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Ecosocialism and Its Implication to the Nigerian State

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The environmental crisis remains unabated. It is still raging on in phenomena such as gas flaring, deforestation, depletion of the ozone layer, climate change, desertification, unplanned urbanization, and so forth. The impact of the crisis is felt in every region of the world including Nigeria. Nigeria has experienced many environmental problems like the ones mentioned above. Others are soil erosion, illegal mining, environmental insecurities, violent struggles over natural resources, etc. Various ideologies have been proposed for curbing the environmental crisis such as communalism, socialism, capitalism, nationalism, democracy, communism, ecofeminism, ecowomanism, and so forth. This paper critically and hermeneutically examines the ideology of ecosocialism and its appropriateness to the Nigerian state. The paper shows why ecosocialism has some positive ideas that should inspire the Nigerian state in ecological protection, it should not be adopted in an uncritical manner hook, line, and sinker. The paper reveals that Nigeria is troubled by many environmental problems. It concludes that the good points of ecosocialism should be adopted and used to create an environmentally friendly Nigerian state.

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is not exempted from the environmental crisis that is plaguing the entire world. In Nigeria, the environmental crisis manifests itself in phenomena such as soil erosion, desertification, deforestation, gas flaring, oil pollution, noise pollution, unplanned urbanization, waste mismanagement, climate change, etc. In a bid to combat the environmental crisis, different ideologies and plans of action have been proposed. These include ecological citizenship, ecosocialism, social ecology, deep ecology, ecofeminism, eco-liberation theology, ecological greening of religious texts, ecowomanism, animal liberation movement, indigenous ecologies, etc. The fact that various ecological problems bedevil Nigeria should not be in doubt. Ikeke (2011, 2012), Anah (2019), Ofomata and Phil-Eze (2007), and Evelyn and Tyav (2012), are all authors who have highlighted this fact. Environmental problems in Nigeria should be attended to for they have serious negative consequences for the nation such as the death of lives, destruction of properties, health hazards, violent conflicts, social dislocations, internal displacement of people, etc.

One foremost ideology that has been proposed is ecosocialism. There are no countries in the world that have fully implemented an ecosocialist system. All human socio-economic and political systems are fraught with their problems. The human operators of the systems are often the problems. Almost all countries in the world that operate socialism have often been oppressive in denying people human rights. There is no doubt that capitalism has its problems and has precipitated many environmental problems. This paper aims to examine the ideology of ecosocialism and its applicability to the Nigerian state. In accomplishing the goal of this paper, the paper deciphered some basic concepts. It then examined the environmental situation of the Nigerian state. Thereafter it looked at the applicability or implications of ecosocialism for Nigeria.

Deciphering of Basic Concepts

There are some concepts or terms that ground the basis of this paper. They are ecology, socialism, ecosocialism, capitalism, and the Nigerian state. The reason why capitalism is also explained here is that ecosocialism is a critique of capitalism, it is imperative then to define capitalism. What is ecology? Hook (2008) defines ecology as: "...the study of ecosystems, their composition and how the various components interact with one another" (p. 72). It is factual knowledge that etymologically, the term comes from two Greek words, "oikos" meaning home or household, and "logos" meaning discourse or knowledge. Mautner (2005) writes that ecology is "a scientific discipline which has for its object natural systems of biological organisms. It investigates how the parts of such systems interact, and the impact of external forces on them" (p.178). In Mayhew (2009) it is "the study of the interrelationships between organisms and their surroundings, outer world; the study of animals and plants in relation to each other and to their habitats" (p. 147). Ecology is the study of the home, the planet in which human beings and other entities and organisms live and dwell. It studies their relationships, interactions, competition, population, and their survival. The word is now commonly used to describe the environment.

As for the term socialism, Mautner (2005) writes that socialism is a "theory and a movement advocating public ownership of the more important means of production" (p. 578). Chaturvedi (2006) states that there are many forms of socialism but all are concerned about social equality, extensive welfare, or egalitarian ideals; today many socialists now de-emphasize public and common ownership and foster social reforms rather than revolution is achieve a socialist state; they argue against disease, and stand for a social order in which no human being is exploited. The social speaks of the collective or togetherness of the people. Socialism is concerned with the collective, communal, or public welfare and wellbeing of all the people

advocating that means of production should be owned collectively by all to promote equality of all and access to social opportunities.

Ecosocialism is a combination of the concepts of ecology and socialism. The world has experienced so much devastation and degradation of ecological systems and destruction of organisms, plants, animals, etc. Much of this has come from the activities of human beings on the earth such as mining and extractive activities, agricultural projects, industrial activities, etc. It is believed by ecosocialists that the implementation of socialist values of ownership of the means of production will mitigate capitalism and its destruction of ecological systems. StudySmarter (2024) opines that the economic system of capitalism is responsible for the anthropogenic climate crises and many other attendant environmental problems and so there is a need for an alternative system to it. Lowy (2005) writes that the idea of seeing capitalism as a culprit in the environmental crisis is a highlight of ecosocialism. The viewpoint of Lowy (2005) is that ecosocialists assert that capitalist and industrial civilization has an insatiable quest for more profits and growth and in the process has caused irreparable calamities and problems such as air pollution, global warming, ozone layer depletion, deforestation, desertification, waste accumulation, food scarcity, nuclear accidents, polluted drinking water, etc. The interest of ecosocialists is a reversal of all these. StudySmarter (2024) opines that for the ecosocialists, the present industrialization and globalization should be denounced, there should be a decrease in the production of goods and consumerism, the adoption of socialism that responds to the capitalist and environmental crisis emphasizing a strong state, common ownership, and emphasis on equal welfare instead of profit with an emphasis on quality of goods, not quantity. Rogers (2018) writes that the term ecosocialism is a merging of the two words, ecology, and socialism, and the term came into the highlight in the 1980s as environmentalism was spreading, although some trace the root to Marx himself; the theory enunciates

that capitalism is incompatible with environmental protection. Only an ecosocialist society can guarantee environmental protection. Lowy (2018) is on target when he argues the position of ecosocialism as follows: capitalism is about profit maximization not caring ecological and social cost; caring less for a sustainable and just future, exploitative.

Though what capitalism implies is already offered above, an explicit definition of it is in order here. Chaturvedi (2006) opines that capitalism is “an economic system based on private ownership of the means of production. The term has its origin in the 17th century, when ‘capital’ means ‘wealth’ or ‘stock’” (p. 37); or “an economic system in which wealth is owned by private individuals or businesses and goods produced for exchange, according to dictates of the market that is by market demand and supply. There is minimum or no control from the Government” (p. 37). Mayhew (2009) writes that capitalism is about private capital, private property, and private enterprise with the motive of profit-making and wealth creation through continuous innovation, production, and intense competition. Arising from the reality that there is little or no firm control from the government, capitalists and business owners often manipulate and control the market as they desire to the detriment of the common good and environmental wellbeing. What matters to them is profit, more than any other thing. A business not making a profit is considered to be not fit to exist. It is a state of survival of the fittest business. It is this that has aggravated so much environmental trauma and human pain and misery. Ecosocialism is forthrightly against a free market economy.

This paper is concerned with whether the Nigerian state should become an ecosocialist state. What is the state? Chaturvedi (2006) writes that a state is “an association which establishes sovereign power within a defined territorial area, usually possessing a monopoly of coercive power. Government, the machinery through which collective decisions are

made on behalf of the State, usually comprising a legislature, executive and judiciary” (p. 295). Abercrombie et al. (2000) aver that the state is “a set of institutions governing a particular territory with a capacity to make laws regulating the conduct of the people within that territory, supported by revenue deriving from taxation” (p. 343). The Nigerian state refers to the government and people of the geographic territory called Nigeria. It is the Nigerian government and its machinery of carrying out governmental functions that act on behalf of the Nigerian state. Malemi (2012) defines the Nigerian state as different ethnic groups politically organized as a sovereign independent country. The economic system that the Nigerian state is operating could be considered a mixed economy. It is not a purely capitalist state. There are companies and corporations owned by the state responsible for the production of goods and services and there are many private companies and businesses also producing goods and services.

Environmental Situation of the Nigerian State

The Nigerian state and by extension, the society are not exempted from environmental problems. It should be asked what is the cause of the environmental problems in the Nigerian state? The intention here is not to give a detailed view of every environmental problem in Nigeria, but just to highlight a few ones. It could be argued that many of the environmental problems are caused by the forces of capitalism and globalization. Think of much of the oil pollution and flaring of gasses in the Niger Delta. The oil multinational companies are owned by private international companies such as Shell, Agip, Elf, Texaco, etc. What is of utmost interest to these oil multinational companies is the profits that they will make for their shareholders, not even their corporate social responsibility. Related to this issue of capitalism and globalization is the issue of the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution has come with its attendant effects (Akporthonor, 2014). Industrialization has brought so much good to human society such as

scientific and medical inventions, technological advances in information technology, etc. Akporthonor (2014) writes that: “The current environmental problems have been created by the development of industrial society since the industrial revolution have since increased man’s capacity to transform nature” (p.5).

It should be noted here that the actions and inactions of individuals and groups not just corporations have also caused environmental problems. Nigerian streets are inundated with waste thrown into the streets by individuals. Marketplaces also are filled with garbage dumped indiscriminately. There are Nigerians who fail to take care of their cars and fill the air with carbon monoxide. You are not to blame capitalism and globalization for these. There is rampant bush burning.

Apart from oil pollution and gas flaring, there are many other environmental problems in Nigeria. There are many mining and extractive industries in Nigeria. Some of these are poorly regulated. Recently there was an explosion in the city of Ibadan that is attributed to the activities of foreign miners who store explosives at home. The explosion killed persons, led to the destruction of properties and equally polluted the land and air. Okedare (2024) states that: “A deadly blast that rocked the Nigerian city of Ibadan overnight was caused by explosives stored by illegal miners, the Oyo state governor has said. Two people were killed and 77 others injured in the explosion that has affected seven suburbs of Nigeria's third most-populous city” (par 1). This is just one instance among many. Illegal miners and mining are rampant in Nigeria. Nextier (2023) states that illegal mining has fuelled insecurity, caused economic losses, and precipitated environmental decline in places like the gold-rich state of Zamfara, Plateau State, Niger State. Katsina State, etc; and one of the fundamental problems is the poor regulatory framework. Many corrupt government officers care little or nothing for human welfare or the environment. All that matters to them is their self-enrichment. There have also been

explosions arising from gas stores and centers located in residential places. Gas stores and centers in residential places are a menace but often government officials play deaf ears to them. It is when there is an explosion and people are killed that the government seems to be aware gas shops are a serious human and environmental danger.

Another serious environmental problem in Nigeria is deforestation. Independent Project Monitoring Company Limited (2023) states that: “Deforestation is a grave environmental challenge in Nigeria, driven primarily by urban expansion, agriculture, and illegal logging. The clearing of forests for these purposes disrupts ecosystems, accelerates soil erosion, and reduces biodiversity. The loss of forests also contributes to climate change as trees play a vital role in absorbing carbon dioxide.” The experience of this present author is that when you drive through many rural areas in Nigeria, the roadsides are taken over by numerous bunches of firewood that the locals have harvested from the forest. There seems to be no control over the quantity of wood that people can harvest.

There are many environmental regulatory laws and frameworks in Nigeria but there is a lack of effective and proper implementation. Many companies and businesses break environmental laws and go free. For many decades now Nigerian government has made many deadlines for gas flaring to stop but they have all come and gone and nothing has been done. Multinational oil companies prefer to pay fines to keep flaring gas. The environmental cost of gas flaring is enormous. Multinational oil companies are motivated more by their profit for shareholders than by environmental health and good. Capitalism does not prioritize the good of the environment, and not even of human lives. Alimi and Gibson (2022) write that one of the countries that flare gas most is Nigeria and this gas flaring releases poisonous chemicals into the air such as carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, etc which cause significant environmental damage, negatively impact human health especially those of children.

The fact that the government has failed to stop gas flaring despite its many negative effects shows that the government is paying lip service to the issue and is more in tune with capitalist profits whose benefits often don't get to the people. American Association for the Advancement of Science (2011) rightly states that economic reasons are why the oil companies continue to flare gas as it is cheaper for other methods of disposing of them are more expensive.

On the poor regulatory framework in Nigeria, Oyeboode (2018) writes that environmental degradation cause untold economic development and health challenges; and equally lead to pollution, global warming, and deforestation. It is poor implementation of environmental laws that lead to the above. The fact that environmental laws are rarely and poorly implemented in Nigeria is corroborated by many authors such as Edo (2012), Oruonye and Ahmed (2020), and Oyeboode (2018). If environmental laws and regulations can be effectively monitored and implemented in Nigeria, it will help a great deal in curbing environmental problems. Could socialist values be more helpful in environmental protection in Nigeria?

Ecosocialism and Environmental Situation of the Nigerian State

One wonders if capitalism can help resolve the environmental crisis in its present state. Capitalism needs total reformation and transformation if it is to help radically resolve the environmental crisis. There is nothing wrong with the profit motive in capitalism in itself. It is the desire for excessive and exorbitant profits at the expense of the poor and the environment that is a problem. Ikeke (2013) cites Berry stating: “Here it is worth recalling insights from another important work of Berry’s, *The Great Work* ... in which he argues that corporations have ambivalent commitments and have devastated the planet because of their dominant profit motive, which needs “to be replaced with dominant concern for the integral life community” (p. 150).

Both national and international corporations should be sincere in their corporate social and environmental responsibility. They must move beyond engaging in piecemeal social projects to placate the people to real projects that help to protect the environment and the wellbeing of the people. Corporations ought to realize that when the environment is destroyed they too are affected and their businesses are damaged. It is in their enlightened self-interests that the environment is protected. They should foster authentic sustainable development. Human beings depend on nature and there must be a place to develop. But their development should be rooted in ecocentrism ethics, and not simply anthropocentric. Moderate and prudent use of nature is acceptable.

There are valuable ideas from ecosocialism, but they should not be implemented in Nigeria hook, link, and sinker. It should be critically appreciated and evaluated. The historic failures of socialism are there for everyone to see. Socialism in itself like many other ideologies is pure and idealistic, but when it comes to the implementation there are people. It is human beings who implement social ideologies and political systems. They cannot operate themselves. Many human beings are prone to selfish inclinations and other evils. As the philosophers have said, absolute power corrupts absolutely. Edwards (2019) writes that in places where socialism has been operated such as China, and other Eastern European countries in the past it is repressive and has failed. This does not mean there are no single benefits to it. In the history of Nigeria, there have been serious problems with corporations and industries owned by the government. Public corporations like NEPA, Water Boards, Nigerian Postal Service, etc are cases in point. Though the Nigerian Postal Service still exists it is a shadow of itself (Yaba et al, 2021). They are deeply bureaucratic and inundated with corruption, especially embezzlement of public funds. There is no guarantee that if Nigeria or any other African state were to turn socialist or

ecosocialist the state would protect the environment.

No matter the system that the people agree to operate what is needed above all is personal and public ethical reformation and re-armament, in which people are altruistic and work for the common good and the environmental good. Those who control the so-called socialist state tend to give no room to dissent, pluralism, and divergent viewpoints. Ecosocialism in its totality cannot be a panacea to the Nigerian environmental problems. It should be interrogated with other systems. The dream of common ownership is idealistic and utopian. Even in common ownership, there are people put in charge of managing the common resources. The problem is that they can be corrupt also.

There is certainly a valid point in the idea that consumerism should be curbed. There is too much consumption of resources in the world. Consumption of more resources does not necessarily make people happier. Capitalism as a system needs to be frontally critiqued. Eckersley (1992) writes that capitalist expansionist dynamics lead to widespread environmental degradation, and social disharmony as there is the drive for continuous economic growth without any restraint, not caring for the carrying capacity of the earth. In capitalism, there is a drive for the exploitation of more resources. The admonition of Hardin (1968) on the “tragedy of the common” is not taken into consideration by capitalists. The Nigerian state should not keep carrying on as if there are no ethical limits to growth. One phenomenon that is so common in Nigeria today is that almost everywhere you go there is excavation and drilling for sands by many streams. There is hardly anybody in government thinking of the environmental impact. There are many ministries of environment in Nigeria and Nigerian states. At times you wonder about their effectiveness in promoting environmental protection. Many roads in southern Nigeria are filled with trucks carrying timbers and

logs of wood. Some of these have been harvested illegally. Corrupt government officers fail to implement environmental laws and regulations. Powerful corporations and interests have silenced regulators. Nigerian forests are being harvested daily and exported to foreign countries driven by global capitalist interests. Even in a country like China that presents itself as a communist state (a higher form of socialism) there is a continuous drive to import resources from poorer nations depleting their natural resources and polluting their environment.

Brownhill and Turner (2019) have shown that in the past, Nigerian women in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s have protested against the capitalist activities of oil multinational forces. They note that in 2002, women occupied the Chevron Escravos Oil terminal. These protests are against global capitalist exploitation of the environment and unimaginable suffering upon the people. Writing further Brownhill and Turner (2019) state that: "...social movements seek to actively replace capitalism with an alternative political economy. This alternative, being creatively pursued by alliances among the exploited (with women at the fore), can be characterized as a global, horizontal, subsistence-oriented, decolonized commoning political economy, or what we call "ecofeminist ecosocialism" (p.5).

The idea of equal welfare is certainly commendable for each human being is valuable and has human dignity. Equal welfare should not mean the needs of all are the same but society should be created in such a way that all can genuinely meet their needs. All have access to the basic amenities of life. In a society in which all can access the basic amenities of life, struggle over resources is minimized. The human rights and democratic records of socialism have been very awful. African countries in the past that tended to practice African socialism such as Ghana, Libya, Guinea, Senegal, Tanzania, etc left much to be desired. Under the dispensation of African leaders who claimed to be socialists such as

Nyerere, and Nkrumah there were human rights violations and imprisonment of political opponents. Eckersley (1992) writes that "the challenge facing ecosocialists...is how to give expression to ecosocialist values such as self-management, producer democracy, and the protection of civil and political liberties" (p. 122)

The point to be said is that capitalism should not be left in its present form to operate in Nigeria causing environmental degradation and devastation of the lives of the people. This is where the ecosocialist critique comes in. However, accepting some of the criticism of ecosocialism is not an endorsement of ecosocialism in totality. It should be stated that the Nigerian State (2011) in its constitution has committed itself to "protect and improve the environment and safeguard the water, air and land, forest and wildlife of Nigeria" (p.30). Malemi (2012) states that this implies that the Nigerian state will seek proper use, exploitation management, and protection of natural resources; create a healthy and serene environment, and promote the well-being of the people. This being the case Nigeria cannot but be responsive to any ecological or environmental challenges posed to it. The ecosocialist challenge is not out of place. There are aspects of socialism that are compatible with ecology. Mellor (2006) writes that: "Far from being a challenge, ecology greatly enhances the case for a redefined and refocused socialism" (p.35). Even if it is not called a challenge, the call by Mellor for redefining and refocusing means that socialism has not fully succeeded the way it ought to be.

Just as there is a tendency in capitalism for capitalists to become greedy, avaricious, and profit excessively at the expense of others, so also there is a tendency in socialism for those managing the common properties of the society to become greedy, selfish corrupt, and authoritarian. The problem is not in the systems themselves but with the people operating the systems. Ikeke (2020) writes that no system is perfect not capitalism now any other. Socialism certainly has value. Mellor (2006) writes

that: “Socialism is about analysing the sources of inequality and ecological destruction humanity faces and looking for new ways of living that would enable people to control democratically their means of sustenance in a way that minimises human impact on the natural world and enables each individual to express their own creativity in peace” (p. 49). This humanistic ideal of socialism should be adopted while the tendency to totalitarianism and abolishment of the right to private property should be shunned. There is nothing wrong if people democratically adopt the full tenets of socialism, but it should never be imposed upon any group of people. In light of this, in a state like Nigeria, the Nigerian people should be allowed to adopt any system that appeals to them. No system should be imposed on them. But whatever system is adopted it should have a humanistic, egalitarian, and ecologically sensitive disposition.

Conclusion

The paper concerned itself with the ecological challenge in Nigeria in the light of socialist tenets. The paper discussed various environmental problems in Nigeria. The problems discussed include oil pollution, gas flaring, deforestation, illegal mining, lack of effective enforcement of environmental laws, etc. These problems are essentially anthropocentric. Capitalism with its attendant globalization was seen as a culprit responsible for many of the environmental problems. In light of today's environmental challenges, socialism has been proposed and revived by some as a panacea to the environmental crisis. Common ownership of the means of production, the emphasis on equal welfare for all, and humanistic egalitarian ideals are at the heart of socialism. It is believed by those who propose socialism that the capitalist state should be abolished. The paper argued that while it is true that there are evils associated with capitalism and it has precipitated environmental problems, socialism arising from its historic failures and the tendency to totalitarianism should not be adopted in toto. But its

values of egalitarian humanism and welfarist ideals should be accepted and critically adopted. Common ownership of the means of production should never be imposed upon a people unless the people democratically adopt it. By and large, the ecosocialist challenge should propel Nigerian society to be more responsive and attentive to curbing environmental problems,

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