

SELF-RELIANT COMMUNITARIANISM: THE DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY OF MUKORO MOWOE OF THE URHOB0 PEOPLE OF NIGERIA (1890-1948)

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Abstract

British imperial activities in the Bights of Biafra in what is at present the southern parts of Nigeria assumed fresh momentum following the 1884/85 Conference in Berlin, Germany. Urhobo country, a territory of about 5000 square kilometres, occupies the mainland of the western Niger Delta, in the south of Nigeria. Urhobo people came in direct contact with the British imperialists in the 1890s, despite having been in trade relations with them for four centuries, through intermediaries. This imperial contact, which was followed closely by colonialism and an amalgamation that created Nigeria in 1914, gave rise to new social realities that discomfited the locals, and which required visionary leadership to comprehend. Just as significant were British colonial policies, which were, in the main, disadvantageous to certain peoples in the new structural system they had established. Tensions arising from competition among ethnic groups in the congested space of limited opportunities added to the necessity for visionary leadership. Mukoro Mowoe (1890-1948) provided that leadership for the Urhobo people. Though he wrote nothing, the consistency in his actions and decisions suggests underlying policy paths bothering on ideological convictions. I describe this ideology as self-reliant communitarianism. In this paper, I elaborate on this ideological construct, explaining how it expressed Mowoe's convictions and development philosophy. I conclude by highlighting the relevance of this ideology in tackling contemporary challenges of governance and advancement for the Urhobo and African peoples in contemporary times.

Keywords: Colonialism, imperialism, Mukoro Mowoe, Niger Delta, Urhobo

Introduction

Mukoro Mowoe is the most influential personality in the emergence of post-colonial Urhobo nation, an era that begins in 1960 with Nigeria's

independence from foreign rule. He lived at a critical moment of Urhobo history, the period of first British contact with the natives and subsequent amalgamation of northern and southern Nigeria. These quick events precipitated, at the time, challenges of diverse forms for the Urhobo people, (just as much as for other peoples of the African continent), which required coherent, systematic and strategic thinking to confront. In that critical moment in history, he stood up to the requirement of the time. The goals he pursued, his preferences and choices and the strategies he adopted in realising them suggest a basis in deep philosophic thought.

Mukoro Mowoe was born in 1890, five years after the Berlin Conference in Germany, which provided "justification" for appropriating the peoples and territories of the African continent by Europeans. Several militant resistances were put up by the African peoples to challenge the onslaught that followed, but they were overcome because of the superior weapons and strategies of the European colonisers. In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the defeat of Nana Olomu in 1894 was followed by those of Jaja of Opobo, Oba Nogbaisi Ovoramwen of Benin and Ovie of Agbarha, who were all sacked and deposed. By 1900, three British Protectorates had been created, namely, Lagos, Southern Nigeria and Northern Nigeria. Half a decade later in 1906, the Lagos and Southern Protectorates were merged, with encouraging economic results. This inspired the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates of 1914 that created Nigeria.

The British administrative experiment of amalgamating what has been described as "incompatible social groups" (Ogundowole, 2004, p.149); (Osoba, 2006, p. 105); (Okoro, 2006, p. 122); (Hatch, 1970, p. 9)) created a new problem for the various ethnic groups which had been accustomed to independent existence. One of such problems was the struggle for relevance and meaningful existence in the congested artificially-created colonial space. Granted that new political and economic opportunities had opened up with the new colonial set-up, yet, these opportunities were limited and required new skills and education to fill. A second problem was the burden of directing the peoples away from their age-long accustomed ways of life, culture, language, religion, knowledge systems, occupation, etc., which had served them so well, at least by their own standards of evaluation, to the new white man's ways and values. These challenges naturally generated the imperative need for courageous and patriotic leaders who could inspire their peoples in the direction of the new social reality. Thankfully, all across Africa, such leaders sprang up. The list is rich and intimidating: Kwame Nkrumah

of Ghana (1909-1972), Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria (1904-1996), Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria (1909-1987), Julius Nyerere of Tanzania (1922-1999), Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia (1924-2021), Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal (1906-2001), Mukoro Mowoe of Nigeria (1890-1948), Thompson Adogbeji Salubi of Nigeria (1906-1982) etc.

Two features characterise the lives of these first generation leaders in Africa. First is that their defence and resistances were steeped in deep ideological foundations. They were highly intelligent men who utilised their knowledge in the service of their immediate nations and the African continent at large. Crucially, while most of their ideas have been well documented and studied, very little have been done about Mukoro Mowoe's. Second, they all rose to positions of political leadership in their respective domains in the post-colonial era in Africa. With independence attained, many of them contested and won presidential elections in their countries. Others contested parliamentary positions and represented their people in that context. Mukoro Mowoe represented the people of Warri Province in Parliament at the Western Regional House of Assembly in Nigeria from 1946 till his sudden death in 1948.

An Analysis of Self-Reliant Communitarianism

Self-reliant communitarianism is a philosophy of development and societal organisation that aptly describes Mukoro Mowoe's leadership style. As a philosophy, it has applications in politics, economics, ethics, and social organisation. To begin, communitarianism is a derivative from the term "community". It is an ideology that sees the 'speech' community as the most important element in both individual and collective aspirations and fulfillment. (Taylor, 1995, p.181) The American philosopher John Dewey has a helpful interpretation for the term. He explains that the term community implicates two others - "common" and "communication":

Men live in a community by virtue of the things which they have in common, what they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge - a common understanding - like-mindedness. (Dewey, 2011, p. 3)

From this perspective, a community describes a people who share several attributes in common, including, especially, a medium of communication. (Ibid). Following this feature, a community also shares common psychological trait, physiognomy, culture, history and

territorial space. The thinking behind communitarianism as a philosophy of societal management is that development is best realised when it has its context and anchor in the community. (Wiredu, 2004, p. 16).

Communitarianism has its roots in African world view and philosophy. According to Wiredu:

A person is perceived as definable only in terms of membership in a society. This is a consequence of the communalistic character of African society. Right from the beginning of socialisation one is brought up to develop such strong bonds with large kinship units that one comes to see oneself as necessarily bound up with a community. (Ibid)

He writes further:

A person is not just a certain biological entity with a certain psycho-physical endowment, but rather, a being of this kind who has shown a basic willingness and ability to fulfil his or her obligations in the community. Personhood, on this showing, is something of an achievement. (Ibid, p. 17)

Communitarianism has gained prominence as an ideology for organizing societies since the second half of the 20th century. This popularity benefited, if indirectly, from the writings of Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997), Charles Taylor (b.1931), and Richard Rorty (1931-2007), whose postmodernist and pragmatist perspectives of philosophy benefited multiculturalism and pluralism. In its political and economic manifestation, communitarianism is considered a successor ideology to both capitalism and socialism which were the known ideologies for organising societies in Europe from the 18th up to the 20th centuries (Ogundowole, 2011, p.75). However, communitarianism predated both ideologies; it reaches back in history to remote antiquity, perhaps to the origin of human society in the age of gathering and hunting.

Aristotle was communitarian in his political thoughts. According to him: "He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god" (Aristotle, *Politics* bk. 1, 1253a 27). Ancient Greek democracy was based on the "polis" (community), as distinct from the "cosmopolis" of the later Romans (a larger uncharacterised group). The Graeco-Roman civilization (referred to as the hellenistic era) operated a republican-communitarian system, until Julius Caesar's expansionist ambitions turned the Roman republic into an empire, a cosmopolis. To accommodate the new reality,

the Romans made a provision in their legal systems for *jus civile* (laws that applied to a specific people e.g the Romans), and *jus gentium* (laws that applied to all men, in the cosmopolitan context). In this way, the Roman era operated both communitarian and cosmopolitan features.

The Modern Era (or Enlightenment) which dates back to between (1500-1900) in the history of European science and philosophy encouraged a complete turn from communitarian ideals to cosmopolitan ones. It was an age that deified reason, rather than culture, community and history. And since reason was believed to be a possession of all men, it was accepted that humans were the same everywhere, and identical in all respects irrespective of geography, race or social status. Identity markers such as language, culture, and community ties were then dismissed as unnecessary or secondary. Modern democracy, liberalism and globalism all have their ideological anchor in this temperament of the enlightenment. (Fukuyama, 2022, p. 14)

The European of the Enlightenment was a cosmopolitan who resented any trace to specific linguistic group, culture and 'polis'. He prided himself as a "citizen of the world". He rejected paternalism of any sort. Liberalism was his operative mantra. No one was answerable to the other; neither the Pope nor monarch could tell one how to lead one's life; the authority of the monarch was questioned; indeed, he was found not to have any 'divine right' after all. The King of France (Louis XVI) and his Queen (Antoinette) were beheaded (in 1789) as a consequence of this new awareness. All over Europe, there was a paradigm shift that questioned old conservative ways for the new liberal variant.

The German Philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) aptly described the Enlightenment as "mankind's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity, an immaturity manifested in depending on someone else's guidance rather than on one's own". (Kant, 1784). Thankfully, this new wave of freedom benefited the advancement of the arts and sciences. Nicolaus Copernicus found the freedom to advance the heliocentric theory (the sun being at the centre of the universe) without the fear of inquisition by the religious authorities; philosophers probed into questions relating to God's existence without the fear of accusation of heresy; uncensored scientific researches were embarked on leading to amazing discoveries. Furthermore, explorations were freely undertaken without border restrictions; Christopher Columbus for example, benefited from a generous grant to explore the Americas for discovery of new territories and peoples. For the new breed of European industrialists, the new freedom opened up vast territories for

sourcing raw materials (including slaves and colonies) in Africa to service new industrial machines and plantations; new markets also opened up for made-in-Europe products.

However, this new consciousness threw up its own challenges. In the first place, while a section of the world was prospering from this newly-attained consciousness of freedom, another section - the Africans and native Americans were groaning under the burden of the callous plunder of their resources, and inhumane treatment of their peoples. They were bearing the burden of European economic and infrastructural advancement. A second problem was that even among the Europeans themselves, only an infinitesimally few individuals, the bourgeois class, owning the means of production, enjoyed the largesse accruing from the enlightenment beliefs. The mass of the people, who ironically, produced the wealth, lived in abject poverty, and were left stranded, exploited and alienated. Hegel described the situation best:

When bourgeois society is in a state of 'unimpeded activity', 'the amassing of wealth is intensified on the one hand, while the subdivision and restriction of particular jobs, and thus the dependence and distress of the class tied to work of that sort, increases on the other hand'.... 'Despite all the excess of wealth', civil society is not rich enough to 'check excessive poverty and the creation of a penurious rubble'. (Marcuse, 1973, p. 97)

There was also the racist question raised by certain eccentric European thinkers such as Johann Herder, who challenged the justice of colonialism and imperialism which the Europeans were carrying out against other races of the world with unimaginable cruelty against the locals. Herder expressed his stricture against colonialism in this way:

Have you done no injustice to foreign nations? A poor unfortunate comes to the gallows because in deepest desperation he robbed a few talers on the highway; and a conqueror, that is, a man who unjustly takes away lands from his neighbour, gets praised as a hero... To usurp cities and provinces is assessed as nothing. To take a field away from an individual neighbor is a crime; to take a land away from a nation is an innocent, glory-yielding deed. Where is justice here? Millions of human beings who constitute a nation - are they less our brothers than a single human being? (Forster, 2002, p. 388)

These problems called up a new set of conservative thinkers who reasoned that the benefits of the Enlightenment have been somewhat exaggerated. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Edmund Burke (1729-1797), Johann Gottlieb Herder (1744-1803), George Hegel (1770-1831) and Karl Marx (1818-1883) led this revolutionary censorship of the Enlightenment. It was believed that the basic presuppositions behind cosmopolitanism were seriously faulty. J.G. Herder thought, specifically, that every human had to be traced to a specific context, in form of a culture and identity; and peoples within cultural boundaries had to be allowed to organise themselves without interference from superior cultural groups, who would naturally nurture imperial tendencies against the weaker. In Herder's very important remark:

Nature has divided peoples through language, ethics, customs, often through mountains, seas, rivers, and deserts; it, so to speak, did everything in order that they should for a long time remain separated from each other and become rooted in themselves, precisely contrary to the world unifying plan of that Nimrod, the languages got confused (as the old legend says); the peoples divided from each other. The diversity of languages, ethics, inclinations, and ways of life was destined to become a bar against the presumptuous lining together of the peoples, a dam against foreign inundations - for the steward of the world was concerned that for the security of the whole, each people and race preserved its impress, its character; peoples should live beside each other, not mixed up with and on top of each other oppressing each other. (Herder, 2002, p. 385)

In essence, there was a new emphasis for more respect to national groupings. Charles Taylor explains it in this way:

There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's life. But this notion gives a new importance of being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for me... Just like the individuals, a Volk should be true to itself, that is, to its own culture. Germans shouldn't try to be derivative and (inevitably) second-rate French men. The Slavic peoples have to find their own path. And European colonialism ought to be rolled back to give the peoples of what we now

call the third world their chance to be themselves unimpeded. (Taylor, 1995, p. 229)

It was thought that a world of sophisticated science and amazing technological products managed by a species of men lacking respect for culture, morality and communitarian consciousness could set the world on fire in a matter of minutes! A civilisation which has left behind its cultural ethos and morality would be one in a hurry to self-destruct. The First and Second World Wars proved this point. The Cold War, had it turned 'hot' at any point, could have easily ended the world.

Communitarianism therefore is the new thought system that attempts to redefine man as a product of a culture, a community and a linguistic group. Mukoro Mowoe understood man in this way, just as much as Aristotle did. In his communitarian thought, he noted thus:

My belief is that every being born into the world has a duty to perform to his people: either to the village he belongs or to the town or country as a whole... Frankly speaking, any one of you who should fail to play his or her part on the upliftment of our dear tribe, it were better that she or he had not been born. (Ikime, 2015, p. 90)

Mowoe's conception of man was that of a being inseparable from his linguistic identity. He believed, like Aristotle, that a man who lived independently of his community concerns, even if he rated himself successful as a cosmopolitan, has in essence existed as a mistake of history!

Self-reliancism

Besides communitarianism, the other aspect of the Mukoro Mowoe ideology is self-reliancism. Self-reliancism derives from the term "self-reliance". To be self-reliant is to depend on one's self in meeting one's needs and solving one's problems. But this concept of the self as used in self-reliancism is not individualistic; rather it connects to the social and linguistic group to which the individual belong and with whom he shares historical and cultural commonalities. (Ogundowole, 2004, p.90)

This point appears to mirror Mukoro Mowoe's thought aptly. He reasoned that development was about people. No sustainable development was worth the name if it left behind or kept at bay, the people it claimed to be developing. A self-reliancist development therefore is inclusive, mass-driven, and grass-root based. Kwame

Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere and Walter Rodney et al. also thought of development in this self-reliant perspective. For Nkrumah, any development which is not self-reliant was fundamentally Neo-colonialist, and it underdeveloped, rather than develop the local society. He reasoned that when foreign capitals are, uncritically injected into local economies to galvanize production, they exploit rather than advance the local peoples. In his words:

The result of Neo-colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world. Investment under Neo-colonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world. The struggle against Neo-colonialism is not aimed at excluding the capital of the developed world from operating in the less developed countries. It is aimed at preventing the financial powers of the developed countries being used in such a way as to impoverish the less developed. (Nkrumah, 1965, p. ix)

Nkrumah's concerns has been confirmed with the experience all over Africa since the 1980s. The IMF-induced Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the 1980s in Nigeria represents the damage foreign loans can do to a local economy and people. Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) are not always the first options for a self-reliant economy. Such investments more often, only create wealth for foreigners while the locals are reduced to stranded onlookers. A public private partnership economic model would be the most appropriate economic system for a self-reliant society, wherein the state and private individuals (sourced essentially from the communities) enter into "production relations", in which the local communities themselves have reasonable stakes.

The philosophy of self-reliance had its most popular application in Julius Kambarage Nyerere's Tanganyika, (presently Tanzania). *Ujamaa* was Nyerere's choice concept for his self-reliant project. It means "African family hood". It was a product of the mixture of Mao-inspired socialism, European ideas of development and modernisation and African values of community (Innocent & Ron, 2020, p. 20). Nyerere developed from these principles a self-reliant ideology which emphasized local production and self-reliance (*Kujitegemea*). For Nyerere, decolonisation went beyond flag independence and replacement of Europeans by African rulers; it meant, more importantly, economic self-determination in which the locals worked in unison in production sites jointly owned and managed by themselves. Nyerere's

most significant application of *Ujaama* was his villagization system (*Vijijini*) in which development took a bottom-up trajectory, with concentration on the rural population in villages. For him, development cannot be imposed; it must involve the people themselves, whose effort must bring it about. (Ogundowole, 2004, p. 93).

In Rodney's view, development is a many sided process:

At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Economic development is at the level of the society and is said to take place, as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment. This capacity is dependent on: the extent to which they understand the laws of nature (science); the extent to which they put that understanding into practice by devising tools (technology); and on the manner in which work is organised. (Rodney, 1972, p. 2)

Ogundowole has further popularized the self-reliancist ideology in recent times. Self-reliancism, in Ogundowole's view is a national resolve and determination by a people to organise their activities into definite sets of preferences and priorities that place on them the responsibility of meeting their own needs through maximum use of the available human and natural resources in their possession. (Ogundowole, 2004, p. 92; 2011, p. 73;). It is the purposive choice to direct a people's political, economic, educational, social and cultural goals and practices along lines that guarantee sustainable development for the people (Ibid). In practical terms, it means a people providing their own needs.

From Ogundowole's perspective, a society which rely on imports to feed her citizens is not self-reliant; a society which relies on an imported culture is not self-reliant; a society whose policies of operation are imported is not self-reliant. A society which depends on others for the satisfaction of her needs is only registering negative development, and would be experiencing what he describes as regress rather than progress. (Ibid, p. 123). Indigenous production of the daily needs of a people is central to self-reliancism.

The foregoing analysis shows that a major aspect of self-reliancism is the manner in which capital is realised for production activities. Self-reliancism prefers "efforts at domestic capital formation" in setting up production activities. (Ibid, p. 124).

In its social and cultural manifestation, a self-reliant society prioritises the protection and preservation of its cultural heritage. This also extends to the protection of her territories against ambitious neighbours. Acculturating young members of the society to ensure continuity of the race is a central core of the mission of a self-reliant society.

Mukoro Mowoe, whose adopted self-reliant ideology of development is the focus of this paper manifested these principles expressly in his choices and preferences as leader of the Urhobo people. His vision was always to build a nation whose members would be adequately equipped to provide their own needs and manage their own affairs without having to depend on others. To build capacity, he approved the education of two Urhobo sons, selected on merit, for scholarship overseas, to return thereafter to head a proposed college which was still, at the time, under construction.

In setting up the College, he neither applied for loans from foreign partners nor from wealthy friends in the then popular political party in Nigeria, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). He saw through those supposed "charities", conditions in the long run that often undermined the interest of the collective. Instead, he reached out to citizens of the nation, spoke convincingly about the justice and significance of the cause, and through willing donations, the college became a reality.

The Urhobo college has since its inception, produced highly accomplished professionals and technocrats. His steadfastness and commitment to the recovery of contested Urhobo territories, his vision to redraw maps that were drawn to balkanize and shortchange Urhobo, and his unwavering insistence not to give in to the will of the foreigners to corrupt the spelling of the Urhobo name reveal Mukoro Mowoe's profound application of the philosophy of self-reliance.

Basic Tenets of Self-Reliant Communitarianism:

The above discourse was tangentially on the characteristics of a self-reliant communitarian theory of development. In this section, these characteristics are highlighted and expatiated on, including specific actions or statements of Mowoe that instantiate them.

Political Unification

Underpinning a self-reliant communitarian ideology is a nationalist spirit defined by an unwavering commitment to the welfare and advancement of one's linguistic group over and above individual

concerns. Mowoe's approach to development was driven by this spirit. A foremost step in this nationalist drive is the insistence that fractions of the group existing outside its political jurisdiction be brought within the group's sphere of influence. This has been demonstrated in the greatness experienced by Italy after its unification in 1861 through the efforts of King Victor Emmanuel II (1820-1878), Giuseppe Mazini (1805-72), Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-82) and Cavour (1810-61); and Germany after its unification in 1871 by Otto Von Bismarck (1815-1898). These events preceded robust accelerated development of these nations to European super powers at the time. In the same way, Mowoe was convinced that development was only possible when political unification of the people had been attained.

Unfortunately the lopsided administrative policies of the British in the Western Niger Delta area meant that this task was going to be cumbersome, given that several Urhobo communities had been unequally yoked together with neighbouring tribes under disadvantageous terms for the Urhobo people. (Lloyd, 2006, p. 482). This practice, dominant in Africa as a colonial strategy, appears a deliberate attempt to undermine future progressive goals for the peoples.

For instance, part of the British style of administration in the areas they conquered was to establish native courts which were charged with administrative functions as well as arbitration of justice. Native courts were established for Warri, the Benin River and Abraka-Okpara (in 1900), Sapele (1902), Ughelli and Ughievwen (1904). (Ikime, 2005, p. 62). The British made all the appointments to these courts. The point is that of the 17 members of the Abraka-Okpara native court, 6 were Itsekiri. In Sapele, 5 out of 11 were Itsekiri; in Agbarho, 3 out of 19! Why did the British choose to appoint non-Urhobos to courts in Urhobo land, when, in the Warri Court which had jurisdiction over such Urhobo areas as Effurun, Effurun-otor, Mogba, Asagba, Adeje, Aladja, and Agbassah, no Urhobo was appointed to the courts? Indeed, in the 1920s, the Urhobos began several protests for the removal of their neighbours from the native courts in their communities. What is more? In 1914, Lugard introduced higher courts of jurisdiction, Courts of Appeal, into Southern Nigeria, which were to sit over and above the native courts. The Warri Court of Appeal was one of those Lugard approved for establishment. Crucially, he appointed Dore Numa, a non-Urhobo its permanent president to add to his many other portfolios he already held through British appointments. This new office further elevated and strengthened Dore's influence in the Division that had the Urhobo as

its major population. (Ikime, 2006, p. 512). The population of Warri, according to a 1963 estimate was quoted as Urhobo 38%, Itsekiri 15%, and others 47% (Lloyd, 2004, p. 480).

Succour came in the way of the Urhobos after the various protests. In 1923, Sapele clan was removed from the Warri Native Appeal Court jurisdiction. Three years later in 1926, Agbon clan got out of the influence of the Warri Appeal Court, even though it got only transferred to the then newly-established Kwale Native Court of Appeal. (Ikime, *Ibid*). These were the prevailing unhealthy situations in the context of which Mukoro Mowoe came to prominence in the 1930s.

Mukoro Mowoe's priority was for a restructuring of the exiting status-quo. As Ikime expressed it, "the guiding principle was that people of the same ethnic group were to be placed within the same unit of native administrations" (*Ibid*, p. 67). With such continued pressure, a first concession was won. The "Warri Division" was changed to "Jekri-Sobo Division" (Itsekiri-Urhobo Division) in 1932. The name inclusion was significant because it showed the stake of each of the linguistic groups in the Division. Still questing for restructuring of the polity to reflect cultural and linguistic homogeneity, the Mowoe-inspired leadership got the British to grant a western Urhobo native administration with headquarters at Orerokpe in April 1938, and the Eastern Urhobo Native Administration with headquarters in Ughelli in 1949. (Ikime, *Ibid*).

Territorial Protection Against Aggressors:

Collective advancement efforts, in line with the self-reliant communitarian ideology are undermined when aggressors and usurpers chance on opportunities to annex territories, or cut out chunks of a people's possessions through unsubstantiated claims of ownership. Mukoro Mowoe's self-reliant philosophy therefore, was premised, understandably, on the sacredness of the territorial integrity of the race and the imperative need to guard and protect it for the present generation and for posterity. Given the premise of the precarious social and political situation engendered by British unjust administrative policies that preceded Mowoe's rise to influence in Urhobo country, and buoyed by his self-reliant approach to development, it became natural that among his priorities would be a judicial process that should put to rest, the lingering doubts of the ownership of the territories belonging to the Urhobo people. He thought that without this attainment, development efforts would be undermined, even frustrated. His reasoning was that there could be no self-reliance without unification, and no unification when the territorial boundaries of the

linguistic group were still matters of continuous legal debates and indeterminacy. The flash points in this legal land tussle were the Warri Township, Sapele Township and Oghara. In the case with Sapele and Warri, historical and linguistic evidence showed clearly that Sapele belonged to the Okpe people of Urhobo, just as much as Warri Township was Agbarha-Urhobo territories. But given British lopsided policies of administration, Chief Dore, from the neighbouring Itsekiri, as foremost Political Agent to the British, had a column for his signature reserved in all the documents of lease of lands to the British, which read *“acting for and on behalf of the chiefs and people of Sapele”* in the case with Sapele; and *“for and on behalf of the chiefs and people of Warri”* in the case with Warri. (Ikime, Ibid, p. 91)

For the value of his signature, a percentage of the value of the annual lease was paid to him (Dore). Years later, Chief Dore exploited this window to lay claims to the territories. To press for the claims, he argued that he signed the territories on behalf of the Olu, (King of Itsekiri, as he then was, though at the time, there was none), who, in his argument, had over-lordship rights over the implicated territories! (Lloyd, 2006, p. 490-491)

No self-reliancist ideology could ignore such a precarious situation. Mowoe thus saw it as a priority to put these legal matters to rest. A 1925 case over the ownership of Agbassah lands had dragged from the courts in Warri, to Lagos and then to the Metropolitan court in London; a case which the Itsekiri won for inability of the Agbassah people to articulate their claims copiously, although as Lloyd puts it, *“in view of the long interregnum, it was difficult for the Itsekiri to prove acts of sovereignty”*. (Lloyd, Ibid). Instructively, at the time, Urhobo had no leader of the calibre of Mukoro Mowoe, who could front their challenges. Smarting from their victory with Agbassah, the Itsekiri sought further to lay claims to Sapele territory. The basis for their claims in each case were the same - the appended signature of Chief Dore to the document of lease of land, and the percentage he had been allocated for that service. The difference at this time was that the Urhobo people, now had an ideologically informed leader in Mukoro Mowoe. He engaged the best lawyers who treated the facts with unusual care and professionalism. Expectedly, the Itsekiri lost the case easily! An appeal to the West African Court of Appeal was also ruled in favour of the Urhobo. Indeed, it was quite clear that the Okpe people had a good case backed with historical facts and documents. Yet, as Ikime puts it, *“good cases can be lost... It required leadership and*

organisation to win the case. Mowoe headed those who provided this leadership and organisation". (Ibid, p. 94). Ikime explains further:

The Sapele land case was handled differently by the Urhobo from the Agbassah land case. The former was fought at a time when the Urhobo had acquired not only greater consciousness as a people, but had an organisation that could translate that consciousness into action. (Ibid)

Purposive and Focused Education for Societal Development

From the perspective of a self-reliant communitarian ideology, development is purposive, selective and tailored to suit the needs of the society for which it is intended. This perspective means not simply embarking on projects or goals that appear gargantuan or alluring to the eyes, but those which address directly pressing needs of the society. Mukoro Mowoe's approach to development was founded on this principle. For instance, he urged that the educational curriculum and preference of disciplines be determined by the respective needs of the linguistic groups in the then Nigeria of his days. In his opinion, the Urhobo people, having developed impressive competence and skill in palm oil and rubber production, and coupled with the fact that their environment was well rivered, then emphasis in their education and curriculum ought to be in disciplines that professionalize in these areas, because the society already had a comparative advantage over others in these areas. In this way, the education received would not only be relevant to the immediate society in which the student lives and have his being, but there would be already waiting jobs to engage the graduates. Following the same logic, other parts of Nigeria, such as the western Yoruba areas, with a long history of cocoa production skills would also benefit from scholarships that promote professionalism in that area. Indeed, Mukoro Mowoe was advocating in the early days, a region-tailored development that would accord with the areas of strength and comparative advantage of the various units that made up the federation. Here is how Ikime, his biographer expressed it:

At the same December 1947 meeting of the House, Mowoe raised two other issues connected with education. He wished to know whether in awarding higher education scholarships, government took into consideration the prevailing educational pursuits of the different areas of the region and whether it was not wise policy for government to encourage youths from these areas to undertake studies connected with such occupations. The Secretary, Western

Provinces, answered that question to the effect that regional and area occupations in the award of scholarships were not taken into consideration in the award of scholarships; what mattered was the 'benefit likely to accrue to the country as a whole'. (Ibid, p. 113)

Localisation of Industries:

It is basic economic knowledge that sustainable development happens when industries are located in the environment in which the raw materials required for production are sourced. When this is the case, it saves cost of transportation of raw materials from source location to production sites, including attendant risks involved. But more importantly, it reduces the cost of production, create jobs for the local society and ensure massive development of the area. This is a core tenet of the self-reliant communitarian approach to development. In the age of Mukoro Mowoe, the western Niger Delta was an epicentre of palm oil production, so much so that the British named it the Oil Rivers Protectorate (there was no awareness of a future crude oil discovery at the time). (Siollun, 2021, p. 46). But the baffling point is that there was no standard oil mill that served the processing of the products. There were only individually owned rudimentary ones. Mowoe's argument was that there needed to be intervention by the government in establishing standard mills to meet the needs of the local society. This would guarantee speedy development of the region. As his biographer reported it:

During the meeting of the House in July 1947, Mowoe complained of the low grade of palm oil in the Province and urged government to establish an oil mill in the Province... At the December meeting of the House, Mowoe again raised the issue apparently because nothing appeared to have been done in the months since the July meeting. He was told that an oil mill was already under construction in the Eastern Province and that work in Warri Province Mill was expected to get underway in August 1948. (Ibid, p. 115)

Cooperative Businesses (The Public Private Partnership Model)

A hinge aspect of self-reliant communitarianism is the question regarding the ownership of businesses in its sphere of influence. Historically, ownership of businesses has oscillated between the individually-owned (capitalism) and the government owned (communism). The argument for capitalism is traced to the 18th century writings of Adam Smith and John Locke. The hallmark of this

temperament to business activities is three-dimensional. First, its being an exclusively individual affair without the interference of state; second, the pricing of goods and services being entirely dependent on the dynamics of market forces and the variability characterizing the demand and supply of goods and services; and third, its being driven and motivated by the crude motive of profit maximization. It is from these set of beliefs that the capitalist cliché that “government has no business in business” derived. Adam Smith argued that an economic system in which the government stayed away from business, and where individuals were allowed to ‘sort themselves’ in a keenly contested and precarious business atmosphere would ultimately result in the benefits of all since even the weak and beggarly who apparently would be out smarted and exploited in the process will ultimately find some jobs to do through the re-investment of the surplus in more business ventures which the bourgeoisie, in his quest for yet greater profits would be compelled to set up. The capitalist ideology was given further theoretical justification through its link to psychological egoism which held that the human is psychologically wired to act self-interestedly and therefore the appropriate economic ideology would be one which encourages this natural disposition for self-seeking.

The socialist/communist argument is in favour of government or public ownership of the factors of production. Its ideas had their best formulation in the writings of Karl Marx. Marx’s central discontent with capitalism derived from the failed hopes of Adam’s Smith’s theory which had promised the well-being of all. Indeed, the optimism held by the laissez-faire advocates of capitalism was shattered immediately following the Industrial Revolution of the period. The conditions of the working class deteriorated sharply just at the same time as the capitalists were amassing wealth of unbelievable proportions. The first theoretical attack was provided by the German philosopher Hegel (1770-1831). He referred to a society characterised by self-seeking autonomous individuals as ‘bourgeois’. His ideal political institution was the ‘state’ distinguished by the possession of a monarchic institution to regulate and check excesses.

Marx’s own solution was for government or public ownership of the means of production. This appeared also to have been inadequate. The Cold War era (1945-1989) which polarised the international system to two ideological camps and heightened tensions in a manner unprecedented in world history underscores the significance of the debate at the time. The collapse of the Soviet Union was interpreted as a

victory for capitalism, which the western world was eager to advance. But self-reliantist ideologues held a different opinion. They argued that the clash of capitalism and communism represented a dialectical encounter between the two opposing thought systems. The point then is that the two combatants had been consumed in the confrontation, and birthed a higher and superior one in self-reliantism. Self-reliantism does not confer ownership of businesses on either the private or public entities, but a combination of both. In a typical self-reliantist system therefore, both the public and private 'cooperate' to set up and run businesses, hence cooperatives.

In cooperative systems, individual entrepreneurs or body of entrepreneurs, along the same line of business, cooperate to establish businesses which the government partly funds in order to earn the right of part ownership. In this way, exploitation and alienation is minimized. This model has been popularized in the 21st century as the Public-Private Partnership system of business.

Mukoro Mowoe was self-reliantist in this very significant sense. Two instances suffice to make the case. As already highlighted, the major economic activity in Urhobo land of Mowoe's days was that of palm oil harvesting and rubber. He had already advocated, as seen from the previous point, for government intervention and support in the establishment of an oil mill. But the self-reliantist temperament in him also awakened concerns about the modalities around which the industries would be established and run. Mowoe's preferred choice was the public-private partnership model. To achieve this, he advocated, ahead of time, for the setting up of cooperatives for the palm oil producers. If this was done, they would then be foundation owners and share holders in the expected government funded-industry, in which the government would become a shareholder rather than sole owner. The advantages that this system of economic organisation avails is replete. It encourages commitment and efficiency, since the commoners have their interest factored into the overall success of the business. It also ensures shared responsibility, which promote discipline, and dedication to the success of the business. Ikime describes it thus:

Still on the palm produce industry, Mowoe at the same December meeting urged the setting up of 'cooperative group of palm producers' to ensure effective use of oil mills to be established in 'Warri Province'. (Ibid)

The second instance is Mowoe's strategy in setting up the Urhobo College, Effurun, one of the best schools in the Province at the time. The

self-reliant step to sort out brilliant and promising students for overseas training to head the school, three years before its opening, has already been mentioned. But what is even more significant in this regard is that Mowoe reached out to capable individuals, unions of Urhobo emigrants in cities in Nigeria, and to philanthropists at home to source the funding for the institution. His strategy was that with the base ownership of the institution already secured, whatever support funding the government would make to the institution in later years would then boost the infrastructural base of the institution for the foundational owners, even if the government demanded a part ownership by reason of her support. In this way, Mowoe demonstrated tact, wisdom and an ideological commitment to the self-reliant communitarian theory of development.

The Relevance of Self-Reliant Communitarianism to Contemporary Urhobo Society.

Ideologies, such as the one under consideration, play important roles in human societies. They are systems of ideas and ideals, which form the basis for economic, social and political action. They ground political behaviour, determine choices and define behavioral patterns for those who subscribe to them. Without ideologies, actions would lack systematicity, coordination and consistency. Ideologies develop usually out of deep intellectual convictions and persuasions. Terrence Ball has underscored the significance of ideologies to societies:

Ideologies perform four important functions for those who subscribe to them first, they help to explain political phenomena that would otherwise remain puzzling or mysterious. Second, they supply standards for evaluating political situations and developments. Third, ideologies provide their adherents with a means of orienting themselves in the complicated and changing political world. And fourth, ideologies provide a program of political action. It would be unlikely that reasonably intelligent citizens could make their way in the world without some sort of ideology to perform these four important - and possibly indispensable - functions. (Ball, 2016, p. 441)

Mowoe's development ideology is significant in the four important ways mentioned by Ball above. It is in this light that the relevance of Mowoe to Urhobo society in contemporary times is examined, on the basis of his defined ideology of development.

It is a fact that the Urhobo country of present 21st century is different from the one Mukoro Mowoe presided over in the 1930s and 1940s.

Challenges of new forms have emerged, just as much as new opportunities have also opened up. Some of these transformations include: the termination of foreign rule and independence in Nigeria; the discovery of crude oil and the vast pool of wealth it has generated, associated with the environmental hazards, pollution, crises, fuel fires, it has engendered; the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970; the incursion of the military into Nigerian politics; the ethnic hostilities in Warri; the creation of the Midwest, Bendel and Delta States; the Urhobo Progress Union since the 1950s; the change of title from Olu of Itsekiri to Olu of Warri; youth restiveness; the age of oil boom and gloom in Urhobo land; culture alienation and language extinction; cultism, bad governance, and corruption; etc. All these events and trends have happened in the post-Mowoe era.

Yet, if one is familiar with the directive principles of Mukoro Mowoe's actions, one could, on the basis of that understanding, be guided, correctly, on how he would have reacted to all such social problems. This is the significance of ideologies, as highlighted by Terrence Ball above. What is not in doubt is that Mowoe, or anyone who has imbibed his philosophy, would have managed the issues more systematically than they have generally been approached by the people of contemporary times. A grand opportunity is yet before the present generation; leaders of Mowoist temperaments and convictions are called upon, all over Africa, to courageously advance strategies to move their peoples out of the cycle of underdevelopment and oppression.

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