

MARGINAL MIND MATTERS NPC.

Concept paper

Inter-faith Ad-Hoc Committee on Social Exclusion



;MARGINS

Push Boundries

"We cannot achieve sustainable development and make the planet better for all if people are excluded from opportunities, services, and the chance for a better life,"

~ United Nations (2015)

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1. Background

Religion and socio-economic policy rarely feature together in research, less so, in research that is oriented to the left. The reason for this is socialism has always been atheistic. Engels once wrote that, "*all religion is nothing but the fantastic reflection of, in men's minds, of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces,*" (Engels cited in Williams, 2016:228).

But, while many African countries adopted socialism, they outrightly rejected atheism (Azenabor, 2009). As the winds of independence swept through Africa, a unique brand of socialism was devised as a means for Africans to resolve African problems in a way that was consistent with the culture, beliefs, and values of the continent (Westerlund, 1982). The theory of the *Third International Way* was developed by former Libyan leader, Muammar Khaddafi and was based on the premise that religion and nationalism should supersede both the capitalist materialism of the west and the communist atheism of the east (Westerlund, 1982).

The Third International Way never gained ground in governance or policy but, nevertheless, continues to be the way Africans and, more generally, people of the south live their lives. The masses of the developing world struggle to see nationalism or liberation as separate from their religious ideology (Westerlund, 1982:28). The relationship between policy and religion is a growing sub-field and

one that is particularly important (Panin, 2020). In Panin's study of economic policy and religion, she identified that while only 23 percent of Europeans considered religion important, over 80 percent in three sub-Saharan countries (Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe) registered that religion was a part of their daily lives, about 60 percent of Latin Americans considered religion important, and around 67 percent of Indians identified as religious. About 48 percent of the rest of world registered that religion played a role in their lives (Panin, 2020).

2. The Importance of Religion in Mitigating Social Exclusion

The growth of religion in the developing world shows few signs of abating and, for this reason, socio-economic policy-making can benefit from an understanding of it (Panin, 2020). Religion serves as an important indicator of beliefs, preferences, and responses to laws and policies (Agbiji, 2015; Panin, 2020). Religion interacts with governance and shapes norms and behaviors relating to labor, consumption, and production patterns (Panin, 2020).

According to Agbiji, religious organizations are a distinctive and unparalleled source of social capital and social capital is the primary means to mitigating social exclusion and ensuring that everyone has a fair chance at participating meaningfully in the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of their society. Religious institutions occupy a privileged position in society and, because religion has never been brought into the policy-making space in any substantial way, religion has been instrumentalized to sow discord in society (Agbiji, 2015).

People find more legitimacy, accountability, and humanity in religion than they do in any other organized social space and, for this reason, religious institutions have had to respond to socio-economic failure and the lack of political legitimacy in society (Agbiji, 2015). Religion has remained a stable force in the lives of the most marginalized (Panin, 2020). Religious institutions provide social networks and access to social goods and services; they unify people and, in doing so, contribute to creating cohesive societies (Agbiji, 2015; Panin, 2020).

Religion is a source of social capital, social mobilization, and social change (Agbiji, 2015; Panin, 2020). Relationships arising from religious groupings provide a means to achieve personal well-being, to developing civil society, and to participating in democratic life (Agbiji, 2015). More and more people are turning to churches, temples, and mosques as a source of guidance and inspiration. These religious spaces are flourishing with voluntary outreach programs, charities, and social services (Agbiji, 2015).

3. Religion in a Post-Cold War World

The post-Cold War world was a multi-polar one but over the last 20 years or so, a bi-polar world (reminiscent of the Cold War era) has (re)emerged. The war in Ukraine has accelerated this bi-polarity. The United States and China compete for political, economic, and military dominance and Africa is split between traditional Western trading partners and the Chinese and Russians. The areas of

contention between the cultures of the West and the rest are clearer now than they were during the Cold War.

The free market encourages individuality and materialism; communism encourages atheism and totalitarianism, and the traditional values, beliefs, and cultures of Africans, Asians, Arabs, and Latin Americans are underpinned by communalism and religion. In a world characterized by conflict, inequality, and environmental disaster, it seems more important than ever to explore the role of the Third Way as a response developed by and for Africa to solve Africa's problems.

4. The Third Way

Long before socialism was founded by Marx and Engels, the tenets of equity and freedom from the oppressive forces of production were expressed in religion. Socialism has always existed in Africa and it is perhaps for this reason that Africans have been reluctant to adopt the Western version wholesale. In this section, the socialist underpinnings of some mainstream religions will be discussed as well as the continued relevance of these religious theories in addressing social exclusion sustainably.

4.1 The Christian Socialist Movement

Christian socialists are of the view that human beings are, essentially, social, and Christian morality is expressed in social terms and, therefore, Christianity is socialist

(Maimela, 1989). Christian Socialism defines itself as a new religious movement for new expression of justice, fraternity, and real democracy. They are of the view that the greatest challenge facing humanity is its inability to cooperate for the greater good it, therefore, focuses on collectivism for a 'higher' individuality (Grant, 1909).

Christian Socialists or Liberation Theologians believe that the value of mutual cooperation can provide the basis for building a more humane and just society (Maimela, 1989). They work towards this end through worker's cooperatives and trade unions. Christian socialism is opposed to the violent overthrowing of the state or forced re-distribution of wealth (Grant, 1909). They focus instead on the awareness of social exclusion and the building of bonds of solidarity, which include both labor and capitalists, in the processes of mitigating social exclusion (Maimela, 1989; Williams, 2016).

The answer to social exclusion, according to Christian Socialists, is to redress inequality peacefully and inclusively by equipping both the working classes and capitalists with consciousness. They do this by conscientizing the laboring classes about their oppression and the capitalists about the immorality of (Williams, 2016). Christian socialism does not concern itself with materialism but with the abolition of interest, a living wage mandated by the state, common ownership of land and capital, production for communal use (and not for profit), and equal opportunity of every citizen (Grant, 1909; Williams, 2016). Christian Socialism also supports a

democratic system that supports individual rights and freedoms, and places the family (instead of the state) at the center of society (Grant, 1909).

4.2 Islamic Socialism

Islamic Socialism centers on the balance between religion and materialism and includes partial nationalization, central planning, and one-party rule for the purpose of bringing about equality and equitable distribution of private property (Westerlund, 1982). The Islamic Socialist State is characterized by a mixed economy where there is some nationalization and co-operatives are used to implement social inclusion. The state intervenes in the economy and its hegemony is tempered by small scale or petty capitalism (Westerlund, 1982).

While private property is permissible, Islam inhibits large-scale capitalism and imposes constraints on commercial monopolization to avoid commerce becoming too accumulative (Westerlund, 1982). Islamic history evidences that Muslim merchants did not become industrialized capitalists (Westerlund, 1982).

Islamic socialism seeks to reconcile Islam with commerce by ensuring its harmonious co-existence. Capitalists are viewed as partners in the pursuit of a just and equitable society (Westerlund, 1982). However, Islamic Socialism does not support economic individualism and individuals are prohibited from possessing more than a stipulated amount of land to discourage large estates which marginalize and proletarianize small peasants (Westerlund, 1982). Individuals are encouraged to share their inheritances with their relatives, not charge interest,

gamble, or engage in high-risk business practices (which are seen as unethical), and to abstain from commercial exploitation and profiteering (Westerlund, 1982). Islamic Socialism views classism as incompatible with the principle of the *umma* which teaches the solidarity of all Muslims (Westerlund, 1982). *Takaful*, *wakt*, and *zakat* are Islamic values of social responsibility that counter social exclusion (Westerlund, 1982). In Islamic Socialism, altruistic-socialism is contrasted with egoistic-capitalism (Westerlund, 1982). In Islam, it is the legal duty of every Muslim to support the poor because it is their moral obligation and religious duty to do so (Westerlund, 1982). The concept of sharing runs strongly through Islam and is said to have informed modern conceptions of the welfare state (Westerlund, 1982).

4.3 African Socialism- Humanist Economics

Africans have long been critical of Marxism and while variations of socialism have been implemented on the continent, these were uniquely African. Marxism is seen as a foreign intervention; an alien concept that subverts African communalism and results in unnecessary conflict and inequality (Senghor cited in Azenabor, 2009:264).

African socialism is based on the values of welfarism, communalism, and family. It is a socialism informed by collective efforts, mutual assistance, and interdependence as the pre-conditions for welfarism (which is the basis of communalism). The individual identifies with a group and invests in its solidarity, co-operation, and reciprocity (Azenabor, 2009). Individuals are inseparable from

community. In the words of Anyanwu, *"The African assumes that there are no isolated individuals since there are no isolated forces in the universe. So, an individual is a force in relation to other forces. The individual awareness is possible only in a community of forces. Individuals are born into a community and their obligation is to manifest the spirit of community in them by sharing in collective beliefs, works, duties, and results,"* (Anyanwu cited in Azenabor, 2009:264).

Mbiti adds, *"The individual can only say: I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am,"* (Mbiti cited in Azenabor, 2009:263). The individual belongs to the greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they are less than they are (Kwiyani, 2013).

This communalism shapes all aspects of African social existence and informs the relationship the individual has with themselves, with others, and with their natural environment. It is the belief that the human is made human by others but not just the people who now exist but those who existed previously (ancestors) and those yet to be born. Therefore, social responsibility and sustainability underpins African socialism. Individuals are made to honor the culture, values, and beliefs of the past and to preserve those beliefs and natural resources for the ones who will follow (Mvula, 2017).

According to African Socialism, moral integrity must accompany economic productivity (Mvula, 2017). For this reason, African Socialism encourages that

wealth be distributed among the collective (Azenabor, 2009). Labor does not belong to the employer or even the individual but to the community and must serve the purpose of uplifting the community (Azenabor, 2009). Economic objectives are geared away from economic growth and towards the means of production and exchange for a communal society characterized by on-land activities such as farming, communal and cooperative land holding, and a culture of adherence to traditional values, human solidarity, natural unity, social equality, and economic democracy (Azenabor, 2009).

4.4 Gandhian Socialism

Gandhi was of the view that 'real' socialism had always existed in India and was handed down, thousands of years prior to Marx and Engels' Communist Manifesto, by Indian sages in the *Ishopanishad* scriptures which taught that, "*All land belongs to Gopal, where then is the boundary line? Man is the maker of that line and he can, therefore, unmake it*" (Gandhi, 1959:10). Gopal means God. Gandhi was of the view that socialism was not born from the discovery of the misuse of capital by capitalists but had always been a part of Hindu beliefs (Gandhi, 1959).

Gandhi called himself a socialist but was against scientific socialism. He compared communism to colonialism and was of the view that because it was propagated throughout the world through coercion it was as oppressive as colonialism (Gandhi, 1959). Any form of oppression, whatever it is disguised as, he

argued and which sought to influence the human mind was dangerous and showed the lack of faith in the human nature and its capacity to think for itself. True socialism, Gandhi believed, was the freedom of the individual mind to believe whatever it chose and to live life according to those choices without hinderance.

Gandhi did not agree with the nationalization of all instruments of production, distribution, and exchange but only key industries. He was also against violent revolt and believed that the only way to achieve widespread socialism was through non-violent persuasion. He saw the socialist movement as one including capitalists rather than conflicting with them (Gandhi, 1959). Gandhi developed the idea of 'trusteeship' which has similarities with the Islamic principles of *zakat* and guardianship (Gandhi, 1959). He was of the view that if he could convince capitalists of the immorality of capitalism then they would join the oppressed in solidarity against social exclusion (Gandhi, 1959).

Gandhi was also opposed to individualism. He believed that no single person should have a right to anything if others were denied that same right. He emphasized that no person should have more land than they need for their sustenance and he attributed the grinding poverty in India to the poor having no land.

Gandhi was of the view that the only means to true socialism is through education. Educating the masses about their oppression would lead to the

conscientization and that, in turn, would lead to them freeing themselves from oppression. Educating capitalists and communists about the violence and immorality of coercing others to follow their ideologies would lead to the support and tolerance of indigenous ideas, values, cultures, and beliefs (Gandhi, 1959).

Gandhi believed that the greatest of human achievements is the attainment of social justice. If every human had bread to eat, he argues, then it would lead to their individual freedom and development. Gandhi's socialism is one where human capability is used, not solely for individual success, but for common good (Gandhi, 1959). He argued that India's village economies were built on the capabilities and duties of ordinary men and women who through their labor and service gained, not only, subsistence from their life but also collective good. Gandhi believed that social inclusion could be achieved if every village was self-sustaining, capable of managing its own affairs without interference or hindrance, and capable of defending itself through non-violent means (Gandhi, 1959).

4.5 Buddhist Economics

The Middle Path of Buddhist Economics entails mixing capitalism with central governance, and a more holistic human existence driven by right understanding (gained from the eight-fold path i.e., right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, mindfulness and right concentration) (Shi, 2018). Under Buddhist Economics, corporations need to be beneficial corporations rather than profit-making corporations. They need to

meet rigorous social and environmental performance, accountability and transparency standards and consumers need to be disciplined, ethical, and responsible (Shi, 2018). Labor needs to; give humans the chance to utilize and develop their faculties, to overcome their ego-centeredness by participating and co-operating with others in a common task, and bringing forth goods and services needed for collective existence (Schumacher, 1973).

The aim of Buddhist Economics is not the multiplication and attainment of wants but the purification of human character so it is free of wants (Schumacher, 1973). Modern economists measure the standard of living by the amount of annual consumption so, the more a person consumes the better off they are assumed to be. In Buddhist economics, consumption is merely the means to human well-being. The point of Buddhist Economics is, therefore, to maximize well-being while minimizing consumption (Schumacher, 1973). This allows people to live with great pleasure through the modest use of resources and to be part of highly self-sufficient local communities where people live harmoniously with each other and the natural environment.

Buddhists do not oppose economic progress unless it causes suffering for others (Shi, 2018). Self-interest, therefore, needs to be balanced by the pursuit of greater good (Shi, 2018). Buddhists believe in a human-centered economic model which enables human and environmental sustainability. They believe that this can be achieved through a mindful economy and smaller-scale local economic systems

as a starting point for a more inclusive society. There is an emphasis on local production and consumption. Both imports and exports are discouraged because production should take place on a small scale to meet the needs of its population rather than abundance which compromises the natural environment and leads to waste. The transportation of goods over long distances is also discouraged as wasteful of non-renewable resources (Schumacher, 1973).

5. The Inter-Faith Ad Hoc Committee on Social Exclusion

The Inter-Faith Ad Hoc Committee on Social Exclusion will serve as a platform to bring together experts from the major religious groupings in South Africa for the purpose of discussing the role of religious institutions in mitigating social exclusion, preserving the traditional knowledge and practices relating to social inclusion in religious organizations, and finding innovative and home-grown solutions to the challenges facing South Africa.

The inter-faith committee will meet every quarter and will produce an out-report underscoring:

1. The state of social exclusion in South African society and its negative impact on communities,
2. The role of religious organizations in supporting marginalized communities,
3. On-the-ground perspectives emanating from the religious organizations and the communities they work with in lobbying for a national policy on social exclusion that is inclusive of religion,

4. Share best practices and come up with concrete solutions on how religious organizations can play a greater role in advocating for and mitigating social exclusion in their societies.
5. Carve out a space for religious organizations to collectively influence policy on social exclusion,
6. Share best practice in tackling social exclusion and,
7. Draw up an action plan on how to mitigate social exclusion in society.

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