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HUMANIZING AFRICAN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

African politics is bedevilled by unpatriotic power tussle—the winner takes it all mentality that conduces to all facets of crude exploitation leaving the masses grossly impoverished. De-humanized politics crippled Africans' chances to develop their potentialities like those of other nations. People disoriented politics created, in turn, the worship of political leaders, who were supposed to serve the populace. This paper canvases for an anthropologically-focused politics as a point of departure for developmental strategies in Africa. Human welfare finds itself at the apogee of political criteria, trifling with it detracts politics from its essential goal.

Key words:

Egoistic-politics, human
suffering, humanized-politics,
common good,
human-flourishing.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper draws its breath from the apparent a-humanistic political structure in the African continent. Africa's political strategies lack sufficient human touch; they ignore the magnitude of human sufferings in the continent, which compels this paper to seek for a re-evaluation of Africa's political programmes towards human empowerment—equipping the individual mentally, physically and spiritually to battle successfully with the hurdles of life. The a-humanizing texture of African politics is manifest in the electoral campaigns. When there is need for leadership change in any African country, the political manifestos pivot on providing physical structures such as electricity, construction of roads, market squares, building of industries, factories and so forth. There is no doubting the fact that these are for human use, but the campaigns hardly focus on the promotion of human empowerment, the general welfare of the human person qua person. That is all the more reason why human suffering is on the increase in Africa.

This essay, objectively, is a clarion call for the development of an African politics that is anthropologically focused. Africa needs politics that is engineered towards human flourishing—the promotion of human happiness and the protection of human life. An anthropologically envisioned politics would place humans at the heart of social development plans.

Developmental strategies would no longer preponderate around the egoistic interests of privileged politicians, but would actually better the lives of the down-trodden in Africa.

The method of this essay has little to do with experimentation, or case study, or questionnaire. It is, rather, a research paper directed towards demonstrating the anthropological pathologies of African politics and philosophically suggesting ways out. It demands a faithful excursus into African political literatures and critically evaluating their anthropological impacts on the welfare of Africans. Consequently, books and academic journals bearing on African politics are going to facilitate the purpose of this essay.

The challenges of this essay demand approaching it by first of all delineating the anthropocentric essence of politics; exposing the anthropological aridity of African politics, outlining some of the causes of such a-humanized politics; and fundamental suggestions essential for a pan-African humanized political philosophy.

The Anthropocentric Character of Politics

Some definitions of politics have tended to preponderate on establishing social organization and on the provision of mere social infrastructures. There is the idea that politics is about “the formulation of the ends and limits of state authority.”

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Some imagine that politics is simply about conflict resolution, sharing of resources, construction of roads and so forth. The propositions are not primarily defective, but they appear to lack the anthropocentric acuity of politics. It is rightfully imaginable that no matter the possible denotations the term politics has recently assumed, the truth is that its essential significance gravitates around the welfare of humans. Etymologically, the Greek word *politēs* (polites) denotes "citizen". The Greek word *politikos*, means amongst others "of, for, or relating to citizens". The word *polis* (polis) means "city". Therefore, politics has much to do with the citizens of a state or city. This is where it derives its anthropocentric density.

The fathers of political theories testify strongly to the homocentric texture of politics. It is indisputable that, in the view of Plato, the city-state arose out of the urge to satisfy human needs. George H. Sabine and Thomas L. Thorson support this view when, regarding the origin of society, they attribute to Plato the saying that: "(...) societies arise in the first place out of the needs of men, which can be satisfied only as they supplement each other." The origin of society, in Plato's thought, is strictly for human's general welfare, for the common good (*bonum commune*). Iain Mackenzie underpins Plato's political pulse that leadership is strictly "for common purpose." Aristotle did not deviate from Plato's human-centred political vision. In his *Politics*, Aristotle states that people establish society for the sake of fulfilling the needs of life and for the sake of a good life (*eudaimonia*—happiness).

When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life.

In Aristotle's perspective, therefore, satisfying the needs of humans, their unalloyed unity and happiness remain central in political thinking. The politician should be trained to stay conscious of the centrality of human welfare in the political discourse. Plato and Aristotle brought Godwyns Ade Agbude to the belief that: "The Greeks understood politics to be an activity that was meant to promote the common good of citizens." The relevance of the state, St Augustine instructs, consists in the discharge of justice (*justitia*) understood in his time as "giving every man his due." The practice of justice, for Augustine, becomes the yardstick for determining the ideal state and the non-ideal political state. In the Augustinian judgement, "where there is no justice, there is no commonwealth." Remove justice, Augustine asks rhetorically, what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale." Thomas Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that "political society (*civitas*) emerges from the needs and aspirations of human nature itself." The purpose of *societas*, in the Thomistic perspective, is for the full perfection of human existence. Politics should create an environment in which the human person experiences the highest natural excellence—"living well." Stressing the anthropocentric texture of politics, John Locke instructs that "The power of the government is limited to the public good. It is a power that has 'no other end but preservation', and therefore cannot justify killing, enslaving or plundering the citizens. As much as possible, Locke insists, mankind must be preserved and the common good invaluablely

prioritized. I. Mackenzie would suggest in corroboration with Locke that: "Rather than presuppose disagreements and conflict, it may be that politics is best thought of as the pursuit of the common good." Immanuel Kant, in his *Metaphysics of Morals*, harped on the centrality of human life in both political and ethical affairs. The human person, Kant instructs, should never be treated in any circumstance as a means but an end in themselves. Politics should pay strict attention to the entire development and welfare of individuals who compose the society.

The above references, across the wide-breath of political consciousness, powerfully orientate us to the centrality of human welfare in socio-political affairs. The perfectibility of humans and the preservation of human life should be the ultimate ambition of all political strategies. We employ this political standard (preservation of life) to examine and evaluate the political criteria in Africa.

The Challenges of De-humanized Politics in Africa

"De-humanized politics" might sound strange to African politicians and statesmen. The politicians might ask: "for whom are we working for, after-all? Is it not for African people that we are labouring for? Be it as it may, the fact remains that African politics is strictly de-anthropologized, meaning that African politics seriously lacks committed human centeredness. Political campaigns in Africa generally centre on promises bordering on road construction, provision of electricity, bridging of rivers, construction of market squares and sometimes building of schools, hospitals and so forth. These are political campaigns that are hardly met, as many communities in Africa lack roads linking them with other communities and electricity is just fantasy stories for some. This observation has been confirmed by African Commissions on Human and People's Rights when she writes that: "Most of the areas still occupied by indigenous peoples and communities are under-developed, with poor, if any, infrastructure. Social services such as schools and health facilities are few and far between, while the roads and other physical infrastructure are equally poor." Political activities fundamentally lack anthropological touch—the welfare and development of the individual citizens of Africa. We see in Africa a wide welfare caveat between the political leaders and the people they are supposed to serve. Human flourishing is hardly taken as a political project in the continent. Ok echukwu M. Izunwa decrying the lack of human-centred politics in Africa has stated that: "What we need, as it were, is a philosophical disposition capable of giving proper regard to man in his personality, individuality and community."

In our twenty-first century, who would not shudder over the staggering number of illiterates in Africa? There is hardly any serious political endeavour to tackle and wipe out illiteracy in the black continent. Writing on education as a means of people empowerment, African Commission on Human and People's Rights decries the low level of education in Africa. She writes: Few indigenous peoples have adequate access to schooling. School attendance is often less than 50% below the national level and literacy levels are also usually very low. The reasons for these low figures can be attributed to a range of factors,

including the unavailability of schools and the unsuitability of the mainstream school curriculum for indigenous peoples' needs.

It is painful and heart-breaking to confront daily preponderating rate of unemployment in Africa. Politicians are unashamed about their failure to handle joblessness on acceding to power after their political promises. Jobless and disoriented African youths have Europe, China, and the United States of America to look-up to for their economic salvation. Many are regularly drowning in the Mediterranean waters in the search for the golden-fleece in Europe.

African socio-political contours almost exclude women from organizational projects. A great number of them are illiterates, simple house wives, hardly participating in both family and political decisions affecting their lives, as they are very few among the top-elites of political leaders. African politics has not taken adequate steps to improve on the lots of women in the continent. Children attract interest at the early stage of their life, but gradually many of them become ill-fated due to the early death of their parents and government's inability to sponsor their education. Africa has run short of great personalities due to careless attitudes in sponsoring children to greater heights. The painful and unenviable life of the disabled or physically challenged in Africa superlatively demonstrates political programmes that are grossly myopic regarding human care and welfare. Few of the physically challenged are formally educated, they have little employment opportunities; the rest spend most of their life begging on the major streets and market squares. African governments have barely any empowerment programme for them.

Failure to intuit the pre-eminent value of the human person has given way to unjust treatment of people in the continent. According to African Commission for Human and People's Rights, "Many indigenous individuals and communities are denied the right to justice, which is enshrined in several of the articles of the African Charter, such as Articles 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. These articles include the provisions that all individuals are equal before the law and entitled to equal protection of the law, that all individuals have the right to freedom and to personal security and, as such, no one may be arbitrarily arrested or detained, and that all individuals have the right to have their cause heard. Nevertheless, indigenous peoples are subjected to arbitrary arrests, unjust imprisonment, beatings from forest wardens, for example, their houses and property are attacked and they are harassed to pay heavy taxes and bribes." Overwhelming greedy politics has lead various parts of Africa into deadly wars during which young men lost their lives to no meaningful purposes, children died of chronic hunger, girlsdegradingly raped and aged people died without help due to sickness and hunger. African politicians have proved themselves grossly incompetent to grapple with the dehumanization of terrorism. Millions of Africans have met their untimely death because of terrorist activities that surpass human intelligence. Africans have continued to wipe themselves out of the face of the earth due to inhumanly oriented politics.

It is pathetic to watch where millions of Africans live as their homes. Most homeless people in the agglomerations sleep in old car boots, grass batchers and in open market squares. Uzo M. Igbozurike has brightly remarked that: "poverty is endemic in Nigeria and particularly so in the rural areas where over sixty percent of Nigerians live and work." African politicians have continued to keep blind eyes over the plight of the homeless in the continent. Health-wise there is no sincere response to health problems in the continent. Many Africans die due to poverty, or ailments that could have been medically taken care-of, if there were philanthropic governments in Africa. The state hospitals lack essential drugs to take care of the chronically sick. It is embarrassing the number of pregnant women who, due to one careless reason or the other, lose their lives bringing-forth new lives. According to African Commission for Human and People's Rights, "The health situation of indigenous peoples is often very precarious and receives very limited attention from the health authorities responsible."

Going out and returning to one's home has become a matter of luck. African governments lack adequate responses to kidnapping, armed robbery, child trafficking and ritual human sacrifices in the continent. There are regular protests all over Africa bordering on poor wages and lack of payment of pensions by African governments. The pensioners would lament over neglect by the state governments, which they served for so many years. For drinking water, those who can afford it resort to private boreholes, while those who are unable to provide private boreholes drink from dirty streams or any type of water they can lay hand on. African politics lacks human face. The various governments of the continent are bereft of civic sympathy as they watch their subjects languish in penury and chronic political helplessness while they live in economic affluence.

The Causes of De-Anthropologized Politics in Africa

Poor anthropologically focused African politics owes its reason to some pertinent causes, which demand paying some attention. Forgetfulness of human dignity, radical egoism, dictatorial leadership, tribalism and social complacency attract profound attention.

Forgetfulness of the Ontological Value of the Human Person

The a-humanistic picture of African politics is patronized by a radical forgetfulness of the ontological value of the human person. In Africa the focus is not really on the individual as such but rather on the family or community. The individual has no ontological identity outside her family or community. On the apparent anonymity of the individual in Africa Laurent Ladouce writes: "The problem of many Africans is thus: Who am I? (qui suis-je?); how to master a multiple and fragmented I, to find a place in a certain environment". That is all the more reason why African politics has not really grappled with the protection and empowerment of individuals as individuals. It has been echoed worldwide, by African scholars, that Africans by nature respect the invaluable dignity of human life. How that dogmatic belief on the inviolability of life has atrophied in

the continent is superlatively worrisome. The metaphysical primacy of the human person seriously eludes political interactions and decisions in the black continent. Most of the conceived social development determinants do not strictly focus on the empowerment of individuals for life. What an individual becomes in the enfolding of her life depends solely on her single efforts. The states hardly provide meaningful facilities for individual empowerment (ausbildung). Nnamdi A. Odoemene offers some reasons why individuals are neglected in Africa. In his perspective, "The problem of the individual arises mainly from the very fact that the individual is often neglected in the treatment of and reflection on culture, community, group and state." The deficiency of a social template towards the establishment of people empowerment philosophy aggravated people's suffering, leading to the survival of the fittest race in the African socio-political set-up. Those privileged to the various political cadres forgot their socio-ministerial mandates, and took care only of their consanguine exigencies. The cries and miseries of the downtrodden were never listened to. Resignation to ill-fated poverty became the lot of the masses. Africa is replete with people who are politically uncared for.

Radical Egoistic Dictatorial Political Leadership

Africans neither have universalizing religions nor political ideologies that socialized them to care for public good. Thus, they end up living as primitive egoists who like animals seek ways for the individual's survival and seldom for the survival of the entire public.

The above quotation is an eye-opener to the egoistic structure of the African society. Some African literatures have continued to defend the communalist visage of the African continent, but what is practically in vogue politically is mounting egoistic dictatorial leadership. An African political leader thinks solely of his/her particular well being, then, that of the immediate family and loosely of his/her relations. Underlining the incumbency of egoistic leadership in Africa, Afegbua S. Issa *et al.*, state that "Political leadership in Africa is parochial rather than national; it corruptly converts national resources into its project of primitive accumulation." For Joseph C. Ebegbulem, "It is no longer news that while the poor in Nigeria are languishing in abject poverty and hunger, squalor, disease and destitution, Nigerian leaders are only after working out strategies on how to enrich and perpetuate themselves in power." Africa has suffered from various hands of dictators, who suppressed their subjects primarily for the realization of their private selfish interests.

This is no longer the story of what the whites did to African blacks, but what African sycophant leaders did to their very brothers and sisters. On attaining to power through coup d'état mainly, they amassed wealth with all impunity, consolidated their power by killing or exiling their immediate political challengers. The power-drunk mentality stagnated education, human flourishing and social development, leaving their subjects in suburbs, ghettos, squalors and in abject poverty. They politicians stayed untouched about the political shame their people were passing through. In whatever direction it might be figured out, the political leader, in every

circumstance, takes all the social resources and the rest must go on bended knee before getting some bit of what could have been a common good. Communalism is only a wishful claim which Africans have continually failed to train themselves up to. What is apparent is unchallenged egoism, deficiency of altruism and philanthropic spirit. With continental wealth in the hands of a greedy few, the helpless condition of the mass can only be ineffably imagined.

Tribalism

One of the facts that have continued to contradict and militate against "African communalism" concept is tribalism. Projecting and defending the interest of one's cultural worldview is commonplace in Africa, but that does not prove that Africans are socialists by nature. An African tribal group has the innate habit of defending herself against domination by another tribe. This is where one can talk of African tribal-recisim. Racism is not mainly a European affair. It is not an exaggeration to hold that Africans are the greatest racists in the world. Africans live and operate on tribal logics. They are most often intolerant of other neighbouring tribes. That is all the more reason why wars and tribal conflicts are over-accentuated in the continent. Tribalism, here, is not just the question of maintaining identity, but one of "superiorizing" over other tribes and not allowing them to survive and develop as a people. According to African Commission for Human and People's Rights:

Such negative stereotyping legitimizes official discrimination, marginalization, subjugation, exclusion and dispossession of indigenous peoples by government institutions and dominant groups. This at times extreme discrimination is a cause of profound suffering among indigenous communities and it is in violation of Article 5 of the African Charter, which states that every individual shall have the right to respect for the dignity inherent in a human being and Article 19, which states that all peoples shall be equal and enjoy the same respect.

One of the conflict-causing-factors in democratic elections in any African country is tribal superiority complex. One tribe struggles to produce the leading political giants for fear of suppression if the others did. There is the tendency in any country of Africa for one tribe to subjugate other tribes. This leads to many African ethnic groups decrying marginalization by ruling tribes. Tribal marginalization denies people good roads, quality education, commercial competence and human flourishing. Joseph Nwizarh harping on the dangers of tribalism in Africa writes: "In our time, the democratic aim of education has been obstructed by marginalization of social groups as promoted most especially by racism, which operates as cultural handicaps, and sexism that operates as culturally viewed biological inadequacies." Human development is not even in Africa due to mentalized tribal superiority leadership.

People's Complacency

Africans, including the so called literates, were little schooled to claim their rights from ruling authorities. The scale of acquiescence over gross violation of human rights and subjugation of people by oppressive political dictators is very disturbing. Acquiescence is problematic because people leave

themselves and the entire society vulnerable to greedy exploitative oppressors thereby giving the impression that oppression can only be endured and nothing more can be done. According to Carol Hay, "Accepting one's oppression can make oppression appear acceptable, or, even worse, it can make oppression appear not to be oppression at all." The dearth of the sense of collective survival gave way to individual survival stampede. In this respect, people worship ruling authorities to accede to their respective interests instead of challenging them to fulfil their political mandates. Politicians resorted to looting and human abuses so long as Africans neglected fighting for their collective welfare. The caveat between the excessively rich politicians and the downtrodden indigent poor masses is so glaring. The suffering of the masses continues to preponderate as far as African populace remain complacent over exploitations, so long as they are unable to challenge African politicians to hearken to their social mandates. In the view of Joseph Nwizarh, "(...) for the oppressed to be able to undertake the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform." Africans should learn to defend their rights against sycophant dictators to avert continuous massive deaths in the continent.

Towards an Anthropocentric Politics in Africa

The followings are inevitable towards an authentic human-flourishing politics in Africa. The fact remains that, since after the liberation of Africa from Western colonial hegemony, Africans have continued to suffer at the very machination of their own brother-political-leaders. This was owed to fundamental detractions from the very essence of politics as laid down by the fathers of political science. To re-orientate African politics to human happiness, attention must be paid to the followings.

Politics for Human Flourishing

African politicians must intuit that politics is not simply a do or die battle for power and exercise of authority over and against people. Politics is not an opportunistic social race for personal aggrandisement. Political activities should rather be programmed towards the happiness, unity and security of the human society. Stressing on the importance of service paradigm in African politics, Godwyns A. Agbude instructs that: "(...) the service paradigm in politics in Africa is essential in providing a viable social order that will serve as a platform for the realization of the citizens' well-being, self-actualization and self-fulfilment." The organization of society for the common good, for the total welfare of all should constitute the quiddity of the political criterion. The spirit of altruism and philanthropy should determine and shape the spirit of modern African political roadmap. Ideal politics pushes for the seat of man (*sedes anthropologiae*), respects the ontological pre-eminence and irreplaceability of the human person. Contemporary African politics should envision the promotion of human good. For human empowerment in Africa, Stanley C. Igwe thinks that "Africa requires leaders who by virtue of their learning have come to realize that wealth and power are transitory and that the legacy of true achievement lies with

what changes one is capable of bringing about to impact on peoples' lives and for which they may be fondly remembered." In the place of high and mighty politicians, Africa needs statesmen, who dress modestly to clothe the naked populace, who eat little to feed their hungry fellow citizens, who live in modest houses to provide shelter for their subjects, who invest money on education for people's mental empowerment and pursue social development for the general welfare of all and not greedily banking them wastefully abroad.

Socio-Political Education as requisite for Political Leadership

Plato envisioned the necessity of specialization regarding social functionality. In the city state (*polis*) as Plato brightly instructed, citizens should specialize in those areas in which they are truly competent. Education, Plato rightly instructed, should be the justifying means of bringing people to their various fields of specialization. Plato's position is that political leadership demands profound educational competence. This is not the case in Africa. Majority of political leaders in Africa did not acquire formal education on socio-political matters. Some African leaders did not acquire formal education as such. Indeed, some began to go to school after they had ruled their country for many years. Many were ignorant of technical education on political matters; some who studied had their specialization in areas outside of politics. The question is how those who lacked fundamental knowledge on political issues can be effective leaders of their people. If Africa has politically stagnated for centuries now, part of the reason is that the continent had been ruled by those who lacked basic training on the art of political organizations. Let it, therefore, be underlined that those who aspire for statesmanship must at least have acquired degrees in socio-political studies. The Holy Bible has rightly instructed us that a blind man cannot safely lead a blind man. On capacity building as basis for good leadership in Africa, African Leadership Forum has stressed that:

At the highest level of leadership, Africa must take a leaf out of the books of other nations. It must equip itself with the intellectual and scientific capacity and the knowledge base to formulate long-term strategies. It must upgrade considerably its ability to analyse economic and social issues correctly and to implement such policies with the necessary political vision.

An unenlightened statesman can hardly be a model on political expediency. Affluence due to wealth can hardly supersede fundamental education in socio-political organization.

Civic Education on Human Rights

The purpose of civic education is to promote the spirit of democracy in any country whatsoever. It encourages more informed and responsible political participation and builds support for important democratic values. It seeks the co-operation of both the political leaders and the citizens towards establishing a peaceful, united and progressive society. Civic education is, here, understood from two basic dimensions. Firstly, African statesmen should be trained not only to promote the spirit of democracy, but also to respect and defend the basic rights of their subjects. Respecting human rights

consists primarily in recognizing the ontological right of an individual to exist. This recognition creates room for granting the individual all that is necessary to facilitate her fundamental survival. African citizens, secondly, should be educated not only to co-operate in building democracy in their respective countries, but also to defend their fundamental human rights against exploitative leadership. Critical education, according to Joseph Nwizarh, can lead to “(...) the identification of the reification of conducive frameworks that sustain domination, subordination, hierarchy and exploitation in view of their proper displacement, with a language of possibilities and the demonstration of opportunities.” Evie Browne believes that “(...) civic education has positive effects on increasing knowledge and to some extent increasing democratic behaviour and attitudes.” Complacency over injustice or blind authority worship hardly furthers human flourishing. Africans should be educated to stand up and insist on their rights and oust governments that are not for their proper welfare. Both the governments and the citizens must committedly work co-operatively to establish rule of law in their vicinities.

Acquisition of Some Sense of Comparative Shame

One of the distinguishing marks of humans from animals is the exhibition of the sense of shame. Africans have hardly shown any sense of shame regarding their backwardness in the scale of human development. The tendency is to blame colonization for Africa’s international poverty stricken stereotype. In the view of Laurent Ladouce, “Africais identifying herself with a large number of suffering (malheur) and failure: war, desertification, diseases, poverty, children who die due to hunger and who need help: it appears that the whole continent is evoking nothing but pity mixed with repulsion.”

Most of the so called industrial nations in the world suffered colonization. Colonization is no longer a sufficient excuse for Africa’s political indolence. According to Africa Leadership Forum, “Compared with other developing nations of Asia and Latin America, Africa now risks being marginalized in the world.” Africans must look into themselves to discover the roots of their political set-backs. A certain sort of comparative shame should help us ask why the rest of the world is fast developing while the black continent continues to stagnate behind.

CONCLUSION

This article has drawn attention to the challenges of detracted anthropological focus in African politics. This paper is at pain with the abounding facets of human sufferings in the black continent despite the claims of established democracies in all the countries of Africa. There might be exaggerated claims of African communalism and socialism, but the glaring fact remains that African politics lacks all senses of general human flourishing-the common good. Human development and happiness is still a luxury in African politics.

The causes include wanting respect for the ontological value of the human person, radical egoism, lack of political education and leadership competence, tribalism, dictatorial leadership and social complacency. For the wholesome welfare of the human

person to predominate in African politics, Africans need competently educated altruistic politicians; political strategies must focus on the common good—the general welfare of all; African citizens must be educated to defend their rights against political exploitations in all its ramifications. To be like other industrialized continents, Africans must learn to be champions of human-centred politics.

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