

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe: Our Father Is Still Alive with His Libertarian Philosophy

Gbenga Bode Babatunde

Former Chief Lecturer, Osun State Polytechnic, Iree, Nigeria

Abstract:

The title of this paper is a derivation from Azikiwe's Igbo forename, "Nnamdi", which means "My father is alive." The paper examines the socio-politico-economic philosophy of one of Nigeria's most sophisticated leaders, Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik), a worthy contemporary of Obafemi Awolowo, another worthy Nigerian philosopher. It situates Azikiwe's philosophy within the spectrum of libertarianism. It also postulates that the values that Azikiwe espoused are still "alive" in contemporary Africa. Azikiwe's ideology is that of political transmogrification for Africa. Zikism, as Azikiwe's libertarian philosophy is tagged, is aimed at the total emancipation of Africans, beginning from their total freedom from colonial rule to absolute liberty from the exploitative tendencies of native rulers after independence. With regard to this latter intendment, Azikiwe's aim was to make the young Africans guide their hard-earned independence from colonial insubordination religiously by insisting on adherence to equity, justice and fair play in governance. It is submitted that Azikiwe's guiding principles are still intact as a template for African youths to work on as emerging African leaders.

Keywords: Libertarianism philosophy, sophisticated, cotemporary, emancipation, equity, justice, fair play, necessitarianism, racial discrimination, individualist anarchism, emancipation, switching allegiance, political thralldom, economic insecurity, disabilities, invectives and innuendoes, capitalism, socialism and welfarism

1. Introduction

This article is about the implications of Azikiwe's libertarian philosophy on contemporary governance in Africa. This is an original study undertaken by the researcher to resolve the problem of continued leadership by old Nigerian politicians with continual and continuous culture of impunity. The research is based on information method, drawn from secondary evidence and interpreted objectively using relevant empirical literature. Available facts regarding the theme were, indeed, sought from the literature rigorously in line with what Obilade (1987) calls "incorruptible scepticism". The article is important to the Nigerian state in view of the recent disappointment in the rule of the old brigade, tagged analogue leadership, and the call for the youths of the nation to rise up, with their digital mentality, to take over the reins of power. The article is, indeed, going to be of interest to the general Nigerian populace who are already disillusioned with the continued misrule of the same set of people, whose names have been recrudescing like recurring decimals, in Nigeria's political landscape, since independence. It is particularly going to be of interest to articulate youths, imbued with modern knowledge and contemporary technology, which are ready to take up the gauntlet and save Nigeria from the rottenness to which it has been consigned by its agelong, serial, regular, monophonic stealers. The article adopts both the thematic and funnel structures. Thematically, the study is about libertarianism as a worthy philosophy which Azikiwe was known to have developed a lot of interest in, the same way his contemporary, Obafemi Awolowo, was married to the philosophy of democratic socialism. Using the funnel structure, the article begins by tracing the global roots of libertarianism, moves to Azikiwe's early contact with the philosophy and, then, identifies the opportunities he had to demonstrate his penchant for the ideas behind libertarianism. The article also looks at the similarities between Azikiwe's libertarianism and Awolowo's democratic socialism and argues that, at the heart of both philosophies, is the penchant of the statesmen for the youths' active involvement in governance. Thereafter, the paper examines Azikiwe's predilection for maintaining the momentum of his philosophy; his crucifixion for adopting the philosophy; the strengths and weaknesses of the philosophy as expounded by Azikiwe and concludes by channelling the philosophy to the contemporary needs of the Nigerian youths.

1.1. The Roots of Azikiwe's Libertarianism

Libertarianism is from the Latin word "liber", which means "free." Its locus classicus was from William Belsham's 1789 examination of the term in contradistinction to "necessitarianism" (Belsham, 1789). According to Belsham, the term was used as a metaphysical concept to denote freewill as contrasted with determinism. The Oxford English Dictionary records that,

from the 12th of February 1796, a libertarian was to be seen as an advocate or defender of liberty, with the appearance of a publication in *The London Packet* chronicling the marching out of Bristol "450 of the French Libertarians." Also, in 1802, "libertarian" was used in a political perception to critique the poem of Walter Savage Landor entitled *Gebir* (Marshal 2009:641). Furthermore, the term gained more notability with its use by Joseph DE Jacque in his criticism of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's "sexist political views" in 1857 and a description of a new set of political positions (Graham, 2005). In all its original usages, in these early publications, libertarianism could be seen as being synonymous with anarchism – the belief in a voluntary, cooperative and non-violent method of self-government.

Not only could these early publications have arrested the mind of the young Azikiwe, as an avid reader and especially as a student in America, back in the 30's; they had, indeed, formed an insignia in his mind throughout his life time. It is pertinent to point out here, however, that the 20th Century deviation of United States from the use of libertarianism from its original socialist political inclinations to denote conservatism in economic issues and liberality on personal freedom must have captured the fancies of Azikiwe. This is in view of his commitment to the total liberation of Africans and the securement of their personal freedom during the colonial rule of Africa and thereafter.

An examination of the ramifications of the term libertarianism exposes it as an anthology of political philosophies that validate freedom as a sine-qua-non. In this respect, libertarians are often critical of institutional authority seen as engaging in social domination and injustice. Libertarianism has generally continued to hold as sacrosanct its political usage that is synonymous with social or individualist anarchism. The foremost version of libertarian theories is Robert Nozick's (1974) entitlement theory. This theory postulates that the three most important principles of distributive justice are justice in acquisition, justice in transfer, and the rectification for violations of justice in acquisition and transfer. It is pertinent to point out, at this juncture, that Azikiwe ably epitomized justice in all ramifications and showed early signs of his love for libertarianism even in his early contact with this terminology.

1.2. *The Man Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe and His Early Contact with Libertarian Ideas*

Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe was one of the most prominent figures of modern Nigerian nationalism. He cut his political teeth as a legislature in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1948. He also occupied the coveted positions of Premier of the Eastern region between 1954 and 1959. In 1960, he established the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. On November 16, 1960, he simultaneously became the first Nigerian to be appointed into the Privy Council of the United Kingdom and Nigeria's first and last Governor-General, occupying both positions till 1963, when he became Nigeria's first President, under the Nigerian First Republic. He was removed as ceremonial president, along with his other political colleagues, following a military putsch of 15 January 1966. When the Biafran civil war of secession broke out between 1967 and 1970, he first acted as the spokesman of the nascent republic and an adviser to Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, its leader, before switching allegiance back to Nigeria, while appealing to Ojukwu to cease fire. In 1980, he got the Nigeria's highest honour of the Grand Commander of the Federal Republic (GCFR) from the Nigeria's second republic president, Alhaji Shehu Shagari. During the Second republic, his two attempts to become Nigeria's executive president were unsuccessful. He finally quit politics after the military coup of March 31, 1983. He died on 11 May 1996 at Enugu and was survived by seven children – Chukwuma, Emeka, Nwachukwu, Ngozi, Molokwu, Uwakwe and Jayzik. Before his death, he had received fourteen honorary degrees from several universities in Nigeria, America and Liberia. He was also the Oziziani Obi and the Owelle-Osowa-Anya of Onitsha (a first-rank, hereditary red cap title). A sport's man of no mean repute, Azikiwe actively participated in sports at every stage of his life. In his entire political life, Azikiwe bestrode the political space of Africa like a colossus.

This colossus of Igbo descent, popularly known as Zik of Africa, was born in Zungeru, the North of Nigeria, on November 16, 1904 to the family of Mr. Obed-Edom Chukwuemeka Azikiwe and Mrs. Rachel Chinwe Azikiwe. His father was a clerk in the British Administration of Nigeria while his mother was a princess from a royal house in Onitsha. His only sibling was Cecilia Eziama Arinze.

He grew up in the North of Nigeria and spoke Hausa language fluently. He was later moved to Onitsha in 1912, where he first attended Holy Trinity School and later Christ Church School. In 1914, Azikiwe relocated to Lagos where his father worked and he continued his education in the city. When his father was transferred to Kaduna, he was again back to Onitsha in 1918 and finished his elementary education at CMS Central School where he also taught. In his secondary school days at Hope Waddell College, Calabar, he was introduced to the teachings of Marcus Garvey, which largely influenced his libertarian ideas in later years. He later transferred to Methodist High School, Lagos, where he was further influenced by James Aggrey's lecture on change in the system. He, thereafter, went to America to study, first in Storer College and then Howard University, Lincoln University and University of Pennsylvania, after which he returned to Nigeria in 1934. When in America, he wrote in a column for the Baltimore Afro-American, Philadelphia Tribune and the Associated Negro Press and was influenced, in his writing, by Garveyism and Pan Africanism. He was also a graduate student instructor, teaching history and political science.

1.3. *Opportunities for Nnamdi Azikiwe's Penchant for Libertarian Principles*

Azikiwe's penchant for libertarianism received a boost on his return to Nigeria after his academic exploits in America following some opportunities which he grabbed with both hands. The first opportunity, after his return to Nigeria in 1934, was occasioned by the warm welcome and respect he received from some members of Lagos and his Igbo community, who had heard about his writing exploits in America.

Later the same year, he was offered the job of an editor of *African Morning Post* by a Ghanaian businessman, Alfred Oxcansay, who gave him unrestrained latitude to manage the newspaper. In his, "Inside Stuff", a popular column of the newspaper, Azikiwe promoted his libertarian philosophy by advocating for a free, autonomous, orderly and egalitarian society.

His repeated preaching of black pride and the necessity of Africans to hold their destiny in their hands often put him at loggerheads with the colonial masters. Smertin (1977:9) has this to say about his writing: "In his passionately denunciatory articles and public statements he censured the existing colonial order: the restrictions on the Africans' right to express their opinions, and racial discrimination...."

Azikiwe also participated in the local politics of Ghana and mentored Kwameh Nkrumah, who later became Ghanaian president. He also used his newspaper to support the Mambii Party and the party reciprocated by advancing Azikiwe's call for equal, just, friendly and orderly society. Azikiwe also fought those Africans who, because of their closeness to the corridor of power of the colonialists, sought to maintain the status quo and exposed them as the enemies of the people. Through this too, he endeared himself more to the people who, in turn, embraced his call for egalitarianism in all facets of life.

1.4. *The Similarities between Azikiwe's Libertarianism and Obafemi Awolowo's Democratic Socialism*

As a libertarian, there are enough proofs to show that Azikiwe maintained the tempo of his libertarian philosophy by constantly calling, during his life time, for a free, autonomous and egalitarian society. He was at the vanguard of political and economic freedom, voluntary association and respect for individualism.

Azikiwe, while in Accra, Ghana, promoted his idea of a New Africa with black pride, an idea that soon transposed into his book entitled *Renascent Africa*. According to Azikiwe, the New Africa should be divorced from ethnic affiliations and traditional influence and transmogrified by five philosophical pillars of spiritual balance (respect for the opinion of others), social regeneration (eliminating all forms of bias - racial, national, tribal, societal, political, ethical); economic determinism (promotion of economic self-sufficiency); mental emancipation (emancipation from the crisis of inferiority with a focus on a wonderful future) and national Risorgimento (encouraging a system that sees politics as a means to an end).

Ikechukwu (2010) highlights the five principles on which Azikiwe's emancipation of Africa are anchored and these include: developing a feeling of personal security and group preservation despite diversities in language and culture, ensuring a federal system in order to guarantee coexistence on the basis of equality, ensuring that people's fundamental human rights are preserved, conceding to regional *de jure* equality and *de facto* inequality and superimposing national loyalty over regional claims.

Azikiwe also tried to work on the synthesis of three economic systems – capitalism, socialism and welfarism and came up with Neo-welfarism. This is a system which enables the state to provide social services in addition to sharing with the private sector the control over the means of production, distribution and exchange. Azikiwe believed that Neo-welfarism would bring reformation to the instruments of power, ensure compliance with the rule of law and fundamental human rights, ensure separation of powers and integrity in governance, guide the administration of public utilities, encourage importation and exportation and introduce a reasonable taxation policy.

Azikiwe was able to promote his libertarian philosophy through effective use of the media. He started the publication of West African Pilot newspaper in 1937, with an initial production of 6,000 copies daily running to 20,000 copies in 1950. He adopted, as the mantra of the forerunner newspaper, Dante Alighieri's maxim: "Show the light and the people will find the way." He also published a plethora of other newspapers, which he effectively used for the promotion of Nigerian nationalism. For example, he published The Southern Nigeria Defender in Warri and Ibadan, Eastern Guardian in Port Harcourt, Nigerian Spokesman in Onitsha and The Comet in Lagos. With these newspapers, he fought against injustice to Africans, called for independence in Africa and aroused political consciousness.

Like Azikiwe's libertarianism, what was paramount in the mind of Awolowo, his contemporary, was democratic socialism. During the nationalists' agitation for self-rule, the principles enunciated by Awolowo, were those of welfarism and happiness (Awolowo, 1981a:196). The tempo for democratic socialism was, however, kickstarted when Awolowo became the Premier of Western region of Nigeria. Although Awolowo has argued that the evolution of his democratic socialism could be traced to his 1951 launch of the Action Group and his promise of "life more abundant", his predisposition was towards nationalism and welfarism - then - and not democratic socialism. Nonetheless, Awolowo began to show signs of implementation of democratic socialism, as soon as he became premier, through his free education policy, his general enlightenment programme for all illiterate adults, his provision of medical care for children, his rural integration programme, his agro-allied industries, his housing scheme, etc. Although Awolowo's opponents have criticised him for being equivocal about his democratic socialism, there is no doubt that Awolowo had a sincere heart, like Azikiwe, to defend people's liberty, fight for justice and fair play and promote egalitarianism. Both of them also encouraged the youths to play very active roles in the progress and development of the country. This is where the ideas of the two sages crossed paths.

1.5. *Emancipation of Nigeria from the Abyss of Hopelessness*

Azikiwe and his NCNC members, led by Herbert Macaulay, also organized tours to several parts of Nigeria to sensitize the people about important decisions of the colonial masters that affected their lives. An example was a tour they organized to oppose Richard's 1945 proposals for the review of the Clifford Constitution of 1922 and to raise money for a tour to the United

Kingdom to signify their protest. Their protest was centered on the nomination of people disinterested in self-government because of their loyalty to the colonial masters and the exclusion of Africans into senior civil service positions.

Following the demise of Herbert Macaulay, Azikiwe assumed the leadership of the NCNC, undertook a sympathy tour to America, where he met Mrs. Roosevelt at Hyde Park and delivered a speech calling for the "emancipation of Nigeria from the political thralldom, economic insecurity and social disabilities." Also, with his UK delegation, comprising of Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Nyong Essien and others, Azikiwe spoke about the imperativeness of engaging Africans regarding changes in the constitution, providing more power to the regional House of Assemblies while pegging the powers of the central Legislative Council to only matters affecting defense, currency and foreign affairs.

Azikiwe's membership of the Legislative Council of Nigeria under the 1946 Richard's Constitution, also afforded him the opportunity to enhance his libertarian views. He also opposed the changes in the 1951 Macpherson Constitution. Furthermore, he espoused the values inherent in libertarianism as the leader of opposition to the government of Obafemi Awolowo in 1951 and as Premier of the Eastern Region in 1954.

1.6. *Azikiwe's Crucifixion as a Result of His Libertarian Philosophy*

Azikiwe met with a deluge of problems with his libertarian philosophy. For example, he was charged with sedition and sentenced to six months' imprisonment in Ghana, following his newspaper's publication of I.T.A Wallace-Johnson's article entitled "Has the African a God?". Although he was acquitted by the appeal, it was this crisis that precipitated his return to Lagos, Nigeria, in 1937.

Back in Nigeria, Zik again ran into problem with his libertarian philosophy, when his newspaper, *West African Pilot* was suspended for about one month beginning from July 8, 1948. This was as result of his write-up supporting the June 1945 general strike of the labour union led by Michael Imoudu. He also passed invectives and innuendoes on the colonial government, accusing it of exploitation of the working class. This problem, however, tended to raise the profile of Azikiwe instead of diminishing it. This was as a result of a story about an assassination attempt against Azikiwe, which his people believed was the handiwork of the colonial government. His popularity soared during this period and the sales of his newspapers improved tremendously.

Yet another problem surfaced in 1951 when a militant youth movement, formed in 1946 to defend Azikiwe and led by Osita Agwuna, Raji Abdalla, Kolawole Balogun, M.C.K. Ajuluchukwu and Abiodun Aloba, was accused of planning to assassinate a colonial secretary and banned. This was sequel to the movement's advocacy for positive and militant actions, including strikes, study of military science courses by Nigerian students overseas and boycott of foreign goods, to actualize self-government.

1.7. *The Strengths of Nnamdi Azikiwe's Libertarianism*

Azikiwe's postulation is as "alive" in Nigeria today as it was during his life time. This is in view of the fact that Nigeria is still grappling with all the issues he raised. A look at Azikiwe's five pillars of spiritual balance will show, for example, that we still have a long way to go to liberate Nigeria in the strictest sense of the word. For example, today's Nigeria is still bedeviled with disrespect for others' opinion; tribal, political, religious and ethical intolerance; economic doldrums; marked inferiority and the conception of politics as an end itself instead of as a means to an end. Besides, the call for restructuring that will ensure personal security and group preservation as well as coexistence in a balanced federation and putting national loyalty above tribal, selfish and parochial interests, in our heterogeneous state, is still a mere cry.

Another good point about Azikiwe's libertarianism is the requirement of government functions to protect individual rights and its conception of civil liberties. As a libertarian, Azikiwe sought to fight for individuals' access to their holdings which they were permitted to acquire, keep and exchange depending on their choice. The beauty of it all is the non-aggressive strategy of making the protection of individual rights the foremost role of the state.

1.8. *Weaknesses of Zik's Libertarian Philosophy*

The first noticeable weakness is the fashioning of a single system out of three systems that are diametrically opposed to one another. The systems of capitalism, socialism and welfarism are, to say the least, different. Indeed, capitalism is at the other end of the pendulum of economic system to socialism. That explains why some of Azikiwe's opponents accused him of having no clear-cut political ideology.

Another weakness, an offshoot of the first, is that it is not clear whether Azikiwe's libertarianism is based on strong private rights or strong public control. For example, Azikiwe does not come clear as to who controls land, infrastructure and natural resources – private individuals or the government.

There was also a tribal coloration to Azikiwe's Libertarianism, with many of his opponents believing that he was enmeshed in ethnic hegemony because of what they termed undue favoritism of people from his Igbo clan.

Besides, although Azikiwe sought to defend wage labour, his indifference to concentrations of wealth in a few hands, on the guise of voluntariness, puts a serious question mark on his defense of the masses of the people.

The weaknesses of Zik's philosophy of libertarianism is, perhaps, a product of the confusion of libertarianism itself. Libertarians have always been associated with a divergence on the magnitude of their opposition to socio-politico-economic systems, resulting in different views on the legitimate functions of state and private power.

2. Conclusion

Notwithstanding the weaknesses inherent in Azikiwe's libertarianism, it is sure that Azikiwe has put his feet in the sand of history by coming up with an enduring philosophy of libertarianism. It is conceded that his synchronization of capitalism, socialism and welfarism may be theoretically off the track. Nonetheless, the ramifications of his political ideology actually actuate and fructify the principles of correct governance and serve as the bedrock for a foolproof Nigerian socio-politico-economic life. Through his libertarian views, Azikiwe has been able to provide significant moral liberty of action, a kind of template, which I believe successive Nigerian governments can fall upon. Moreover, his preachment on significant moral protection against unnecessary interference from others is a sure way of guaranteeing freedom of choice and action. Besides, Azikiwe succeeded largely at sensitizing people, especially the youths, about the past agreements and violations, with a view to engaging their minds for a more orderly, friendly, popular and egalitarian future society. Of recent, another Nigerian former president, General Olusegun Obasanjo, has come up with an alliance that will make the youths alert to their responsibility with regard to seizing power from the expired analogue old politicians who are still in the saddle. How well the youths are able to rise up to access this window opened by Obasanjo to come together as a virile group that will save Nigeria from total collapse, through the injection of new and fresh ideas, will determine the enlivenment or otherwise of a work earlier stated by Azikiwe. It is, on this note, that I believe our father, Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe, is still alive and the earlier our youths, the emerging leaders, address themselves to his ever-living libertarian philosophy, the better our society will be.

3. References

- i. Awolowo, O. (1960). *Awo: The Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ii. Awolowo, O. (1981a). *Voice of Reason*. Akure: Olaiya Fagbamigbe Publishers.
- iii. Azikiwe, N., (1961) *Renascent Africa*. New York: Negro University Press.
- iv. Azikiwe, N., (1978) "From Tribe to Nation" in Onigu Otite, O., (ed.) *Themes in African Social and Political Thought*. Malta: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- v. Barnett, R., 1998, *The Structure of Liberty: Justice and the Rule of Law*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- vi. Belsham, W., (1789). *Essays*. Michigan: C. Dilly
- vii. Brennan, J., 2012, *Libertarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- viii. Epstein, R.A., 1995, *Simple Rules for a Complex World*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- ix. Friedman, D., 1989, *The Machinery of Freedom: A Guide to Radical Capitalism*, New York: Harper and Row.
- x. Graham, R., ed. (2005). *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas. Volume One: From Anarchy to Anarchism (300 CE–1939)*. Montreal: Black Rose Books
- xi. Ikechukwu, A. K., (2010), "The Political Philosophy of Azikiwe as an Ideology of Political Regeneration for Nigeria" *Bassey Andah Journal*, 3, 178-188.
- xii. Marshall, Peter (2009). *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.
- xiii. Nozick, R., (1974). *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books.
- xiv. Obilade, T. (1987). *Research Methods in Language and Communication*. Ibadan: Odusote Bookstore Limited.
- xv. Oxford English Dictionary 2010 edition
- xvi. Smertin, Y., (1977), *Kwame Nkrumah*, Moscow: Progress, 1977.