosopher assigns to it a particular content and sketches differently the modalities of its achievement.

In this regard, African political philosophers have to deal with multiple challenges: African emancipation, poverty, human rights, gender, and democracy, to mention some few. African political philosophy also addresses the issue concerning the nature and justification of power. Following questions are often debated: who governs the polis? By which principles does he/she achieve such a duty? According to what modalities and in response to what purpose does he/she rule? The search for a suited paradigm of social and political organization has been reduced to the choice between capitalism and socialism, in Africa. For many leaders, socialism was the best option because it was thought to be in compliance with African culture. Senghor, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Sekou Touré, Mboya have made of this option their

priority. Many others leaders remained loyal to capitalism. This was the case of people such as Mobutu (Congo/Zaire), Ahidjo (Cameroun), Eyadema (Togo), and Bongo (Gabon). Beyond this ideological option, they all remained submitted to foreign (Western) interests and policy as well as they developed a philosophy of power based on a single party rule principle.

This paper therefore seeks to examine this political ideology not just to celebrate the intellectual prowess of late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe but as a possible tool for the liberation of the minds of the Nigerian youths towards ensuring that they rise to ensure good governance in all sphere of Nigerian society.

### **Zikism and its Tenets**

Between 1941 and 1947, Nigerian political leadership at this period was bankrupt, ineffective, and uninspiring. The nationalist movement had been badly divided since the Ikoli- Akinsanya crisis in 1941[3].The leaders, instead of uniting to challenge the colonial administration, the leaders engaged themselves with

pettiness, tribalism, rancour, jealousy, and mutual antipathy. The organization which could claim a national following during this period, the National Congress of Nigerians and the Cameroons, though effective in the realm of political propaganda with its arrays of newspapers, was impotent in that of positive action. But by 1948 the N.C.N.C. had ceased to be politically active. The party had been frustrated by the lack of success of the 1947 delegation it sent to Britain to protest the Richards Constitution. Eta Iyo attempted to explain the inactivity of the party by stating: 'We are not extinct, but dormant volcanoes waiting for the time when we can explode' [4]. At a time when the chiefs supported British hegemony and were used to fight the liberal intelligentsia of Africa, Zik developed his philosophy as a reformist ideology. He stressed that Africa could only be emancipated by those who believed in the concept of a renascent Africa. The realization of a new Africa must not be through bloodshed or disorder. The spirit of cooperation,

respect and honour for the old Africa must abound. Zikism began when Zik returned to Nigeria in the mid-30s and formed the NCNC. There was a huge mobilization of people, which created a ground for national consciousness. For this consciousness to be sustained, the development of an ideology was inevitable. This ideology took into

consideration the basic views of its believers. These believers were called „agitators“ by Zik. Since it was an ideology that spoke to their situation, the believers spread the ideology and organized people around it, thus transforming the ideology into a motivating instrument of action.

### THE FIVE CANONS OF ZIKISM

In his political theory, Nnamdi Azikiwe, in 1943, enumerated five principles that are vital to the political emancipation of Africa, and they could also be referred to as the five canons of Zikism. His aim was to provide a foundational structure on which a free national political system was to be built. These canons include;

1. Spiritual Balance: while talking about spiritual balance, Zik called for respect for the opinion of others. This would involve allowing others the right to state their opinion without denying one's right to state his or her opinion, what can be referred to as the cultivation of the spirit of

tolerant scepticism for the views of one's antagonists

2. Social Regeneration: Zik calls for the Jettisoning of all forms of prejudice, be they racial, national, tribal, societal, political, ethical etc. This takes us back to Francis Bacon's Idols, which are themselves prejudices. But while these prejudices in Francis Bacon impede the acquisition of knowledge, in Zikism, they impede the realization of political regeneration [5]. Nnamdi Azikiwe makes this call because an African, no matter where he or she is born, is an African. To postpone the

breaking down of all forms of barriers of tribal prejudice, be they inter-tribal or intra-tribal, is to postpone the social unity of Africa

3. Economic determinism: Zik sees economic self-sufficiency as the ultimate means to the redemption of Africa. No matter how educated Africans may be, as long as they lack economic self-sufficiency, they will fail to realise a stable society. Education for the African is useless, unless it is adapted to the African environment. This was the idea of Zik, when he called for "a state of society where the mind is brought into harmony with matter... a psychological conception deeply rooted in a material environment"[6]; He further argues that "The usefulness of any concept, idea or theory, lies in its implications for the practical solutions to the problems of society. In this sense, pragmatism requires that man's efforts and intelligence should be

geared towards the liberation of man and the satisfaction of his needs in society" [6]; and so our education should be aimed at providing means of livelihood for Africans, to fail in this regard, Zik argues, is to dent the African social fabric [7]

4. Mental Emancipation: the slave trade and colonization of Africa created a situation of the „crisis of self-confidence“ in the African, which has opened apertures for a lasting barrier to growth and innovation. Zik argues that there is no specific proof to sustain the idea of superiority or inferiority of any race, and for the African to cultivate an inferiority complex is to sign the death warrant of Africa's future. He calls for emancipation from the crisis of inferiority and assures the African that he had a glorious past and can design a more glorious future. Zik wants the African to follow Socrates' principle: Gnothi

seauton, (Man know yourself), and like a sleeping giant wake up from his slumber and harness his power for his own good and that of mankind [8]

5. Political Resurgence: If the African cultivates a spiritual balance, experiences social regeneration, cultivates and realizes economic self-sufficiency and mental emancipation, he or she certainly finds himself or herself in a state of political Risorgimento (renewal or rebirth). Zik says,

“Politics is a means to an end which is more glorious than the means through which this end must be attained. Socially, the end is guarantee of social security, and a right to enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, just as do other peoples. Once this is attained, a people can boast of a stable and reliable political system” [9].

### **Zikism and Nigerian Problem**

Though he wrote his treatise decades ago, his philosophy still runs deep and has astonishing relevance today in this century 21st. Since the book’s publication

in 1937, somehow, Africa skipped her re-birth and instead, chose the path of the still-born. And somehow, the generations between the start of the Zikist movement and the rubbles of a *present day* broken continent have been sadly conspicuously silent.[10] Zik’s exhortation in *Renascent Africa* was directed to not just the youths of Africa but also to African members of the old guard. In his time, this referred to traditional chiefs and conservative pro-colonial politicians. In our time, this refers to our rulers, dictators and corrupt elites who by greed and intellectual myopia have collectively ground the continent to a halt. In Zik’s study of the Nigerian nation, he describes the Nigerian nation as having evolved from tribe to nation, tribe, in the sense of an endogamous group descended from the same ancestor, occupying a particular territory and possessing cultural, religious and linguistic homogeneity. In Nigeria, he observes that there are about 400 of such tribes who have united and formed a political union in the form of a federation. From this, Zik envisages a

threat to national unity. He raises the all important question: will the new autonomous state endure? Tribalism, he observes, is a reality, but proposes that even in the midst of tribalism, national unity can be a reality. How the reality of tribalism can be adapted to the unreality of national unity to make national unity a reality is one of the basic concerns of Zik. He enumerates the solution, which he refers to as keys:

1. To discover the circumstances which can be super imposed on the natural chains of language and culture, which has linked the human beings who inhabit Nigeria to enable them develop a feeling of personal security and group preservation.
2. He proposes a federal system of government which will concede coexistence to all linguistic groups, on the basis of equality, within a framework of political and constitutional warrantees. Such a federal system of government would protect individual freedom

under the rule of law and thus preserve and sustain any linguistic group. By preserving the linguistic groups of Nigeria and conceding to them local autonomy of some satisfactory nature, an atmosphere for respect of their culture and traditions is created.

3. If loyalty to the nation must not be replaced by loyalty to the tribe, Zik calls for the revision of the Nigeria's Republican Constitution: first in relation to safeguarding people's fundamental human rights; secondly, providing citizens with adequate food, comfortable shelter and a minimum level of subsistence. In this case, rulers must discover the material needs of their people. Once there is a failure in this by rulers, Nigerian will harbour grievances about political, economic and social inequalities. This will increase loyalty to tribe and disloyalty to the nation

4. An effective way to increase national unity is to concede to each region *de jure* equality and *de facto* inequality. By *de jure* equality, Zik speaks in the sense that every province and local authority in each region in the Federal Republic of Nigeria is legally equal with the federal government providing for each of them. By *de facto* Inequality, Zik

means the acceptance of the fact that not all regions, provinces and local authorities are equal either in area, population, natural resources and financial means.

5. Again, Zik argues that political parties will have to cut across the artificial barriers of tribes and regions. National loyalty must supersede regional claims.

### CONCLUSION

The rise and triumph of the ethnic and regionalist tendencies in Nigeria from 1967 has spiraled into its current headache, bred and led by her sons of Anarchy. But Zikism provides Nigeria an alternative to national miasma, and on the strength Azikiwe's renascent and humanist philosophy this paper believe in the imperative of a Nigerian *Risorgimento*. It is in Nigeria's interest. Nigeria's rich human tapestry is its greatest strength, and might also be its major downside, if improperly managed. The Igbo themselves say, "Umunna wu Ike; Umunna wu kwa Ori Ukwu!" A man's

kinsmen are as much his strength, as they are his waist pains. In the Zikist context, the Nigerian problem is a class question, rather than the problem of ethnic difference. Zik taught that by harnessing the strength of Nigerians, everywhere in Nigeria, we could build a great, united, and prosperous nation. Azikiwe believed in a broad based coalition of all Nigerian ethnicities united by common economic and political interests. Nigeria drifts today from that vision of economic determinism, spiritual balance; social regeneration; mental emancipation; and Political resurgence. In its place has



triumphed Ethnic particularism; religious fundamentalism; fascism, and dependency. The future of Nigeria now depends on the rise of Zikist ideas to be led by a new generation who must be taught revolutionary Zikism: the idea that Nigeria as a nation is a radical imperative and that those who wish to dismantle it are the enemies of the people. That Nigeria's problem is not the problem of

"tribalism" but of elite greed, because the challenges that face the workers and peasants of the North are the very same that face the workers and peasants of the South. For these, the common enemy is political greed not geographic difference. Those who send the Almajirin to kill, have all their children in London, Cairo, and Dubai. Indeed Zik did say: "show the light and the people will find the way."

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