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Kenneth Buchizya Kaunda's contribution to the philosophy of African humanism (ubuntu) and pan-African theory

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Introduction

On 17 June 2021, former Zambian president and pan-Africanist Kenneth Kaunda died in Lusaka at the age of 97. He was born at Lubwa Mission in Chinsali, then part of Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia, on 28th April 1924. He together with his compatriots led a struggle against African colonisation, and later became Zambia's as its founding president from 1962 to 1991, 27 years. In Zambia he is remembered for advancing education, health, uniting over 73 tribes (using the "one Zambia one Nation" motto which he coined) and being a self-less people-centred leader. In Africa, he is remembered for supporting African liberation. He hosted several liberation movements when Zambia got independence. As a young professional he worked as a teacher at the Upper Primary School and Boarding Master at Lubwa and then Headmaster at Lubwa from 1943 to 1945 in the then Northern Rhodesia. He then worked as a teacher in Tanzania before trying work opportunities in Salisbury and Bindura Mine. In Tanzania he was influenced by the work President Mwalimu Julius Nyerere was spearheading, particularly pan-Africanism and ujamaa. This led him to think about African liberation and African ways of thinking and doing things. The end result was him becoming a nationalist and pan-Africanist. He wrote a book about African humanism, ubuntu. This is an important piece of literature for African social work.

Kaunda's philosophy of African humanism (ubuntu)

Kaunda (2007)'s eight basic principles of African humanism or ubuntu are:

1. The human person at the centre, people centred
"...This MAN is not defined according to his color, nation, religion, creed, political leanings, material contribution or any matter..."
2. The dignity of the human person
"Humanism teaches us to be considerate to our fellow men in all we say and do..."
3. Non-exploitation
"Humanism abhors every form of exploitation of MAN by man."
4. Equal opportunities for all, non-discrimination
"Humanism seeks to create an egalitarian society--that is, society in which there is equal opportunity for self-development for all..."
5. Hard work and self-reliance
"Humanism declares that a willingness to work hard is of prime importance without it nothing can be done anywhere..."
6. Working together
"The National productivity drive must involve a communal approach to all development programs. This calls for a community and team spirit..."
7. The extended family

"...under extended family system; no old person is thrown to the dogs or to the institutions like old people's homes..."

8. Loyalty and patriotism

"...It is only in dedication and loyalty can unity subsist."

Kaunda wrote "Zambian humanism came from our own appreciation and understanding of our society. Zambian humanism believes in God the Supreme Being. It believes that loving God with all our soul, all our heart, and with all our mind and strength, will make us appreciate the human being created in God's image. If we love our neighbour as we love ourselves, we will not exploit them but work together with them for the common good (p. iv)."

His two basic personal principles were relating with the creator, God and relating with neighbours or each other.

"Zambian humanism, this thesis argues, is a postcolonial discourse whose aim was to break with the colonial past and to create an African identity (Mwangala, 2009)".

"When Kaunda took over from British rule, his government chose an ideology: Zambian humanism. It was a form of African Socialism, which combined traditional African values with Western socialist and Christian values. This ideology was eventually declared Zambian national ideology and philosophy in 1967. The choice of this ideology was based on the fact that Africa had always contained much indigenous socialism which the colonialists had tried to destroy, and so the Zambian humanism was an attempt to rescue pre-colonial values and traditions and to use these as the basis on which to build the modern state. Like every other humanism, it set out to create a society that places the human person at the centre of all activity, social, economic and political (Kanu, 2014)".

Pan-African theory

Throughout his life, he castigated colonialism and neo-colonialism. For doing this, his country suffered a lot. He was attacked by the apartheid regime in South Africa and Zambian infrastructure was destroyed. But he has to do this work, reciprocating what other countries like Tanzania had done to his country. It was a duty Zambia had to partake. In his own words, he said Zambia received sanctions from Thatcher (then British PM) and Reagan (then US President) for supporting African liberation. Zambia wanted its neighbours to be free. For example, these former leaders stopped an oil company in Zambia that had established a huge extraction program and they also targeted copper. It was to silence Kaunda and his people for speaking against apartheid. Copper prices fell drastically, with huge impact of the Zambian population. But he spoke openly about this form of injustice. After meeting Reagan in 1987, he said we need

to base our relationship on truth, social justice and fair play with Africa. Decolonisation requires commitment, even if it means imprisonment and sanctions, he said. Pan-African meetings and engagements played an important part in developing Kaunda's pan-African Kaunda' ideals, for example:

1. He attended the fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester in the UK that was held between 15th and 19th October 1945. The congress was also attended by Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya; Dr. Hastings Banda of Malawi; Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. After the meeting Kwame Nkrumah said to his colleagues "...Now you've seen an independent state, we've had this big conference, now go on and free your part of Africa..."
2. In January 1960 Pan-African Freedom Movement for East, Central and Southern Africa (PAFMECA) Conference held in Mbale, Uganda from 24 to 25 December 1960. KK said "...I am a Pan-Africanist and I believe in larger units. But this must be based upon the consent of the people..."
3. In 1961 Kaunda visited Martin Luther King Jr., a US Civil Rights leader in the USA. The meeting strengthened his pan-African ideals, including fighting for liberation of Africa.

"After 70 years of British colonial rule, I inherited a country with only 100 degrees, only three being medical doctors."

During his reign as first republican President, Kenneth Kaunda managed to unite or the 73 tribes under his common motto of "one Zambia one nation". He also introduced what he termed "humanism week", a week that preceded 24th October, Zambia's independence day. During this week, citizens were called upon to work together, cleaning the environment and well as helping the needy in the community.

The major themes and features of Kaunda's pan-African model are:

1. Need for maintaining an African overarching philosophy in all spheres of life - political, economic and social.
2. Doing away with colonial mentality, breaking with colonial past
3. Appreciation of African values, heritage and worldviews
4. Socialism – ensuring that the means production, distribution, and exchange is community owned and controlled
5. Authentic African identity
6. African spirituality

Philanthropy

After leaving politics, Kaunda focused on philanthropy. He founded the Kenneth Kaunda Children of Africa Foundation, focussing on effects of HIV/AIDS on children but also the military. Like Thabo Mbeki, his guiding principle was 'you can't defeat AIDS without defeating poverty'.

10 ways to use African humanism theory in social work

Essentially, African humanism is ubuntu. We use it in several ways, including but not limited to:

1. Setting values and ethics of professional practice.
2. As a philosophy and theory for the profession used in thinking about social work, teaching, learning and writing.
3. Ethics for research.
4. Values for community organisation and development.
5. Decolonisation.
6. Spiritual social work.
7. In promoting economic development.
8. It is a theory for developmental social work.
9. For social justice.
10. To design or manage social welfare systems.

Conclusion

Kenneth Kaunda was pan-Africanist, teacher, welfare officer, farmer, politician, theorist, thinker or philosopher and philanthropist. In social work, we will remember not only for his pan-African ideals but for being the founder of the theory and philosophy of African humanism. Humanism did not bring immediate social and economic benefits to Zambia. It did not even instil morality immediately. Is its contribution understated? Was it short-lived? Was competition from western values of choice, urbanisation, modernisation and capitalism immense? Whatever happened, KK left a philosophy that is not only Zambian but African humanism.

Some of his written works

Kaunda, K. D. (2007). *Zambian hu-manism, 40 years later*. Sunday Post, October 28. 20-25.

Kaunda, K. (1974). *Humanism in Zambia: A Guide to its implementation*. Lusaka. p. 131.

Kaunda, K. D. (1973). *The humanist outlook*. Longman Group Ltd., UK. p. 139.

Kaunda, K. (1966) *A Humanist in Africa*. London: Longman Greens

Video

Conversations with History: Kenneth D. Kaunda

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4RPr4rNCtw>

Questions for students assessment and exams

- What are some of the key themes of Kaunda's pan-Africanism? Focus on 4-6.
- Looking at Africa today, assess strengths of Kaunda's humanism philosophy.
- Compare Kaunda's and Nkrumah's pan-Africanists ideas.
- How did Kaunda put his ideas into practice?
- How would rural people benefit from Kaunda's pan-Africanism and humanism?
- Review literature on Kaunda and generate 5-8 themes.
- What factors impact African countries and the AU's sovereignty today?
- How could Kaunda's ideas impact the work of social workers today?
- What is Kaunda's contribution to social work?
- Write a philosophical response to Kaunda's humanism proposition.

Questions and topics for research students and researchers

- The roles of pan-Africanists in promoting the goals of social work and social development.
- Identify any three emerging pan-Africanists and outline their backgrounds, techniques and aspirations.
- What are the views of selected respondents on strengthening the pan-African movement?
- Is Africanism in conflict with goals of the United Nations? What are the disadvantages of the United Nations to Africa?
- Use African humanism as a framework to study decolonisation or neo-colonisation in a selected community, village, town, country or region.
- How effective are sanctions? Use examples from African countries that had been sanctioned by western countries.
- What are the arguments of modern pan-Africanists?

We hope you will find this resource useful in your social work learning, practice or teaching.



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