

### 3 CHAPTER THREE

## THE AFRICAN VALUE SYSTEM AND ITS ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

### 3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two I argued that, although the Lagos Plan of Action (LPA) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) were designed in Africa, their respective philosophical foundations are not African. I outlined how the dependency theory of economic development, which inspired LPA, was based on the value and belief system which structures the ontological make-up of the Latin American people. In the same way I argued that the neo-liberal theory of economic development, which inspired NEPAD, is based on the Western belief and value system.

Chapter Three focuses on the belief and value system that structures the ontological status of Africans. I will argue that, in this system, the individual is conceived of as ontologically part of the community. This community has two aspects, namely, the cosmological and human dimensions. The human being is part of the cosmological community of beings (*ntu*), as well as part of the community of human beings (*Bantu*).

This chapter will consist of three parts. In the first part, I will argue that, despite the apparent cultural diversity which is empirically obvious, there is a metaphysical backbone that unifies almost all Africans. The second part is an outline of the cosmological and anthropological dimensions of the African community. The third part is an overview of the political attempts to validate the African sense of community and its values. I will consider the views of the fathers of Africa's independence, namely, Leopold Senghor, Nkwameh Krumah, Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda, who tried to give the African belief and value system a socio-political expression, namely African socialism. Such consideration should lead to the issue of whether the African belief and value system could be given an economic expression. The conclusion will follow.

### **3.2 The unity and/or the diversity of the African value system**

To talk of the African value system and not African value systems presupposes the unity of African culture. The unity of African culture is certainly a debatable issue. That Africa is culturally homogeneous is not empirically obvious neither to the outside observer nor to those inside. In fact, empirically speaking, Africa is culturally diverse. A Zulu is not a Burundian, a Burundian is culturally different from a Yoruba of Nigeria, a Yoruba is not a Muluba of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and a Nuer of Sudan is not a Khoisan of Southern Africa. According to Mudimbe (1988, p.79), African scholars who are in search of their pride and identity cannot deny Africa's diversity. Even Hountondji (1996, p.148) criticised the vast majority of anthropologists who neglected the plurality of pre-colonial African culture, forcing an artificial unity upon what is really irreducibly diverse.

The issue of the unity and plurality of African culture is even more contentious when it comes to the question of African philosophy. The much debated issue of whether there is an African philosophy is not only discussed with a view of affirming the universality of philosophy as self-critical thought (Crahay, 1965; Houtondji, 1977, 1982, 1983, 1989; Wiredu 1980; Oladipo 1992), but also in terms of the thought system which may be particular to African cultural groups, or simply African culture as a whole (Kagame 1956, 1971, 1976; Mulago, 1955, 1969, 1973, etc).

Diversity is a reality which cannot be denied in Africa. Yet Hountondji's idea that the vast majority of anthropologists are simply forcing an artificial unity upon what is irreducibly diverse is hardly acceptable. To remain at the level of Hountondji's affirmation is to undermine the whole endeavour of philosophy which consists in the search of the unity behind the observed diversity, the One behind the many. The point is that the empirical observation is not a sufficient basis from which to appreciate the diversity or unity of Africans. The fact that there are different personalities in a given family does not negate the reality of a family. To affirm the reality of parts is not to deny the reality of the whole; nor is to affirm the reality of communion (common-union) necessarily to negate the existence of individualities.

Thus, although the diversity of cultures in Africa is a reality, such diversity of cultures could be seen as parts of the whole, or more accurately subcultures of a general African culture. This general African culture is underpinned by a common metaphysical backbone, a common root

that unifies almost all Africans (Oladipo, 1992; Ramose, 2002). The idea of a metaphysical backbone that underlies the cultural unity of Africans is present in African discourses of otherness such as negritude, black personality, African philosophy, and the struggle for identity and authenticity (Mudimbe, 1988, p. xi; Sindima, 1995, p.ch.3).

Olumide (1948) studied the Yoruba religion (in Nigeria) with a view to demonstrating that the Yoruba tradition has an Egyptian origin. Similarly, the Egyptologist Cheikh Anta Diop (1954, 1967a, 1967b) stressed the religious, linguistic and cultural unity of Africa. Diop's cultural unity of Africa has been revisited by Nkemnkia (1999) who centres his reflection on the idea of "African vitality", meaning that "for the African everything is life" (Nkemnkia, 1999, p.11). Beside his nationalist programme, Abraham underlines African unity in his book *The Mind of Africa* (1966) and talks of the "family resemblance" in Africa. For Ramose (see also Shutte, 2001) what underlies this "family resemblance" is the notion of "ubuntu" "which is simultaneously the foundation and the edifice of African philosophy, a philosophy which "goes from the Nubian desert to the Cape of Good Hope, and from Senegal to Zanzibar" (Ramose, 2002, p.41). The concept of "negritude" which Senghor (1964, 1967a, 1967b) developed was aimed at substantiating the claim that Africa is one. Nkrumah always sought to build African unity politically on the premise that Africa has a cultural unity. Mbiti (1968) affirms the cultural unity of Africans and regards it as the foundation for the coherence of African religions and philosophy. In his *La Religion Traditionnelle des Bantu et leur vision du monde* (1973), Mulago asserts that the Bantu religious vision is homogeneous; and this homogeneity brought African scholars to talk of *U-ntu*, *Négritude*, *Africanity*, three terms that are used interchangeably. Mulago himself developed the concept of Africanity and took it to be the common factor of African cultures and religious beliefs. Sindima (1995) tries to redeem the African identity and the values that underlie it from the crisis caused by the impact of liberalism and the legacy of colonialism.

After having done research on the Bemba and the Baluba of Congo (and partly in Zambia), Tempels (1959) talked of the notion of being and the universe which is special not only to Baluba, but also to all Bantu and even to all Africans. Alan Ogot (1967) used this same Bantu ontology as a framework for the analysis of the concept of "jok" among the nilotic people. In his *Muntu*, Jahaneiz Jahn (1961) argued that the Bantu ontology applies to all Africans. For Jahn, this is substantiated by those Africans who have their own opinion and who are ready to determine the future of Africa: those, in other words, of whom it is said they are trying to

revive the African tradition (Jahn, 1962, p.16). Jahn had in mind the distinction between the “real” Africans and the westernised ones. Thus when he talks of the Africans who are trying to revive the future of Africa and its tradition, he was talking of the so-called “real” Africans. Jahn’s distinction seems to be too radical and simplistic, yet crucial insofar as it points to the issue of how to account for the Western influence on Africans, that is, the issue of whether Africans are still the same. Are the so-called “real” Africans not just those, who, despite the Western influence, “struggle for authenticity and identity” (Sindima, 1995, p.60)? Are they not those who “struggle [...] to undo what colonialism did to the African mind and society” so as “to create a new mentality and a new social order in which African values [...] can exist?” (Sindima, 1995, p.61) Are the so-called westernised Africans those “Black skin, (in) White Mask” of which Franz Fanon (1967) talks? Or those Africans who try to appropriate the fruits of science and technology (having) without appropriating to themselves the spirit or rather the cultural beliefs and values that ultimately produced them (being)? Or again those who “suffer from the pathological interiorisation of self-hatred” (Bidima, 1995, p.28)?

Central to the metaphysical backbone that unifies African cultures is the belief that the individual is ontologically part of the community and that the community is ontologically prior to the individual. It is true that this belief could be found elsewhere in other cultures in the West as can be seen in the reflections on the centrality of the community in the life of the individual (see Walzer, 1982; Taylor, 1989; Sandel, 1982, 1996). The sense of loyalty to the community found in certain oriental cultures, particularly in India, China and Japan, is one of the indications of the importance attributed to the community (see Morishima, 1982).

However, the specificity of African sense of community lies in the way the Africans conceive of the universe around them in general and the human universe in particular. As far as this research is concerned, it might be overly ambitious and unrealistic to consider the whole of Africa. As already mentioned in Chapter One and, as can be seen on Map 3-1, the northern part of Africa is populated by Afro-asiatic people, and therefore may have their distinctive cultural characteristics. In the same way, Madagascar will not be considered in this study since it is populated by Austronesian people who have their own cultural features. I will concentrate on the Bantu people whose ontology applies to the negro-Africans of Sub-Saharan Africa.

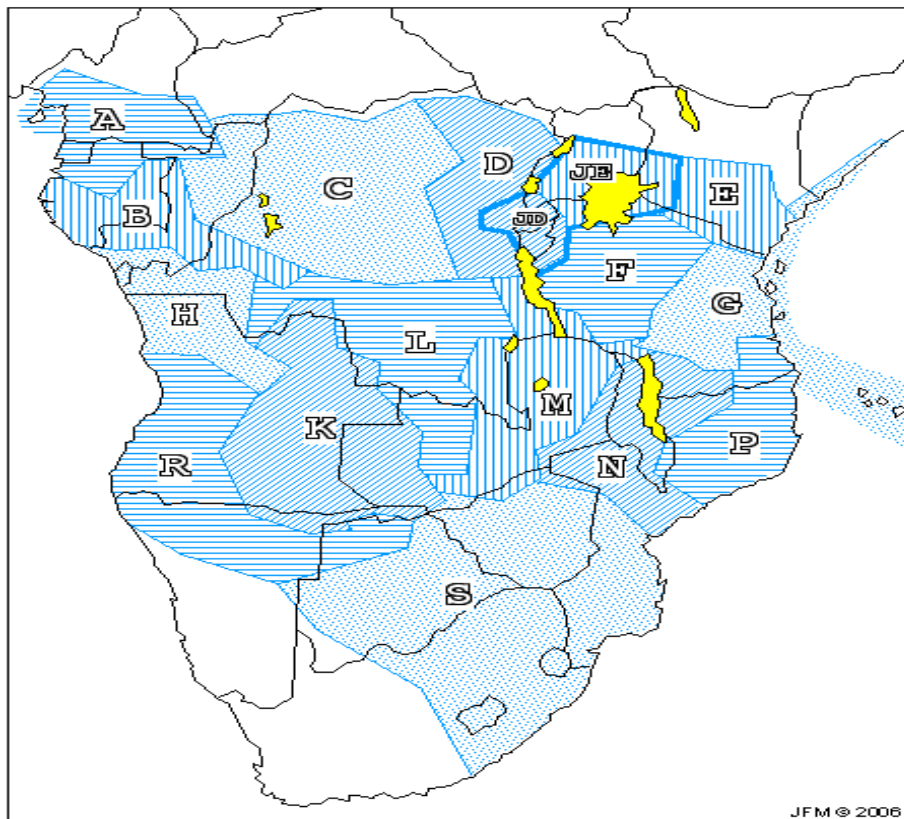
The Bantu people are part of a larger group called the Niger-Kongo (see Map 3-1) and occupy almost the whole region South of the Equator and its surroundings. They make up more than 60 % of the African population in Sub-Saharan Africa, and occupy geographically a third of the whole African continent (Kagame, 1976; Guthrie, 1948). This may justify why most African thinkers tend to refer to Bantu philosophical principles to make the point about what unifies Africans (Jahn, 1961; Ebousi-Boulaga, 1972). Although this is debatable, anthropologists and ethnologists argue that Western Africans (Niger-Kongo A) and the Bantu people were the same people before they took different migratory itineraries. This may be the reason why certain metaphysical concepts found in West Africa are almost the same as those of Bantu people, although they are linguistically different (Gyekye, 1997; Kaphagawani, 2006; Odei, 2007).

**Map 3-1: Map showing the approximate distribution of Bantu vs Niger-Kongo**  
(Source: New World Encyclopedia)



Linguistically, Bantu languages seem to be variations of one common ancestral language (see Map 3-2). In particular, despite certain phonological variations they share the fact that the human being is referred as *Muntu* (in singular) and *Bantu* (in plural).

**Map 3-2 Guthrie's classification of Bantu languages (1948) updated in 2006.**  
(NB. The original map did not have Group J which, on the updated map, combines D and E.  
See *A Survey Report of Bantu Languages* by Derek Nurse, SIL International, 2001)



- Group A: South Cameroon & North Gabon
- Group B: South Gabon & West Congo-B
- Group C: North-West, North & Central Congo
- Group D: North-East, East Congo-K & Rwanda-Burundi
- Group E: South Uganda, South-West Kenya & North-West Tanzania
- Group F: North & West Tanzania
- Group G: Central, East Tanzania & Swahili coast
- Group H: South-West Congo-B & North Angola
- Group K: East Angola & West Zambia
- Group L: South Congo-K & West, Central Zambia
- Group M: East, Central Zambia, South-West Tanzania & South-East Congo-K
- Group N: Malawi, Central Mozambique & South-East Zambia
- Group P: South Tanzania & North Mozambique
- Group R: South-West Angola & North-West Namibia
- Group S: Zimbabwe, South Mozambique & East of South Africa



In Bantu philosophy, the notion of being is known as *-ntu*<sup>23</sup> while the concept of human being is *muntu*. I will henceforth talk of *muntu* to designate human being and *ntu* to refer to being.

### 3.3 Cosmological and anthropological dimensions of the African community

In this section, the aim is to show that the *muntu* is part of the cosmological community of *ntu* (beings) in general and part of the human community in particular.

#### 3.3.1 The *muntu* in the universe of *ntu*

According to Alexis Kagame (1956), the structure and grammatical rules of a people's language are modelled in agreement with the cosmological ordering of the universe. On this premise, Kagame analysed his own language, Kinyarwanda, and came to the conclusion that the philosophical elements in the linguistic structure of Kinyarwanda reveal the way in which the Bantu of Rwanda conceive of the categories of being in their philosophy. For Kagame, since the linguistic structure of Kinyarwanda is the same as that of Bantu in general, one can talk of an ontology that is common to all the Bantu people (1976)<sup>24</sup>. Kagame outlined four categories that constitute reality and the Bantu universe. He argues that these categories are amenable to Aristotelian metaphysical categories (see Table 3-1).

**Table 3-1: Table of Bantu categories**

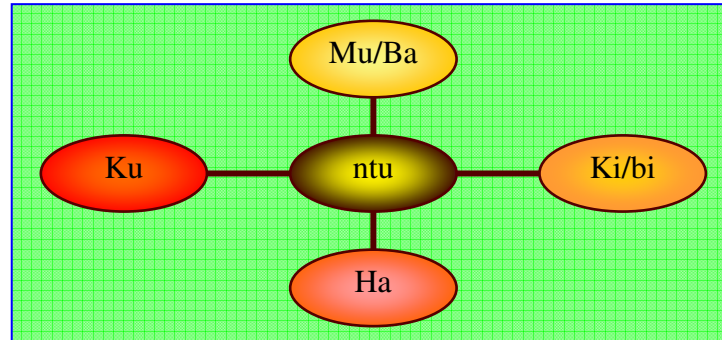
Singular	Plural	Analytically	Meaning	Aristotelian categories
Muntu	Bantu	Mu/ba-ntu	<i>Being with intelligence:</i> Human beings actually living, human beings who are dead, and human beings who are not-yet born.	Substance
Kintu	Bintu	Ki/bi-ntu	<i>Being without intelligence:</i> minerals, plants, animals	
Hantu	Hantu	Ha-ntu	<i>Being of space and time</i>	Time, space
Kuntu	Kuntu	Ku-ntu	<i>Modal being</i>	Quantity, quality, relation, position, possession, action, passion

<sup>23</sup> There may be some phonological variations where the root *-ntu* becomes *nhu* (some parts of Group S), *-tu* without "n" (Group G), or even *-du* (the western part of Group A). These variations do not alter anything as far as the Bantu notion of being is concerned.

<sup>24</sup> Alexis Kagame collected data on 180 languages for the Bantu zone, read more than 300 books on all the various languages, and interviewed 60 informants (see Kagabo, 2006, p.232).

All these four categories (mu, ki, ha, ku) are built on the same root, *ntu* (being)<sup>25</sup>. The following figure (Figure 3-1) gives a schematic picture of the four categories.

**Figure 3-1: The schematic structure of the Bantu categories**



Contrary to what Mkhize (2008, p.41) believes, it is obvious from the above table that *ntu* is not only reserved for human beings. Mkhize (2008, p.38) talks of the cosmic unity but fails to discover that *ntu* underlies it as if the four categories were unknown to him.

There has been a question of why Kagame did not consider the “bu” of (*u*)*bu-ntu*<sup>26</sup> as a fifth category. For Kagame, with the concept of *u-bu-ntu*, one is already in the realm of formal logic as a condition for philosophising. In other words, *bu* is not another class of beings, but rather an **abstracted being**<sup>27</sup> which has a mental existence. It belongs to the order of what is signified. *Bu* could be compared to what Peter Abelard called *sermo*, that is, a word in its relationship with a logical content, that is, what is predicated. It has a universal existence in the mind, yet refers to concrete, particular beings in the real world.

The Bantu distinguish between the concrete and the abstract. They distinguish between the abstract of accidentality and the abstract of substantiality. The abstract of accidentality expresses entities which do not exist independently in nature. In other words, entities expressed

<sup>25</sup>Kagame claimed that these four categories correspond to the ten Aristotelian categories (one substance and nine accidents). However, his biographer, Kagabo (2006, p.236), questioned this claim arguing that Aristotelian categories are classes of predicates, while Kagame’s categories are classes of beings. Nevertheless, this is not to say that Kagame is wrong since as far as the Bantu languages are concerned, Kagame is right to stress that any conceivable entity comes down to one of those four and there is no entity outside those four categories (Kagame cited by Kagabo, *ibid.*).

<sup>26</sup> According to Ramose (2002, p.41, see also Mkhize, 2008, p.41) *ubuntu* has particles, the prefix *ubu* and the stem *ntu*. But actually there are three particles: *u* which is an article, *bu* which denotes the abstract. For instance the Bantu would refer to the dog-ness of a dog as *u-bu-bwa*, the animality of an animal as *u-bu-koko*. When *bu* is combined with the stem *-ntu*, it means the humanness”.

<sup>27</sup> My emphasis



by the abstract of accidentality have no existence except in reference to some being. I will give two examples here, namely *u-bu-gabo* and *u-bu-shangantahe*. *U-bu-gabo* (courage, force, and virility) derives from *umugabo* (man) and is predicated to people or anything that shows signs of courage or strength. *U-bu-shingantahe* (integrity, equity) derives from *umushingantahe* (judge) and is predicated to any person who leads a life of integrity, justice, and truthfulness. Instead, the abstract of substantiality expresses entities existing independently in nature. It expresses a particular being in specific categories or a mode of being. For instance, the Bantu would talk of *u-bu-bwa* to mean the dog-ness of a dog; *u-bu-khosi* to mean the kingship of a king; *u-bu-shuhe* (heat-ness of the heat); *u-bu-kali* (sharpness of a thing or a tool). As can be seen in these examples, it is the substantiality of a given being that is expressed.

Both the abstract of accidentality and the abstract of substantiality are connoted by the classifier *-bu*. *Ubuntu* (humanity or humanness) enters in the category of the abstract of substantiality. *-Bu* is not an entitative being. Ramose is right to point out that *(u)bu*<sup>28</sup> evokes the idea of be-ing<sup>29</sup> in general (universal in the mind). It is enfolded being before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of ex-istence<sup>30</sup> of a particular entity (Ramose, 2002, p.41).

Looking at these categories of beings, one could say that the human being, the *mu-ntu*, the being of intelligence, is part of the universal community which includes beings other than the human being. However, there has been a debate as to whether it is adequate to translate *ntu* by being on the one hand, and on the other hand, whether God is part of *ntu*.

Tempels (1959) translated *ntu* as force and equated the Bantu notion of being with force. The aim of Tempels was to distinguish the classical Greek, Western notion of being (the reality common to all beings, being as such, the reality that is) and the Bantu notion of being. But Tempels' distinction between the Western notion of being and the Bantu one is not only conceptual, but also ontological. He argued that while the Western notion of being is static, the Bantu notion of being is dynamic, hence his concept of "force":

We can conceive the transcendental notion of "being" by separating it from its attribute, "force," but Bantu cannot. "Force" in his thought is a necessary

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<sup>28</sup> See the above footnote 26.

<sup>29</sup> Ramose's spelling

<sup>30</sup> Ramose's spelling

element in “being”, and the concept of force is inseparable from the definition of “being”. Without the element of “force”, “being” cannot be conceived. We hold a static conception of “being”, theirs is dynamic (Tempels, 1959, p.34).

When one looks at the different Bantu categories, it would appear as if Tempels is right. Indeed, the Bantu idea of being seems to be dynamic when compared to the classical Greek/Western one. The classifier *-Mu* refers to being that acts with intelligence. *-Ki* refers to being that acts without intelligence (animals, the plants, and inanimate beings). *-Ha* is the being of time and space; and *-Ku* refers to the being of modalities, the different aspects a being can take. A number of African philosophers seem to have developed the Bantu philosophy along these lines.

In the same way, Vincent Mulago (1965, pp. 152-153; see also Mulago, 1955) argues that *ntu* cannot be simply translated by being. *Ntu* and being are not coextensive in so far as the *ntu* categories subsume created beings and not the original source of *ntu*, God. For Mulago *ntu* is a fundamental and referential basic being-force<sup>31</sup> which dynamically manifests itself in all existing beings, differentiating them, but also linking them in an ontological hierarchy. Apparently, Mulago wants to vindicate Tempels’ equation that being is force and force is being in Bantu ontology. However, the fact that *ntu* includes only created beings does not undermine the translation of the Bantu concept of “*ntu*” as “being”, nor does it allow to claim that being is force. That the Bantu idea of being is dynamic does not give Tempels grounds to claim that, in Bantu ontology, “being is force”.

According to Kagame, the essential characteristic of *ntu* is to act and be acted upon. And this constitutes its mode of being. However, Kagame does not equate being with force. Force does not have an ontological status like *ntu*. Rather, it could be a characteristic of *ntu* but not *ntu*

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<sup>31</sup> The concept of being-force is certainly taken from Tempels’ *Bantu Philosophy* (1959). Tempels talks of vital force as an invisible reality of everything that exists, a certain property that underlies all things. As far as he understands the Bantu ontology, force is being, the very essence of being. It is possible that Tempels was drawing on Bergson’s evolutionary philosophy (1946). In effect, Bergson talks of a vital principle (*élan vital*) which he contrasts to inert matter. Using the same contrast, Tempels compares the vital force in Bantu ontology with the static being in Western metaphysics (see Masolo, 1994, pp.48-49). Tempels believes that in Bantu philosophy, all beings have and are force and that there is a constant interaction between them. This interaction is a passive existential property which unites all beings. Although Tempels’ reflection on Africa philosophy has influenced many African philosophers, both his proponents as well as his opponents, I believe that his equation being = force in Bantu philosophy is merely an interpretation geared to underlining the fact that the Bantu people have a philosophical system of their own. As far as I know, in Bantu languages, nowhere do they use the word force to mean *ntu*.

itself. For Kagame, the central notion of the Bantu philosophy is being in the general sense rather than just force. According to Kagame, it is in this general sense that Bantu philosophy is a philosophy of being (See Kagabo, 2006, p.235).

In line with Kagame, Masolo (1994) disputes the accuracy of Tempels' interpretation of *ntu* as force. He argues that Tempels is mistaken to consider being as force in Bantu philosophy. He demonstrates Tempels' mistake by referring to the following analogy:

I have often held a piece of chalk out in class and asked different students to say "something" about "this thing" in my hand. Almost invariably, I have had students giving answers like this: it is white; it is cone-shaped; it is long; it is chalk (in the sense of its chemical composition), etc. Assuming that at the back of my own mind I believe that there is only one fundamental focus or problem to which every person's attention would be invariably drawn in regard to "this thing," I will definitely make a very stupid mistake in likening those different answers of students as equitable synonyms for the same referent, as synonyms which can be equated in the following way: white = cone-shaped = long = chalk. This equation may make sense in terms of what goes on in ordinary language and human experience (Masolo, 1994, p.58)

Masolo's analogy is clear enough to demonstrate that *ntu* cannot be equated with force as Tempels claims. According to Tshamalenga (1981), Tempels' error lies in the fact that he wanted to construct a philosophy instead of reconstructing the Bantu philosophy as he had intended. In so doing he betrayed the Bantu ontology. In fact, before Tshamalenga, Eboussi-Boulaga (1968) had argued that the confusion of force with being lies in the problem of method which Tempels did not confront. Tempels, having been schooled in the Aristotelian Thomistic philosophy, failed to face the question of how anthropology can be a source of, or a basis for philosophy. Thus Tempels limited himself to using the Aristotelian Thomistic grid, as a technique for transcribing and expressing what is fundamentally unutterable (Eboussi-Boulaga, 1968, pp. 9-10).

Furthermore, Eboussi-Boulaga suspected that, in the ontological hypothesis on which the distinction between the notion of being peculiar to Western metaphysics and the notion of force peculiar to Bantu metaphysics is established, Tempels reduced the *muntu* to the

primitiveness of an amoral and absolutely determining order of forces (Eboussi-Boulaga, 1968, pp.19-20). I would certainly not subscribe to Eboussi-Boulaga's hermeneutics of suspicion.

That Tempels used the notion of force having in mind the intention to reduce the Bantu people to the order of forces is unthinkable, and would betray his mission of evangelisation which was the primary aim of his intellectual endeavour. In fact, as Sindima (1995, p.139) pointed out, "one of Tempels's main reasons for writing Bantu ontology was the desire to show the closeness between the Bantu and the Christian worlds". It may be true that Tempels opted for the notion of force because it was currently used by the Baluba, as he affirms. But as already pointed out earlier in a footnote, it may equally be possible that Tempels was referring to Bergson's notion of "élan vital", that is, "the within" of things underlying the process of evolution.

I would like to conclude the debate on *ntu*, being and force by noting the following three points which Tshamelenga makes.

1. One cannot conclude that, because the Baluba, whom Tempels studied pay a great deal of attention to the reality of force, that force is being.
2. Ontology cannot be constituted on the basis of its external signs. The identification of the Bantu notion of force with the Western notion of being does not make sense. In effect, in the Bantu tradition the concept of force should be understood and defined in its relationships with other concepts, while in the West, being is a notion transcending all determinations and opposing nothingness.
3. The equivalence established between force and being should be considered as a simulacrum since it is unthinkable without the Western conceptual instruments Tempels used (Tshamelenga, 1981, p.179).

As far as the notion of God is concerned, Kagame argues that, although God is an existent, God exists in a mode different from that of *ntu*. For Kagame, as I have already noted, the essential characteristic of *ntu* is to act and be acted on. This constitutes their mode of being. God does not have this characteristic. God transcends everything as the absolute and is the habitual source of all activity in *ntu* (see Masolo, 1994, p.92).

Kagame shares his idea with Mulago who argues that being is fundamentally one and all beings are ontologically attached together. Above the hierarchy, is the transcendent being, God: Nyamuzinda, the beginning and end of all life; and Imana, the spiritual being that is source of all life. Between God and humans are intermediaries, all ascendants, the ancestors, the dead, and the disincarnated souls. Below human beings are other beings which, basically, are only means placed at the disposition of humans to develop their being and life (Mulago, 1965, p. 155). In other words, the *ntu* is a sign of universal similitude; its presence in beings brings them to life, and attests to both their individual value and the measure of their integration in the dialectics of vital energy. *Ntu* is both a uniting and differentiating vital norm which explains the powers of vital inequality. Mulago's worry about whether the four categories are comprehensive is important. It is a worry which consists in making sure that, in the universal community, nothing is excluded or forgotten, especially the necessary being (God) which gives meaning to the contingent ones.

According to Mujyinya (1972), God is the origin and meaning of *ntu*, but is beyond *ntu*. God is not a *ntu* but a causal and eternal being. That is why the Bantu people call God, Iyakare (initial one), Iyambere (pre-existing one), Rugira (efficient one), and Rurema (the creator).

It is not clear why most of these African philosophers who were schooled in Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy did not refer to God as a necessary being who causes contingent beings. The reference to the necessary being in the Aristotelian-Thomistic way could have led them to consider God as a *ntu*. The only African philosopher who conceived God as a *ntu* is Tshiamalenga. Tshiamalenga (1973) argued that God is a *ntu* and even a *muntu*. His point is understandable since, in certain Bantu languages, God is conceived of as a *mu-ntu*. In the Zulu language, for instance, God is Nkurunkuru which means elder, lord, and authority. In most languages in Central African region such as Kirundi, Mashi, Kinyarwanda, and Kihaya *umukuru* means elder or authority.

It is not easy to take a clear position in this debate about God. It is an ongoing debate in so far as the issue of God is one of the philosophical problems without a final answer. That God is a *ntu*, it might not be denied. It is a *ntu* par excellence since other beings cannot have their being or any activity without it. If God is not included in the four Bantu categories, it is because the Bantu people seem to be aware that God is the being which transcends and causes the four other categories of being. From this point of view I concur with Kagame and Mulago who

argue that God is above the hierarchy of *ntu* and transcends everything. They both express differently Mujiyinya's claim that God is the origin and meaning of *ntu*. God communicates to *ntu* what God has, namely being. As the disciples of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas would argue, all other beings, apart from God, are beings by participation, that is, caused to be. Tshiamalenga's view that God is a *muntu* seems to be borrowed from the biblical idea that God created human beings in God's image and likeness. In turn, human beings in their quest for the foundation of their being tend to conceive God in their own image and likeness so that God has a place in their universe. Tshiamalenga's view of God could be rightly understood against this background. The point being made is that, although God is not included in the four Bantu categories, God has a place in the Bantu universe as the origin, the foundation, and the ultimate explanation of everything that exists.

So with the idea of God included, one can now talk of the universal community or cosmic unity as Mkhize calls it. A holistic conception of life, cosmic unity entails a connection between God, ancestors, animals, plants and inanimate objects, and everything that is created (Mkhize, 2008, p.38). Masolo reflects Senghor's view of the universal unity in the following words:

It is the way he feels and thinks in union not only with other people around him but 'indeed with all other beings in the universe: God, animal, tree, pebble'. [...] negritude is the naturalness with which Africans embrace and participates in nature rather than relating it cognitively from distance. In Africa, the communitarian habits are not acquired but they are part of the African way of experiencing being (Masolo, 2006, p.489-90).

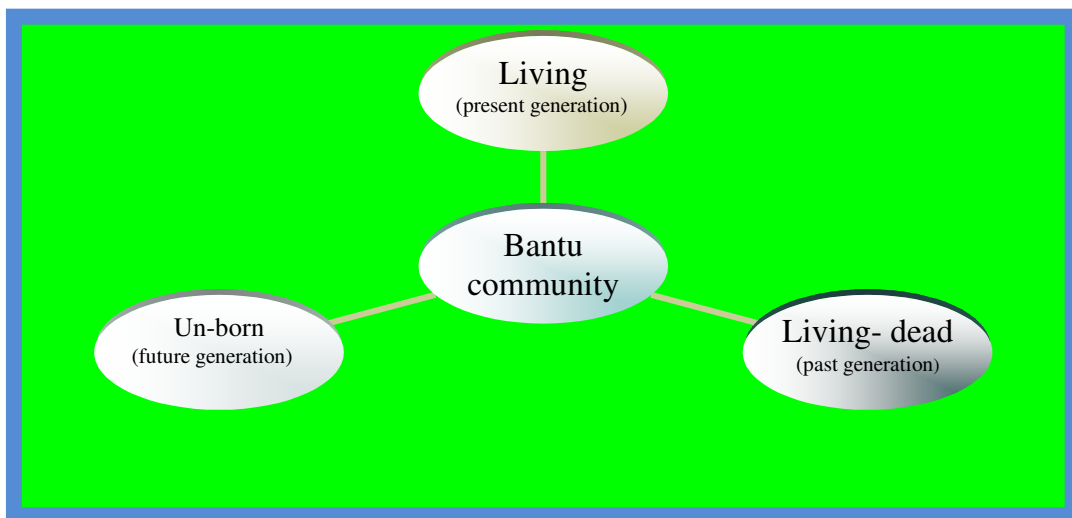
What one can conclude from the above discussion so far is that things exist together and manifest aspects of relationship beyond their individuality. This leads to the conclusion that, in the African value system, the world is a communion and not a collection of individual essences (Masolo 1994:59). So much for the *muntu* in the universal community of *ntu*! The next section considers the *muntu* in the universe of *bantu* (the plural of *muntu*).



### 3.3.2 The muntu in the universe of Bantu

Apart from being a member of the universal community of beings, the *muntu* is also a member of the human community. In Africa, the *muntu* is conceived of as part of the social web which incorporates other *Bantu*. These *Bantu* include human beings actually living (the present generation), human beings who are dead (the past generation), and human beings who are not yet born (the future generation).

Figure 3-2: The structure of the Bantu human community



This sense of community which is not limited to those living is peculiar to the African way of life. In Kwesi Dickson's words, this all-inclusive human community is a characteristic mark that defines African-ness (Kwesi, 1977).

In his *Bantu Philosophy*, Tempels (1959) affirmed that the Bantu psychology cannot conceive of a human being as an entity existing by itself apart from its ontological relationship with other living beings. Jommo Kenyatta (1965) argued that nobody is an isolated individual (as contrasted with the liberal belief and value system) and that the uniqueness is a secondary fact about the individual (as contrasted with the Latin America belief and value system). This is derived from the fact that the individual is a relative of several people and contemporaries. Mbiti (1968) adds another aspect and argues that whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. From this, Mbiti derived his principle: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am".

Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984) argues that the community defines the person as a person, such that the notion of personhood is acquired and not merely granted as a consequence of birth. Tshamalenga (1985, see also Bidima, 1995, p.59) emphasises that the “we” (*biso* in lingala) is not a mere inter-subjectivity of the “I”. That is to say, the community in Africa does not result from a contract between people, but is ontologically derived.

This academic language of African scholars also builds upon what is already expressed in popular language. In South Africa, the sense of the community is expressed in the following popular Zulu and Xhosa saying: “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*”<sup>32</sup> (a person depends on other people to be a person). In the Burundian culture, it is often said that the child does not belong to one family, emphasising that a child belongs to the village (*umwana si uwumwe* = a child does not belong to one family), or again, that people depend on one another (*abantu ni magiriranire* = people depend on one another).

The ontological primacy of the community in the African belief and value system, may lead one to believe that the individual is swallowed up by the community to the extent that individuals cannot have a responsibility of their own, a freedom of their own. Gyekye (1997) felt uncomfortable with the seeming radicality of the African sense of community and asked himself whether a moderate perspective of the African community could be envisaged. In fact, his book, *Tradition and Modernity* is an effort to substantiate such a moderate position with the aim of finding a ground upon which political and economic liberalism could be based in Africa.

The African belief and value system naturally accommodates both the individual as well as the community as ontologically interdependent yet without reducing the ontological density and the primacy of the community. To make clear this point I shall distinguish between the human being as a being-with/in-self (*umuntu-w'-ubuntu*) and a being-with/in-others (*umuntu-mu-bantu*).

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<sup>32</sup> This saying is also found in other languages such as Sesotho (*Motho ke motho ka batho*), in Kirundi and Kinyarwanda (*Umuntu ni umuntu mu Bantu*).

### 3.3.2.1 The African conception of the human being as *umuntu-w'ubuntu*

I have just shown the African conception of the human being as part of the universal community of *ntu* (beings). As it has been made clear, the characteristic feature of the human being is intelligence (*mu-ntu*). Ramose is right to define *umuntu* as the specific entity which continues to conduct an inquiry into being, experience, knowledge and truth (Ramose, 2002, p.41).<sup>33</sup> Intelligence is the faculty by which the *muntu* acts and interacts with other *ntu* in the universe. It is the faculty by which the *muntu* judges, appreciates, relates to and harmonises with, other beings in the world. The failure to act intelligently, or rather in a way that safeguards harmony in nature disqualifies the ontological identity of the *muntu*. The Burundians say of the *bantu* who have lost their ontological identity: *Barabaye ibikoko ntibakiri abantu* (these people have become animals and are no longer human beings).

According to Kagame there are two essential principles that underlie the ethical behaviour in the Bantu belief and value system. The first principle is based on the internal finality of the human act of the *muntu*, that is, the ultimate purpose that gives meaning to the moral acts of the *muntu* in the community. This principle brings two dimensions of the human being together: the dimension of knowing (intelligence) and the dimension of loving (will). The classical philosophy lays emphasis on knowing:

[...] to know beings surrounding us in order to discern what is good and what is not good for us... we have to know and love the Pre-existing One who made possible these things so [that] we can know and love them” (Kagame cited by Mudimbe, 1988, p.150).

Bantu philosophy emphasises the dimension of loving to the extent that love commands knowing. It is an obligation or a duty for the Bantu to know their relatives. The reason for this emphasis is that love serves as the cement that ties and strengthens the relationships between the members of the family, the tribe, the clan and the community in general. Thus, for the Bantu, it is important to protect and perpetuate the lineage or the tribe in particular and the human community in general. Thus *ubuntu* of the *umuntu* (*ubuntu bw'umuntu*), that is, the

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<sup>33</sup> I could also refer to Heidegger who argues that the best place to start the study of Being is the human being (*dasein*) because, the human being is the only being that asks the question of being. “The entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its being we shall denote by the term ‘Dasein’ (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 32ff).

humanity of the human being, is assessed in terms of what a person can do and be for other people to enhance their life.

The second principle is that the Bantu, in fact the African community defines itself mostly through blood filiations. The community is upheld and stands as a natural and social body. It defines how individuals in the nuclear or/and extended family, clan or tribe should behave in relation to one another, as well as the rights and obligations of each in the community. It infers from the authority of its being and its history the laws that regulate people's lives. However, *ubuntu* of the *muntu* is not actually based on juridical laws for two reasons. First, the juridical laws do not bind the individual in conscience. Secondly, whoever can escape these laws could be regarded as intelligent. Nevertheless, that people could avoid legal responsibilities does not mean that they are regarded as moral; just as abiding by the juridical law does not make people necessarily moral. The *ubuntu* of the *muntu* is rooted in the taboo-laws which have a religious nature. These laws contain in themselves an immanent power of sanction. God and the ancestors are the sole judge. Thus, if a taboo-law is transgressed, its resolution lies between the transgressor and God on the one hand, and between his existing family on earth and the departed ancestors (Mudimbe, 1988, p.150).

The ultimate meaning of all this is that *umuntu-w'ubuntu* cannot be satisfied solely with the practical matters of the present through tricks and calculations. The primary role of intelligence is to connect people to their true selves as human beings to the extent that they can now feel obligated to be in harmonious relations in the community of both the visible world and the invisible one.

When I talk of the *umuntu-w'ubuntu*, I refer to the human person as one is in oneself, that is, one's (moral) constancy in relation to one's (ontological) identity. I may compare this with Paul Ricoeur's concepts of *idem* (the same) and *ipse* (the self, of the self, or by the self) which are unified in that of self-constancy:

Self-constancy is for each person that manner of conducting himself or herself so that others can count on that person. Because someone is counting on me, I am accountable for my actions before another. The term responsibility unites both meaning; counting on and being accountable for. It unites them, adding to them the idea of a response to the question 'Where are you?' asked by another

who needs me. This response is the following: ‘Here I am!’[...] (Ricoeur, 1992, p.165).

There is a great deal of moral baggage that goes with this outlook. This baggage revolves around the value of human-ty or human-ness (*ubuntu*), hence *umuntu-w’-ubuntu*. Literarily, *Umuntu-w’-ubuntu* refers to a person of humanity, a person of harmony, integrity, equity and one who is respectful of the world of the humans and of things. It is a human person as one realises oneself as an individual person in one’s universe which includes one’s guiding principles, cherished values, innovating and constructive choices, self-determination, self-realisation in harmony with others. Senghor says it differently:

The member of the community society [...] claims his autonomy to affirm himself as a *being*. But he feels, he thinks that he can develop his potential, his originality, only in and by the society, in union with all other men – indeed, with all other beings in the universe: God, animal, tree, or pebble (Senghor, 1964, p.94).

The worry that the African sense of the community could be an impediment to the individual’s rights and responsibility, and that individuals could shift their responsibility to the community finds its response at this level. The aim of the community is to safeguard humanity in the individual and, on the other hand, the permanent concern of the individual is how humanity can be safeguarded in the community. Ramose (2002, p.42) rightly interprets *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* as follows: “to be a human being is to affirm one’s humanity by recognising the humanity of others”. *Umuntu-w’-ubuntu* affirms her/his own humanity by recognising the humanity of others. This leads me to the second aspect of the human being which is considered below.

### 3.3.2.2 The African conception of the human being as *umuntu-mu-bantu*

While *umuntu-w’ubuntu* refers to the human being as one conceives of oneself as an individual, *umuntu-mu-bantu* (being-with/in-community) refers to a human being as an community being, the human being as socially constituted. In the conception of the African,

the plenitude of humanness cannot fully be achieved outside the community.<sup>34</sup> This belief has a deeper root in the whole of the communal conception of the human being. An individual is born into an existing human society, into the human culture. The fact that the individual is born into an existing community suggests that a human being is a communal being by nature. The human being does not choose voluntarily to enter a human community; the community life is not optional for the individual. The individual cannot make optional the community without, at the same time, doing injustice to the *ubuntu* characteristic of one's individuality. Hence the concept of *umuntu-mu-bantu*.

*Umuntu-mu-bantu*, is a human person who recognises her/his situation among others as a moral necessity. In the Burundian culture, people say of a person who has no moral engagement towards the community: “*Yarafpuye agenda*” (= That person is dead alive). The meaning of this is that such person is dead although s/he is apparently alive, such person has lost what makes her *umuntu*. In other words, people's disconnection from the community deprives them from their humanness (*ubuntu*). The Bavenda have another way of expressing this: *muthu u bebelwa munwe*, which Mkhize interprets as “To be is to belong and to participate, it is to be bone for the other” (Mkhize, 2008, p.40). Karenga translates communal relationality as follows:

[... ] a person is her character; or more definitively she is her practice-in-relationship as a result of her character. The motivation here, then, is not to enhance individualism or define and project individual rights, but to define relational obligations, the honouring of which gives one both her identity and sense of worth (Karenga, 2004, p.254).

Thus *umuntu-mu-bantu* refers to people as they realise themselves in the universe of other people, including their guiding principles, the values they cherish, their view of the world, and their dynamics in their universe. Bénézet Bujo puts it as follows:

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<sup>34</sup> For the following, I am indebted to Kwame Gyekye whose book *Tradition and Modernity* is very insightful. However, this does not mean that I share his view of African communitarianism. In the end, Gyekye seems to develop a passive view of the African community, and does not face the issue of whether the African belief and value system has something to offer.



Without a communitarian relationship there is no identity for the African person. Only together with others can one become a human person and achieve individual freedom, which again should be exercised in a communitarian manner (Bujo, 1998, p.148).

It is, therefore, only in relation with the community that the identity of the individual is substantiated. This dynamic interaction between the individual and the community is best seen in the whole process of initiation observed in most of the African cultures. One of the major objectives of initiation is to teach those who are being initiated how to interact with the natural environment and the human community (cf. Ogunbgemi, 1997; Tangwa, 2006). But above all, initiation is geared to help those being initiated to learn self-organisation and mutual challenge which involves, first of all, locating the talents and the potential abilities of each one outside the authorities of the village, of parents, etc. It is on the ground of these talents and potential abilities displayed by the individual that each one is given a role or responsibility in the group, and later on in the society as a whole. Manu Ampim (2008) points out that the rite of passage to adulthood is to ensure the shaping of productive, community-orientated and responsible adults. This observation is supported by Masila Mutisya (1996) who argues that in the initiation to adulthood, one learns the rules of the society, the responsibility of obeying these rules, of self-respect, and the respect for others. According to Ezekwona:

The availability of others in the community gives the individual the opportunity to use his reason and to allow his reason to be challenged. Therefore, the community should not be seen as swallowing the individual, instead it helps the individual and gives the individual a forum within which to manifest himself. It is when one is with others that he can think and then in the process his thinking can have a meaning (Ezekwonna, 2005, p.67).

Perhaps the best platform where Ezekwonna's observation can be perceived in practice is the search of consensus in the process of decision-making on certain matters. On this platform, people can speak their mind and can challenge one another at length until a common ground is reached. When the consensus is reached, the decision of others is mine, and my decision is theirs insofar as it is the outcome of *my* reason and *our* reasoning (Wiredu, 1996, p.186; Deng, 1998, p. 159; Nürnberger, 2007, p. 194).

Some scholars such as Shutte (1993) and even Menkiti (1984) interpret this interaction between the individual and the community as if they want to safeguard the ontological primacy of the community to the detriment of the individual. Shutte interprets *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* to mean that the African personhood is an “outside thing” which the community empowers and inculcates (Shutte, 1993, 2001):

European culture has taught us to see the self as something private, hidden *within*<sup>35</sup> our bodies. (...) The African image is different: the self is *outside*<sup>36</sup>, present and open to all. This is because the self is the result and expression of all the forces acting upon us. (...) So we must learn to see ourselves as *outside*, in our appearance, our acts and our relationships, and in the environment that surrounds us. If we can see ourselves in this way we will have grasped the key insight in the African idea of persons: persons exist only in relation to other persons. The human self is not something that first exists on its own and then enters into relation with its surroundings. It only exists in relationship with its surroundings; these relationships are what it is. And the most important of these are relationships we have with other persons. This is why, in all African languages, there is the local variant of the Zulu saying *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* – a person is a person through other persons (Shutte, 2001, pp. 22-23).

In this quotation, Shutte is making two claims. The first claim is that, contrary to European personhood which is “within” and self-given, African personhood is an *outside* thing. This claim safeguards the individuals, their freedom and sovereignty in Western culture on the one hand, and the priority of the community on the individual in the African context on the other hand. The problem does not lay in this distinction between the individual in the Western culture and the individual in the African culture. The problem is the second claim in which Shutte articulates the genetic link between the community and the individual in the African culture. Shutte claims that, in African culture, personhood is “outside” and is given to the individual the same way one can give a colour to an object. Such a claim dilutes the ontological dynamic relation between the individual and the community; and so undermines

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<sup>35</sup> Italics in the original

<sup>36</sup> Italics in the original

the idea of *umuntu-w'ubuntu*, people as they are in themselves, their ontological identity, and moral constancy.

Shutte's interpretation of the link between the individual and the community is similar to that of Menkiti (1984, 2006). Menkiti's conception of the individual in the community is built on the following statements:

1. [...] it is the community which defines the person as a person, not some isolated state quality of rationality, will or memory.
2. [...] personhood is something which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed,
3. [...] the notion of personhood is acquired (Menkiti, 1984, pp. 172&174).

The three statements emphasise practically the same thing: the ontological primacy of the community. The importance of the community is emphasised to the point that, without the community, the individual is simply a "thing"; in Menkiti's own words, an "it" which, through "an ontological progression" that the community imparts unfolds into a person (Menkiti, 1984, pp.173-174; 2006, p.325). This view is erroneous and misleading. In effect, Menkiti does not account for the fact that, first of all, the ontological identity of the *mu-ntu* in the universe of beings (*ntu*) is based on intelligence. The *mu-ntu* is a being which acts with intelligence. It is intelligence that allows the *ba-ntu* to live in mutual relationships and harmony with other *ba-ntu* in the community and in the universe. The community has to safeguard this ontological order. In the same way Wiredu and Gyekye have dismissed Menkiti's point as unacceptable:

A human person is a person whatever his age or social status. Personhood may reach its full realization in community, but it is not acquired or yet to be achieved as one goes along in society. What a person acquires are status, habits, and personality or character traits: he, *qua* person, thus becomes the *subject* of the acquisition, and being thus prior to the acquisition process, he cannot be defined by what he acquires. One is a person because of what he is, not because of what he has acquired (Wiredu & Gyekye, 1992, p.108)

*Umntu-mu-bantu* is ontologically derived from the community. A person is recognized as a person by others through the way one enhances them by one's creativity, initiative, and innovation, dynamics in one's universe, one's self-determination and realisation, as well as one's care and respect for oneself and for others (cf. Nyerere, 1968, p.107).

Such belief and value system is present not only among the Bantu people as a linguistic group, but also throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. In the next section, I shall try to give an overview of the attempts made by the African fathers of independence to use this African belief and value system to argue for an African socialism. What lies beneath this overview is the following question: If the African belief and value system has been used to justify and mobilise Africans behind the choice of socialism in Africa, to what extent can it serve as a foundation for strategies of economic development? I will first consider the concept of African socialism in order to see where it differs from classical socialism. In the second point, I will consider four representatives of African socialism, namely, Senghor and Nkrumah in West Africa, Nyerere in East-central Africa and Kaunda in Southern Africa. Thirdly I will assess African socialism and its link with African communalism, and then conclude.

### **3.4 Attempts to validate the African sense of community: African socialism**

The African idea of the community has particularly attracted the attention of the leaders and thinkers of Africa's independence era. For them the ideology of socialism resonated with the African belief and the value of the community. In other words, the fathers of Africa's independence endorsed socialism as the favourite ideology that resonates with African realities and that would guide the social, political and economic policies of Africa. According to Bahru Zewde,

[...] the socialist objective of ending exploitation of man by man fitted in with the strategic objective of ending colonial rule [...]. Capitalism had represented the springboard which propelled the colonialist powers towards the partition of colonisation of Africa at the end of nineteenth century. [...] Socialist thinking permeated the ideology of liberation [...] (Zewde, 2003, p.2).

The major champions of socialism in Africa include Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Sedar Senghor in Senegal, Kenneth Kaunda, and Sekou Touré in Guinea. For these political leaders and thinkers, socialism was central and a key concept in their thought as well as their socio-political practice.

However, these African leaders and thinkers argued that the kind of socialism which would lead policies in Africa was not the Western socialism underlined by the Marxian philosophy. Thus they talked of “African socialism”. The “African-ness” of African socialism was differently expressed. Nyerere talked of *ujamaa* (African brotherhood or familyhood), Senghor talked of negritude (emphasising African cultural identity), Kaunda talked of humanism, implying the centrality of human beings in African thought and practice, Nkrumah talked of African personality, while Sekou Touré talked of communocracy. What all of them tried to put across is that African socialism is foreshadowed in the traditional socio-economic thought and practice, and that the African traditional system is entirely communal. Thus, for them, to adopt the ideology of socialism was to claim back the African identity (Gyekye, 1997, p.144).

The concept of “African socialism” created confusion among socialist thinkers. In effect, originally, socialism was not associated with any communal society. In Marxist thought, socialism is associated with such concept as “class” and “proletariat”. Secondly, so far, in Marxist thought, there were no “socialisms”, but rather, one and only one “socialism”, namely, scientific socialism which was thought to be universally valid and applicable. Even among African socialists themselves, this confusion was apparent. For instance, Nkrumah (cited in the *Ghanaian Times*, December 1965) who hitherto had defended African socialism, affirmed that “there is only one Socialism – scientific Socialism” and “our Socialist ideology is the application of the principles of scientific Socialism to our African social milieu” (Nkrumah cited in *The Worker*, May 1965).

Thus “African socialism” needed to be defined. In Kenya’s government occasional papers in 1965, one of the presenters defined African socialism as follows:

In “African socialism”, the word “African” is meant to convey the African roots of a system that is itself African in its characteristics. African socialism is a term describing an African political and economic system that is positively

African, not being imported from any country or being a blue print of any foreign ideology (Kenya's Ministry of Information, 1965, p.2).

Bede Onuoha talks of African socialism as follows:

It is beyond doubt that traditional African society was based on a profound socialist attitude of mind and governed by indigenous socialist rules, customs and institutions. But these were not the product of Marxist thinking. This is the justification of the attribute 'African' standing before the word 'socialism'. It points to the originality of African socialism. African socialism is an expression of the desire of all Africans to find themselves, be themselves, and assert themselves (Onuoha, 1965, p.30).

According to Jidendra Mohan (1966, p.228), the definitions of African socialism make three affirmations: Africa's originality, its distinctiveness, and its personality. Thus, African socialism was thought to differ from scientific socialism thought to be universal and a new stage in society. The proponents of the scientific socialism, including Nkrumah (at later stage), rejected the idea of African socialism on the grounds that scientific socialism has a universal validity and applicability. They argued that in the same way that there cannot be African mathematics, chemistry or biology, there cannot be African socialism. Thus, the African political leaders and thinkers should simply apply "orthodox" or doctrinaire socialism, instead of constructing their new kind of socialism. For instance, Popov (cited in Onuoha, 1965, p.109) complained in the following terms:

These imperialist circles hiding behind talk of "real African socialism" are attempting to castrate the class content of the proletarian struggle and to force the African working class to betray the principles of proletarian internationalism as well as to drag into the African working-class movement the narrow nationalist slogan that "all African are brothers". However, this false bourgeois thesis will become less and less popular on the African continent.

According to Gyekye (1997, pp. 145-146), the argument of scientific socialists is plagued by two major flaws: Firstly, the analogy between natural sciences and socialism is false. Natural sciences are exact sciences and have a universal validity. Socialism as a social theory may not



necessarily have a universal validity and applicability. Scientific truth *qua* scientific truth transcends cultural and social frontiers. On the contrary, a social theory is constructed out of a particular social and historical milieu and may therefore not have an immediate universal appeal or validity.

Secondly, for Gyekye, the argument of scientific socialists implies a rejection of a basic Marxist premise. By “materialism”, Marx meant that, the construct of a socialist theory must start with the real people and the real conditions of their life, that is, the material existence of people. The scientific socialists’ rejection of the idea of African socialism assumes wrongly that the real existential conditions of people in the mid- nineteenth century Europe and those of Africans in the mid-twentieth century Africa are the same. This argument was also put forward by Senghor (1964, p. 69ff) and Nyerere (1968).

According to Gyekye, by stressing African conditions and historical experiences, and thus starting off with what, according to Marx, one should start off with (the real conditions of the real man), African political thinkers were clearly taking their clue from Marx. Perhaps it is here that the idea of “African socialism” could make sense. Marx’s grid of analysis of society could be used at a different time (mid-twentieth century) and in a different social milieu (Africa). This would lead not to the scientific socialism which is thought to be universal, but to a contextual socialism; hence African socialism.

The problem, though, lies with those who seem to talk of African socialism as if there can be African socialism without Marxism, the same way one can talk of Marx without Marxism. Certain African scholars maintained that African socialism is but an attempt to recapture and modernise the communal way of life practised by Africans before the encounter with Europeans. The point is that the matrix of African socialism is the communitarian nature of the African society. There are many figures of African socialism of which I already mentioned five. All of them will not be treated in this dissertation. I shall consider four of them who are particularly highlighted in African philosophy, namely, Senghor and Nkrumah in Western Africa, Nyerere and Kaunda in East-central and Southern Africa respectively.

### 3.4.1 Leopold Sedar Senghor

Senghor was born in Senegal in 1906 and is well known as a poet, a cultural theorist and a politician who led his country as a president from 1960 to 1980. His knowledge and skills in poetry and nourished interest in literature won him a seat in the French Academy from 1983 to 2001. Senghor is well known for the idea of negritude which he drew on to substantiate his thought of African Socialism as an African alternative to Marxism.

For Senghor, African socialism is part of African humanism, and African humanism is a function of Africa's negritude. The foundation of both African humanism and negritude is the nature of African society. The negro-African society is communal because it is more a communion of souls than an aggregate of individuals. Senghor (1964, pp.69-72) rejects scientific socialism for three reasons which are interconnected.

The first reason is that the knowledge of Marx and Engels, who are the fathers of scientific socialism, was conditioned by their era, "by the rather limited progress of science and philosophy. Marx and Engels could not foresee wave mechanics, quantum theory, or relativity." (Senghor, 1964, p.69)

The second reason is the new theory of knowledge. Senghor argues that those scientific revolutions (relativity, wave mechanics, quantum theory, and para-Euclidian geometry) as well as new philosophical revolutions such as phenomenology, existentialism, and Teilhardism led to a new theory of knowledge in the first half of the twentieth century. The dialectic method which Marx and Engels used dates back to Heraclitus, and therefore is not new. Although they tried to rationalise it and to apply it to concrete facts, the European dialectics remains abstract and deterministic. In the new method of knowledge, reality which, hitherto, appeared to be continuous and determined appears now to be discontinuous and undetermined. To gain access to the undetermined and discontinuous requires one's contact, participation and communion with the object being known.<sup>37</sup> This could hardly be achieved by the traditional method of knowing in which the knower distances himself from the known. For Senghor the new method

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<sup>37</sup>Senghor is referring to Gaëtan Picon's *Panorama des idées contemporaines* (1946). The point he wants to make is that the African way of life which consists in the communion of souls applies also in the African epistemology. To know reality is not to separate oneself from it and keep it at a distance but rather to participate in it, "to touch it", "to penetrate it from inside", "to finger it". Drawing on Picon's idea that "To grasp the meaning of a human fact is to grasp it in itself and in oneself", Senghor argues that "To know a human fact, psychological or social, no longer means to investigate it with the aid of statistics and graphs, but to live it" (Senghor, 1964, p.71).

of knowledge is similar to the African approach to know reality. And this leads him to his third reason for rejecting scientific socialism.

The third reason is that the Negro-African's method of knowing is by confrontation and intuition. Senghor describes it thus:

In contrast to the classic European, the Negro African does not draw a line between himself and the object; he does not hold it at distance, nor does he merely look at it and analyse it. After holding it at a distance, after scanning it without analysing it, he takes it vibrant in his hands, careful not to kill it or fix it. He touches it, feels it, and smells it (Senghor, 1964, p.72).

According to Senghor, this method of knowing by touch reveals the communitarian nature of the African society where everything holds together:

The Negro-African sympathizes (sym-pathises: feels with), abandons his personality to become identified with the Other<sup>38</sup>, dies to be reborn in the Other. He does not assimilate; he is assimilated. He lives a common life with the Other; he lives in symbiosis (Senghor, 1964, p.72-3).

For Senghor, even reason has a communitarian character. In his response to those who criticised him for reducing Negro-African knowledge to pure emotion, and denying that there is an African reason, Senghor argues that the Negro-African reason is not the *reasoning-eye* of Europe, rather it is the *reason of the touch*, the *reasoning-embrace*, the sympathetic reason, more closely related to the Greek *logos* than the Latin *ratio*<sup>39</sup>.

In the development of his version of African socialism, Senghor relied on Teilhard de Chardin. He regards De Chardin's *Phenomenon of Man* as a continuation as well as an improvement of Engels' *Dialectics of Nature*. He argues that, in the De Chardin's process of socialisation, African socialism becomes the technical and spiritual organisation of human society by the intelligence and the heart. In its materialistic approach, scientific socialism relies on the intelligence without the heart. He writes:

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<sup>38</sup> The upper case is in the original text of Senghor.

<sup>39</sup> Italics as in the original text.

[...] from scientific socialism we have rejected atheism and violence, which are fundamentally contrary to our genius, but we have accepted research and technology, which we have been without because we have neglected them. We have especially developed co-operation, not collectivist but communal. For co-operation, in family, village, tribe has always been held in honour in Africa, not in its collectivist form as an aggregate of individuals, but in its communal form as con-spiracy from centre to centre, of hearts. You will recognize this as Teilhard de Chardin's *union*, which makes one mind and one soul (Senghor, 1964, p.146).

It is obvious that Senghor develops his African version of socialism, or better, African socialism by drawing on the communitarian nature of the African society as well as the values that flow from it: cooperation, communion, family, and solidarity which constitute the ontological density of the *muntu*. Yet it would be difficult to know whether, for Senghor or any other African socialist, it would have been possible to think of African socialism without Marx and/or Marxism. The genius of Senghor seems to lie in his discovery of the fact what is important is not Marxism but Marx's methodological contributions. Senghor used these contributions to validate what Africans believe and value in terms of a political ideology, much less in terms of economic development. As Wiredu would argue, for Senghor as for the other fathers of Africa's independence, the question that seemed to be urgent was rather:

What form of government or social organisation is best suited to the requirement of [...] the restoration of the cultural identity which colonialism has eroded (Wiredu, 1996, p.145).

Whatever case may be, Senghor's argument follows the definitive framework in which the *muntu* is ontologically part of the universe of *ntu* as well as ontologically part of the human community.

I shall now consider another political thinker who tried to ground his political ideology in the communitarian nature of the *muntu*, namely, Kwame Nkrumah.

### 3.4.2 Kwame Nkrumah

Nkrumah was born in 1905 in Ghana, a country which he led to independence in 1957 and where he served as president till 1966 following a military coup. Nkrumah was also one of fathers of Pan-African movement and played an influential role in the foundation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Although, he did his graduate studies in the United States, Nkrumah was interested by the literature of socialism, especially Marx and Lenin. He believed that (African) socialism is respectful of African beliefs and values and leads to cooperative and egalitarian society.

Nkrumah distinguished between two kinds of socialism. The first kind of socialism is that which develops out of a non-communalistic society. He argued that “the passage from a non-communalistic society to socialism is a revolution which is guided by the principles underlying Communism” (Nkrumah, 1972, p. 258). As he indicates in his autobiography, Nkrumah arrived at this kind of socialism thanks to his extensive and interested reading of Hegel, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mazzini, but in particular, his reading of Marx and Lenin. For Nkrumah, the philosophy of these two impressed him to the extent that he thought that it could help him to solve the whole colonial question and the problem of imperialism.

The second kind of socialism is that which develops out of communalistic societies as is the case in Africa. For Nkrumah, because of the continuity of communalism with socialism, in communalistic societies, socialism is not a revolutionary creed, but a restatement in contemporary idiom of the principles underlying communalism (Nkrumah, 1972, p.258). Nkrumah arrived at this kind of socialism thanks to his background in African culture which is communalistic. He argues that there is a natural continuity between communalism and socialism:

If one seeks the socio-political ancestor of socialism, one must go to communalism.... In socialism, the principles underlying communalism are given expression in modern circumstances (Nkrumah, 1972, p.257).

Obviously, Nkrumah was in favour of the second kind of socialism, which is linked with communalism. For Nkrumah, this is the only natural and viable option as far as Africa is concerned. Nkrumah believed that “capitalism might prove too complicated a system for the

newly independent country” (Nkrumah, 1972, p.256). He argued that “the presuppositions and purposes of capitalism are contrary to those of African society” to such an extent that “Capitalism would be a betrayal of the personality and conscience of Africa” (Nkrumah, 1972, p.258). Thus, with his belief in the continuity between communalism and socialism, as well as the communitarian conscience and personality of Africans, Nkrumah built his case for African socialism.

However, later Nkrumah rejected African socialism to embrace scientific socialism both in theory and practice as can be noted in the following:

Concepts like African socialism, pragmatic socialism, traditional African socialism, Arab socialism, etc., will have to be analyzed and carefully explained so as not to confuse African people as to the real meaning of socialism and the correct way to set about achieving it. Here we have had to wage an unflinching battle for the general acceptance of the principles of scientific socialism. Socialism, in its principles, is a science (Nkrumah, 1964 [November]).

It is not clear when Nkrumah distanced himself from African socialism in favour of scientific socialism. It is not the purpose of this discussion to consider the history of Nkrumah’s socialist thought. Suffice it to note that prior to his publication of *Consciencism* in 1964, he was reported to have stated that he was behind the organisation of the left wing of the Convention People’s Party (CPP) and its ideological struggle to propagate scientific socialism (Nkrumah, 1962a, 1962b). Furthermore, according to John McClendon (2003), in his address at the First Seminar at the Winneba Ideological School in 1962, Nkrumah pronounced the Marxist character of his conception of socialism. Finally, in 1961, Nkrumah founded the journal *The Spark* which propagated scientific socialism in Ghana. If such were the case, the defence of African socialism in *Consciencism* might have served only as a philosophical or a theoretical guide for his ideological campaign (McClendon, 2003).

Although it is quite striking, McClendon’s interpretation seems to be limited and *de façade*. According to Hountondji (1996, p.145), before writing *Consciencism*, Nkrumah claimed to be committed to socialism. This is obvious in article 8 of the 1949-draft of the political programme of CPP which was adopted in 1951. This article states that the aim of the party is the founding of a socialist state in which all men and women have equal opportunity, and



where there would be no capitalist exploitation. For Hountondji, *Consciencism* is an attempt to justify this long-standing commitment. Furthermore, Hountondji made clear an aspect that is not often perceived by the readers of African political leaders and thinkers. He sees Nkrumah's 1964 essay as an answer to a classic objection in which it is argued that by adopting socialism, Africa would be delivering herself to an imported ideology and betraying her original civilisation. In *Consciencism*, Nkrumah's objective was:

[...] to link socialism with the purest African tradition by showing that socialism, far from being a betrayal of this tradition would actually be its best possible translation into modern idiom (Hountondji, 1996, p.146).

This fits with Nkrumah's argument of the continuity between socialism and communalism. However, in moving away from African socialism in favour of scientific socialism, and hence embracing what was supposed to be avoided – submitting to an imported ideology and betraying Africa's original civilisation, Nkrumah seems to have been prompted by new developments or realities in African politics. As Nkrumah described it in the fifth revised edition of *Consciencism* (1970), the period of independence and post-independence (in the 1960s) was characterised by armed struggles which were recurrent in Africa, military coups of which Nkrumah himself was a victim, the links between the interests of neo-colonialism and African indigenous bourgeoisie, and also the open conflict between pro-capitalists and the pro-socialists at national and international level. Thus while, in the first edition of *Consciencism*, he talks of the continuity between communalism and socialism in terms of **reform**, in the later edition, he refers to **revolution** as can be observed in the following quote:

[...] because the spirit of communalism still exists to some extent in societies with a communalist past, socialism and communism are not, in a strict sense of the word, 'revolutionary' creeds (Nkrumah, 1970, p. 74).

As can be observed in the above quote, Nkrumah sees the necessity of a "revolution" as a passage to socialism. However, Nkrumah is moderate in his suggestion of revolution: Revolution should not be taken in "a strict sense", but in broad sense. Nkrumah saw socialism and communism as revolutionary creeds in the broad sense. His moderate perspective is premised on the belief that "the spirit of communalism still exists in Africa **to some extent**". The phrase "to some extent" suggests that Nkrumah believes that in today's African society,

communalism belongs to the past, and now survives only as a memory (Hountondji, 1996, p.145). It is this belief that might have led Nkrumah to his choice of scientific socialism in Africa.

To conclude, one has an impression that Nkrumah evolved from a thick to a thin perception of what African believe and value. He sought to validate African beliefs and values in terms of a political ideology of socialism, but failed to genuinely translate them in terms of economic development. Like in the case of Senghor, the attention was more on a form of government or social organisation that would help in the restoration of African cultural identity eroded by colonialism.

I will now consider two other figures of African socialism in eastern-central and Southern Africa, namely Nyerere in Tanzania and Kaunda in Zambia respectively.

### **3.4.3 Julius Nyerere**

Nyerere was born in 1922 in Tanzania, a country he ruled, first as a Prime Minister from 1960 to 1961, and as a president from 1962 to 1985. During his studies of history and economics at the University of Edinburgh, he was influenced by the Fabian thinking of the British Intellectual Socialist Movement (Fabian Society) which aimed to promote the principles of social democracy gradually without using revolutionary means. Nyerere tried to link socialism to the African communal way of life. However, what is specific to him is his claim that socialism is an attitude of the mind as well as his notion of *ujamaa* (familyhood) as the basis for African socialism. He believed that the Africa's sense of mutual responsibility could be extended to the nation and even to the whole world:

The foundation, and the objective, of African socialism is the extended family. The true African socialist does not look on one class of men as his brethren and another as his natural enemies. He does not form an alliance with brethren for the extermination of the non-brethren. He rather regards all men as his brethren – as members of his extended family [...]. 'Ujamaa', then, or 'Familyhood', describes our socialism (Nyerere, 1968, pp.11-12).

For Nyerere, the characteristics of family relationships are care and compassion. Since the society is an extension of the basic family, the care and compassion perceived among the members of the family find similar expression in the sensitive attitudes members of the wider society have towards the needs of other members. It is on this ground that one can understand the interaction between the individual and the community:

In our traditional African society, we were individuals within the community. We took care of the community, and the community took care of us (Nyerere, 1968, pp.6-7).

Thus, Nyerere defines traditional “African socialism”:

Both the rich and poor individuals were completely secure in African society. Natural catastrophe brought famine, but it brought famine- ‘poor’ or ‘rich’. Nobody starved, either of food or human dignity, because he lacked personal wealth; he could depend on the wealth possessed by the community of which he was a member. That was socialism. This *is* socialism (Nyerere, 1968, pp. 3-4).

Sharing is another characteristic of *ujamaa* as a basis of African socialism. Sharing is the cement in the family, and the community at large. For Nyerere, to be a socialist is to put oneself in relation to one’s neighbour. This involves sharing out the goods in one’s possession. Commenting on Nyerere’s definition of socialism, Nkafu says:

African socialism, whose true realisation implies sharing and distribution of goods among all, consists in trust of belonging to a community and this total responsibility of the community towards its members (Nkafu, 1999, p. 52).

For Nyerere, because African Socialism developed out of the communitarian nature of the *muntu*, it differs from Western socialism. He puts it thus:

European socialism was born of the Agrarian Revolution and the Industrial Revolution which followed it. The former created the ‘landed’ and the ‘landless’ classes in society; the latter produced the modern capitalist and the industrial proletariat. These two revolutions planted the seeds of conflict within

the society, and not only was European socialism born of that conflict, but its apostles sanctified the conflict into a philosophy [...]. The European socialist cannot think of his socialism without its father- capitalism! [...] African socialism, on the other hand, did not have to ‘benefit’ of the Agrarian Revolution or the Industrial Revolution. It did not start from the existence of conflicting ‘classes’ in society [...]. The foundation of African socialism is the extended family (Nyerere, 1964, p.11).

Nyerere’s socialism has been praised as being the most pragmatic of all African socialisms insofar as its basic assumptions are spelt out in simple terms (Daggan & Civile, 1976; Mudimbe, 1988, 94-5). What I can infer so far, is that Nyerere built African socialism on the most concrete aspect of African communalism, brotherhood or familyhood. Although Nyerere did not gain any economic dividends from his thought, he nevertheless achieved national cohesion of Tanzanians and extended his political solidarity to most of the countries which were not yet independent. More precisely, like Senghor and Nkrumah in West Africa, Nyerere succeeded in using politically what Africans believe and value to justify and mobilise the Tanzanian people behind the choice of socialism in Africa. However, economic development has not followed with equal strength.

I shall now consider a fourth political thinker and leader, Kenneth Kaunda, in Zambia.

#### **3.4.4 Kenneth Kaunda**

Kaunda was born in 1924 in Zambia which he ruled as the first president right from the time of independence in 1964 to 1991. According to his biographer Collin Morris, he followed Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence which he enjoined upon his followers as well (Morris in Kaunda, 1966, p. 11). While Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere could easily take the label of “socialist”, Kaunda preferred to be called a humanist:

I suppose I could be called a humanist, though I have never had the leisure to read the standard works on the subject. I have a passionate belief in the worth and possibilities of man and I expect him some day to achieve perfection (Kaunda, 1966, p.19).

Kaunda's humanism has a double foundation, namely, an African and a Christian foundation. For Kaunda, African humanism lies in its emphasis on "Human Relationships"<sup>40</sup>, and this makes Africa "the last place where Man can still be Man" (Kaunda, 1966, p.22). Kaunda argues that in African humanism, relationships have two aspects. The first is the human relationship with Nature which he expresses thus:

I believe that the Universe is basically good and that throughout it great forces are at work striving to bring about a greater unity of all the living things. It is through co-operation with these forces that Man will achieve all of which he is capable. Those people who are dependent upon and live in closest relationship with Nature are most conscious of the operation of these forces: the pulse of their lives beat in harmony with the pulse of the Universe (Kaunda, 1966, pp. 22-3).

Although this idea of the human relationship with nature recalls the relational dynamics of the *muntu* in the universal community of "ntu", it seems also to be based on Teilhard de Chardin's book: *The Future of Man* sent to Kaunda by a friend of his. The point De Chardin makes in this book is that the human species is evolving spiritually, progressing from a simple to higher forms of consciousness until it culminates in the ultimate understanding of humankind's place and purpose in the universe. Thus, Kaunda could say: "[...] what he [De Chardin] has discovered as a philosopher I can testify to as a politician" (Kaunda, 1966, p. 20, see also p.42).

The second aspect is the human relationships in the society. Such relationships stem from the structure of traditional society. Kaunda draws attention to three factors which reinforce his humanistic outlook. The first is the fact that the African community is a mutual society, organised to satisfy the basic human needs of all its members to the extent that individualism is discouraged:

Most resources such as land and cattle might be communally owned and administered by chiefs and village headmen for the benefit of everyone. If, for example, a villager required a new hut, all the men would turn to and cut the trees to erect the frame and bring grass for thatching [...] (Kanda, 1966, p. 25).

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<sup>40</sup> Upper case as in the original

The point Kaunda is making is that human needs, in African humanism, are the supreme criterion of behaviour.

The second factor to which Kaunda draws attention is the fact that the African community is an *accepting* community:

It did not take account of failure in an absolute sense. The slow, the inept and incapable were accepted as a valid element in community life provided they were socially amenable. Social qualities weighed much heavier in the balance than individual achievement (Kaunda, 1966, pp. 25-26).

The third factor Kaunda underlines is the fact that African community is an *inclusive* society. The web of relationships which involved some degree of mutual responsibility was widely spread. In this kind of society, the father or mother is not only the father of his/her own children, but also the children in the extended family. The title of ‘father’ or ‘mother’ goes with the responsibility of parenthood to the extent that all one’s ‘fathers’ receive one’s filial devotion (Kaunda, 1966, p.27). The implication is that “no child in the traditional society is likely to be orphaned”. In the same way,

No old person is likely to end his days outside the family circle. If his own offspring cannot care for him then other ‘children’ will accept the duty and privilege (Kaunda, 1966, p.27).

The second foundation of Kaunda’s humanism is the Christian one:

I must be a Christian humanist! By Christian humanism, I mean that we discover all that is worth knowing about God through our fellow men and unconditional service of our fellow men is the purest form of service to God. I believe that Man must be the servant of a vision which is bigger than himself, that his path is illumined by God’s revelation and that when he shows love towards his fellow men, he is sharing the very life of God, who is love (Kaunda, 1966, p.39).

Kaunda relates the Christian foundation of his humanism to his responsibility as a political leader in these words:

When man learns, by better experience if in no other way, that the only hope for the peace and happiness of the world is to give political and economic expression to love for others, we shall have entered not the Kingdom of Man but the Kingdom of God (Kaunda, 1966, p. 39)

Thus Kaunda talks more of “humanism” rather than socialism. However, as is clear in his writing, by the term humanism, Kaunda is not bringing in a new socio-political thought; he simply meant that African socialism is a humanism as traditionally practised, and thus justifies the existence of African socialism as opposed to scientific socialism:

Just to recap, our ancestors worked collectively and cooperatively from start to finish. One might say this was a communist way of doing things, and yet these gardens remained strongly the property of individuals. One might say here that this was capitalism. Collectively and cooperatively they harvested and when it came to storing and selling their produce they became strongly individualistic. Indeed, one is compelled to say a strange mixture of nineteenth century capitalism with communism [...]; a strange mixture which gives the present generation the right to claim that our socialism is humanism (Kaunda, 1968, p. 20).

Kaunda may seem to have betrayed African socialism in his description. Nevertheless, he actually brought in an aspect which was not considered by Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere. Although the approach to production was clearly socialist, in certain cases, the land was private, and the produce was not put together. This gives the impression that the ontological link between the individual and the community as traditionally thought of in the African value system is rather loose. African thinkers have never denied that individuals have things on their own. However, the ontological status of the African is such that it is possible to say: “mine is ours, ours is mine”. The collectivist and cooperative spirit which Kaunda talked about is better understood in those terms.



Nevertheless, the question is still whether Kaunda managed to validate what Africans believe and value in terms of economic development. Like Nyerere, Kaunda might be given credit for having succeeded to unify Zambia socio-politically thanks to his intellectual articulation of what Africans believe and value. This credit cannot be given in the case of economic development. Like other fathers of African's independence, Kaunda was more concerned with the issue of the form of government or social organisation that would redeem African cultural identity which had been tarnished by colonialism.

To conclude on the four figures treated, as Wiredu (1996, pp.145-146) argues, one can see that African statesmen of post-independence were under pressure of historical leadership to produce theoretical and normative underpinnings for their programmes of political reconstruction after years of colonisation. These statesmen often did so in reference to African value system and achieved certain political gains but less or no economic development.

### **3.4.5 Assessing African socialism and its link with communalism**

The African political thinkers, whose thought I have put across so far, believed that it was possible to build their version of socialism on the African belief in the community and its values. The kind of socialism was thus called African socialism. Thus they rejected capitalism because they believed it was underpinned by individualistic and materialistic tendencies which betrayed African communalism and its humanistic sensibility (Ayittey, p.1990, p.2). In the same way, except for Nkrumah at the later stage, they opposed scientific socialism as unacceptable because its basic tenets conflicted with the historical and African contextual realities.

There are two issues that need to be confronted here. The first is the extent to which African socialism captured the imagination of Africans and mobilised them to action, that is: What did African socialism achieve? The second issue is why African socialism failed despite the strong belief that it is natural to Africa.

The first major achievement of African socialism is the point made that the African is different, and that this difference has its foundation in the structure of African society and its beliefs and values which had been undermined by colonisation. As a result, African socialism strengthened

in Africans the awareness of their own identity, and the struggle for their authenticity. It is awareness of Africans' identity and the struggle for authenticity that partly served to achieve Africa's socio-political liberation from colonialism and independence. Sindima puts it differently:

To be authentic is to be able to assert one's values and to reach selfhood. Selfhood does not appear until people have asserted themselves as subjects of history (Sindima, 1995, p.117).

Another important aspect where African socialism captured and mobilised Africans is the creation of a new socio-economic and political order. Within African socialism as the framework of reference, Africans understood the fact that neither Marxist socialism nor capitalism responds to the ontological structure of Africans. In the imagination of Africans, not only these two systems were associated with colonial powers, but they were an end-product of the Western beliefs and values in which the African individual felt alienated. Leo Apostel expressed it thus:

Western capitalism and European socialism [...] *could*<sup>41</sup> both reproduce a society in which the individual is alienated from others. Not the will of the majority but the will of the community should be realised; and even in a classless society African tradition is still afraid of solitude and closed individuality (Apostel, 1981, pp. 380- 81).

The intellectual reflections of the scholars who theorised African socialism boldly emphasised humanism that underlies the human relations in the human community and in nature. Senghor, Nkrumah, Nyerere and Kaunda, all emphasised humanism, opposed to western materialism, as an important dimension which is displayed by the community, cooperation, togetherness, and care in the African society. Africans could understand African socialism as meaning that they would work together and cooperate so that no one would go hungry when others would have what they need, and that the wealth of the post-colonial Africa could be the welfare of all.

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<sup>41</sup> Emphasis as in the original

Thus African socialism captured the imagination of and mobilised Africans to the extent that it helped them to recover their identity, to build a new socio-political order, and to appreciate their humanism based on the African belief and value system.

Although certain African leaders such as Nyerere tried to be consistent in making African socialism the basis of all aspects of life in Africa, the idea that African socialism would also inform Africa's self-reliant economic development remained, to a greater extent, at the level of thought. What explains the low level of its translation into practice? This question leads to the second aspect of the assessment of African socialism, that is, why African socialism failed despite the strong belief that it is natural to Africa.

According to Van Der Walt (1988, p.18), the failure of African socialism is in the very effort to tie it with an ideologised version of traditional communalism. The roots of socialism in the traditional society were weakly anchored, and the ideological plant would not grow. Communalism and socialism are different visions of life and ways of life. Van Der Walt's point is quite striking. African leaders and thinkers seem to have embraced socialism not necessarily because it was readily present in the African communalism, but because it was readily available at the international stage as an alternative to capitalism. Against this background, African communalism was used as a moral justification to legitimate socialism and to oppose capitalism as an economic and political ideology of the colonial powers. This argument was also developed by Sachs and Warner who used it to explain the causes of slow growth in African economies:

The decision to pursue state-led development [...] in newly-independent developing countries in the 1960 was part of a reaction against the economies associated with colonialism. To be sure, many observers, not only in Africa, thought that market-led economic development and free trade has been discredited by the example of the Great Depression and (what appeared to be) the economic success of the Soviet bloc. But among African leaders seeking to lead their countries sharply away from their colonial past, free trade and market-led development had an additional stigma as being the policies of the colonial rulers (Sachs & Warner, 1997, p.19-20; see also 1995a).

In his *Black Orpheus* (1976), a text which served as a preface to Senghor's book, *Antologie de la poésie nègre et marginale d'expression française* (1948), Jean Paul Sartre drew an analogy between the proletariat under capitalistic structures in Europe and Africans under colonisation. From this analogy, Sartre drew this conclusion:

The Negro, like the white worker, is victim of the capitalistic structure of our society, and he discovers solidarity of interests beyond the nuances of skin colour with certain classes of Europeans oppressed as he (Sartre, 1976, p.14)

However, even if it were granted that the choice of socialism in Africa was informed by its availability on the international stage, one would expect this availability to be a strengthening factor for African socialism rather than a weakening one. In other words, the reasons that gave rise to socialism elsewhere would be complementary to the fact that African socialism is rooted in the ontological structure of the African, and not simply a consequence of a socio-historical development *à la Marx*.

According to Gyekye (1997, p.148), not everything that can be asserted about communalism can be asserted also of socialism. Communalism is essentially a socio-ethical way of life concerned with social relations as well as moral attitudes, about what sorts of relationships should hold between individuals in society and about the need to take into account the interests of the wider society. Instead, socialism is fundamentally economic, concerned with the relations or modes of production. The basic premises of socialism are economic. The concern of socialism with such moral values as justice and equality can be acknowledged, but this concern is certainly not idiosyncratic to it.

Gyekye's point was also made by Ayittey, who points out that:

Socialism as understood and practiced, entails government ownership of the means of production; the operation of state enterprises to the exclusion of privately-owned businesses, price fixing by the state and a plethora of state regulations and controls [...]. Africa's indigenous economic system may be "backward" and "primitive", but it is not characterised by these absences and is therefore not "socialism" (Ayittey, 1990, p.12).

Gyekye and Ayittey are right to point out that the specificity of communalism is a socio-ethical way of life, while the specificity of socialism is the modes of production. However, while they note the concern of moral values in socialism, they do not take note of the economic concern of communalism. Yet, they are aware of the notion of mutual aid in production which Nyerere and Kaunda held in esteem, as well as the fact that, in Africa the production of wealth is inseparable from social relations. In other words, the issue, in African socialism, is always “how to bake the cake together and share it together?” This is the case in most African societies. The issue is whether the African socio-ethical way of life can be given an economic expression or whether traditional African communalism could have economic implications.

Furthermore, Gyekye (1997, p.149) argues that there is no necessary connection between communalism and socialism, nor is communalism a necessary condition for socialism. As matter of fact, the European societies that gave birth to Marxist socialism were not markedly communitarian societies. They were societies marked by the ethos of individualism. Gyekye’s point is seemingly superficial here. It is effectively the ethos of individualism which allows the exploitation of the human being by another and abandons the human being to oneself that prompted Marxist socialism.

If Marx and Marxists in the West thought that socialism would solve the problem of the ethos of individualism, the fathers of Africa’s independence believed it to be present in Africa already in the form of communalism but that it lacked a political (and an ideological) expression. Thus they endeavoured to work out this political expression. This political expression grew stronger to the extent of being disconnected from what was seen as its root. One can see it in the ideological shifts that occurred in Nkrumah, Kaunda and Senghor. Nkrumah shifted from African socialism to scientific socialism, from communalism to communism; Kaunda shifted from African socialism to a vague use of humanism, as if humanism is not rather the spirit of African communalism. In his introduction to the translation of Senghor’s *On African Socialism*, Cook (1963, p.vii) accused Senghor of being too eclectic:

Retaining such traditional African values as religion and the community spirit, Senegal, he believes, must develop its “open,” “democratic,” “humanistic” socialism, selecting and applying the most useful contributions available. From the French Utopian socialists it will borrow trade unions and the cooperative.

From Marxism-Leninism it will accept dialectics but reject atheistic materialism.

From Cook's observation, one can see that in Senghor's version of African socialism, African communalism is no longer at the centre as major factor to be given a political expression. It is now at the periphery as an aspect among others. Co-operation, which characterises the "communion of souls" which Senghor treasured in African communalism, is even borrowed from the French Utopian socialism. That is what I have called *A wrong way: From being to having in African value system* (Ntibagirirwa, 2003).

According to Masolo (2006), the proponents of African socialism confused culture and politics. There is a difference between culture and politics. For Masolo, Senghor, Nkrumah, Nyerere and Kaunda were led by nationalist ambitions to create out of Africa something that was radically different from the political system of the colonisers. They opted for a political programme that would combine values from Africa's living indigenous histories and social structures with an anti-capitalist ideology. This left African socialism on shaky ground.

Masolo's observation seems to be simplistic, though. Although culture and politics are two different things, they are necessarily, if not genetically linked. If politics is the art of managing the city, the best politics is that which takes into consideration people's beliefs and values. In fact, politics is part of culture. The proponents of African socialism have not consistently followed up the link to its logical conclusion.

According to James Ferguson (2006, p.76), "African socialism was from the start an ideology of rule and state moralising". Ferguson's observation might be true, but African socialism might not be limited to that. If the language of socialism captured the ear of the ordinary African, it is because it could resonate with the reality of the ordinary life of Africans. Where this resonance was not betrayed but strengthened by the leaders, African socialism may not have yielded economic dividends, maybe because the focus was much more political liberation than economic, but it safeguarded unity and solidarity as it can be observed in Tanzania, Ghana and Zambia.

However, Ferguson's idea could identify a more complex reason as to why African socialism went wrong. In fact I could put the issue as follow: Was the problem of African socialism at the level of ideology and state moralising? Or was it rather at the level of the political approach of the leadership? In effect, according to Bruce Baker,

The approaches of the ruling classes, both under colonial rule and since independence, have largely centred around statism. This has three pillars of belief. First, state power represents the will of the people (in singular) and rules in their interest. It is, therefore, entitled to rule by diktat. Secondly, state power promotes unity and therefore entitled to expect consent, or at least acquiescence. [...] Thirdly, state power promotes economic well-being ('development') and is therefore entitled to extract resources from the populace and distribute the resources as it sees fit (Baker, 2000, p.109).

One important aspect of this statism was too much bureaucracy of which the consequence is poor public service delivery. In the words of Collier and Cumming,

African governments have typically been less democratic and more bureaucratic than their Asian and Latin America counterparts (Collier & Gunning, 1999b, p.6 see also 1999a).

The views of Collier and Cumming raise a question with which I would like to conclude: Have the different structures and institutions of the modern African society worked in a way that effectively reflects the African socialist characteristic of the African belief and value system? The answer is that they have not. The structures and institutions of the modern African society were divorced from the African value system. African socialism itself became a forgotten idea. In most cases, once the independence was acquired, the question of whether African beliefs and values should inform political evolution received less and less attention. To be clear, Africans shifted from being to having as I said earlier (Ntibagirirwa, 2003). As a consequence, "in Africa, progress stagnated with the attainment of political liberation" and "the leadership failed to develop an inspiring, shared agenda of economic liberation and development" (Mbigi, 2005, pp. 148-149).



Although African socialism might not be retrieved, the philosophical guidelines that will be elaborated in Chapter Seven will highlight how different structures and institutions of the modern society in Africa could work in a way that reflects the African belief and value system.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that despite the cultural diversity observable in Africa, there is a common metaphysical backbone that unifies almost all Africans. Central to this metaphysical backbone is the belief that the individual is ontologically part of the community. I argued that the particularity of the African sense of community lies in the way the Africans conceive of the universe around them in general, and the human universe in particular. I made this point by dwelling on the four ontological categories of the Bantu people. I showed how Senghor, Nkrumah, Nyerere, and Kaunda developed and defended an African version of socialism or African socialism based on such an African belief and value system. I outlined the extent to which this African socialism captured the imagination of Africans, mobilised them to action, and also discussed the arguments used to explain the failure of this political vision in Africa.

In next chapter I will focus on the universality of development theories in relation to the particularity of the African belief and value system. I will address two major issues. First of all I shall consider the issue of whether the African value system was ignored or avoided in the economic development planning. Secondly, I will consider the issue of whether the “universalistic” aspect of theories of economic development could be accounted for in Africa’s economic development planning by using the concepts of inculturation and democratisation of economic development.