

**OHAZURUME AS OHACRACY AND DEMOCRACY:  
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONVERGENCE OF  
THE IGBO AND GRAECO-MODERN POLITICAL  
LEADERSHIP SYSTEMS**

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**Abstract**

Leadership is as old as the chequered history of Humanity and eternal timelessness of Divinity (Trinity). Though the conceptual and lexical appreciation of leadership styles may differ but the age-long idea of Ohazurume as Ohacracy for the Igbo Nation and Democracy for the Western Nations seems to be practically synonymous and a mere convergence of Igbo and Graeco-Modern Political Leadership Systems. Using the methods of critical review and analysis, one finds out that the leadership lexicon Ohazurume is Ohacracy conceptually westernized. Equally, the people, Oha, remain the labyrinth connection between Ohazurume and Democracy. To these people, however, their idea of Government, that is governance and leadership, is Government by consensus which is central to Ohazurume as democracy in traditional Igbo-Nation sense.

**Keywords:** *Ohazurume*, Ohacracy, Democracy, Leadership, Belongingness

**Introduction**

The foundation of Modern Democracy was laid during the European Enlightenment, an 18th Century Philosophic Movement. This was championed by John Locke who is frequently called the Father of Modern Democracy for his Political Theory which he developed in his *Two Treaties of Civil Government*.

The Political Philosophy which Locke developed in his work is highly democratic and had much influence on English politics and also on the American Constitution. The relationship between the *ruler* and the *ruled* he proposes is of more democratic and independent than any other theories given before him. He believes in equality of men,

the consent of the majority, the division of power and the right to rebellion.

Also, on Locke's State of Nature, he argues that men living together according to their reason without a common superior on earth and with an authority to judge between them are termed by them as proper state of nature. Therefore, Locke gives emphasis on equality of men. All men are created by God as equal and no one is superior to other. The foundation of this Modern Democracy of John Locke, that is, the kind of power sharing among community of people, forms the foundation of *Ohazurume* as a form of *Ohacracy* practiced by Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria.

### ***Ohazurume***

*Ohazurume* literally means collective will of the people, that is, communal will of the people. It is expressed within the popular phrases: *the people have spoken, the people have agreed together*. However, the people's wish is the solid foundation of *Ohacracy* which is by sheer extension the government of the Igbo people, by the Igbo people regardless of status and for the common good of the Igbo nation in general. *Ohazurume* is equally administered accordingly in the context of *Ohacracy* and in this form of political administration of power, the Igbo Society or Nation knows that in political leadership, power belongs to the people. Moreover, *Ohazurume* is the expressive political nitty-gritty of *Ohacracy*. *Ohazurume* nonetheless spells out the consensus action of the people which is very definitive in leadership style, that is, very synonymous with *Ohacracy*. *Ohazurume*, notwithstanding, is the *microcosm* of any styled leadership within the *macrocosm* of any society that shares power with full awareness that leadership is based on consensus. Hence, the leadership series of *Ekwenche Research Institute* has it that,

In Igbo Society power belongs to the people. *Ndigbo* elect their own leaders and tell their leaders what to do and how to lead them. *Ndigbo* have never accepted Rulers, not even when the British imposed warrant chiefs on them.

*Ohacracy*, therefore, is the unanimous decision of the people and it's the Igbo model of servant-leadership that is thousands of years old.

This form of servant leadership is possible because philosophically, *Ndi-Igbo* will always maintain a very fragile balance and delicate equilibrium between individualism and communalism definitively expressed in Belongingness. Such delicate balance in-between one's individuality and the community is seen more in the few expression of African philosopher's communalist metaphysics, where the I is located in the will which is very fundamental in the proper understanding of the concept of *Ohazurume*. Other expressions are in John Samuel Mbiti's popularized cultural statement: *I am because we are*; Henri Maurier's concept of Relation: *I-With*; Mogobe B. Ramose's *Ubuntu Ontology* and Chukwudum Barnabas Okolo's *Being-with*.

### ***Ohazurume*: A Leadership Style**

*Ohazurume* as a leadership style or model is based on the will of the people. Etymologically *Oha* means the mass, people and *zuru* meaning equal to the task: shows completeness; *ume*, means will, energy, depending on the usage in a sentence while *me* or *mee* expresses a task already completed amidst will or energy. *Ohazurume* is doing collectively the people's will in the general participated form of *Ohacracy* government. In this proper understanding *Ohazurume* is *Ohacracy*. According to Umeogu, B. (1998:107), *Ohazurume* is a principle governing thought as well as a practice governing conduct, in relation which people, by democracy of action, take care of the affairs of life. He further explained that *Ohazurume*, which acts as a function of reality typifies the organic integrality whose significance lies in the *univocality* of its *multivocality*. Hence, integrating *Ohazurume* as the philosophy of communal consensus; a philosophy of character and behaviour, which regulates a people's existence.

*Ohazurume* is a participatory form of government in Igbo land where everybody expresses his own view. As a property of Igbo government, Umeogu insinuated that it is a philosophy of life and action, a philosophy of *Ohacracy*, a philosophy of the government of everybody, by everybody and for everybody. This type of government was evidently seen in 507BC in the Greek world when the Athenian Leader Cleisthenes introduced a system of political reforms he called *demokratia* or rule by the people. *Ohazurume* form of *Ohacracy* starts from the family where there are kindred, *Umunna*, villages and

the entire town. **Ohazurume** kind of representative government embedded a participant in decision makings, opinions, laws, and even sanctions in the community.

### **Ohacracy as Leadership Model**

The current art and act of model leadership in Igbo Society, where power belongs to the people, is better appreciated within the conceptual bounds of **Ohaocracy**. **Ohacracy**, which has given a new kind of philosophy of life for the Igbo people as well as embedded in their political worldview, is defined by Iroegbu (1997) thus as:

**Ohaocracy** is the practical conception of societal order and governance in which the communities determine the praxis of the socio-political life of the people while taking into account basic individual and group peculiarities.

By this definition, **Ohacracy** is an active participation of all responsible Igbo persons in the polity which promotes the common good and the common goal in their existential life so that they can define and establish themselves and stand out as men in the society. Equally, **Ohazurume** which is all the same the collective will of the people determines their existence in the community which has no paradigm shift from **Ohacracy** but hinges on it for development and sustainability. **Ohacracy** as expressed in **Ohazurume** is embedded with the spirit of belongingness which has its root in community spirit, that is, in communalism. To this end, therefore, there is a political implication or significance of belongingness in the proper understanding of **Ohazurume** and **Ohacracy** as the Igbo Nation and Greek world appreciation of democracy respectively.

### **Belongingness**

Belongingness as a viable societal concept is very fundamental in the proper reshaping and refashioning of a desired better and positive human society. Belongingness, nevertheless, is one of such concepts in African communal and socio-political milieu. As such, it remains a crucial principle of operation in African political cum socio-communal enterprise. Belongingness has been a fundamental aspect of African

political, philosophical and communalist engagement. Belongingness, we must note, has been a basic cultural trait within the exigencies of African philosophy. And African philosophy, having permeated within cultures and traditions, has according to Okere, T., (1983) gathered a lot of *philosophemes* (which are reservoir of cultural raw materials from which any future philosopher can inspire himself or borrow his share of philosophical raw material). Thus, for it to be enterprising, it has to grapple with these emerging cultural and traditional issues.

Belongingness as a viable societal concept is very fundamental in the proper reshaping and refashioning of a desired human society. Belongingness, nevertheless, is one of such agreed together. Belongingness is a principle of membership established on the conceptual idea of *Ohazurume*. Being, in order to actualize itself, makes effort to belong; it must flow out. And this is what belongingness is all about. It is a principle that makes one a member in a given community. It is, therefore, a synthesis of the reality and experience of belonging. To belong is to be part of being. According to Iroegbu (1996: 78-87), belongingness is derived from the basic sense of unity (community) that exists among the members of the given political community.

In this sense, the concept of belongingness evokes a kind of relationship that is seen in the nature of man as a socio-political animal, and in this kind of appreciation, belongingness, among other principles, remains not only a definitive principle in African communalism, but as well, a contemporary way of redefining being. Belongingness remains a succinct way of understanding and explaining the African metaphysical understanding of being. In the coinage of Iroegbu (2000: 481-490), belongingness is the African metaphysics of To Be.

The concept of belongingness is very basic, and finds a potent basis and sustenance in communalism; as a theory of justice, expressing the active role of the community and the individual. As Ejenam, S. (2007:391) opines: *Belongingness is a principle of membership applied to a given political community. It is what moulds a community's cultural, historical, and traditional values.* According to Iroegbu, it is both a *terminus a quo* and a *terminus ad quem*. That means that it is very fundamental such that we cannot speak of social justice in Africa without it. Belongingness makes all members real

and participating members of the community. It gives all a sense of belonging.

Belongingness, therefore, is a synthesis of reality and experience of belonging. Irrespective of the limitation of belongingness, there is always an appreciation of it as if to say that belongingness is not limited to only a political community; belongingness can be extended to outside such community. To belong is to be a part of being. In Iroegbuø usage, *to be is to belong and to belong is to be*. It is in *belongingness* that one affirms ones *beingness* and that is, showing one's action. It is by belonging that one is active, that is, one is not dead. Therefore, to belong is to participate and in that, one is real and of course, active through belongingness. Belongingness, therefore, constitutes the nature of being. Belongingness is from the verb *to belong, ø* meaning to be part of or an appurtenance to something, in the group of, to have relation to or be a member of. Belongingness, therefore, borrowing from the foregoing, is a substantive that summarizes all the things that are, that is, all reality in relation to other things.

### ***Ohazurume as Ohacracy and Belongingness***

Whatever is, is part of reality, which is belonging to something. You belong in order to contribute to any common good. Without this act of belonging especially in a political community there will be no participation. Belongingness, however, overshadows these existential facts of every communal operation. This notion of belongingness is clearly reflected in John Donne's poem:

No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a  
piece of the continent, a part of the mainí .any man's  
death diminishes me, because I am involved in  
mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom  
the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.

Belongingness is, therefore, a fundamental quality in understanding whatever is. Nothing can be understood in terms of its completeness but in its political relation to other realities, defining itself through other beings. Everything is defined by a relation, that is, a thing or being is in relation to something, or with an attribute of engaging in something. This

form of relationship defines *Ohazurume*. And this fact of *Ohazurume* or *beingness* which is a form of relation is a form of belonging to, belonging with, and belonging in. relation, therefore, becomes a kind of state by which people realize themselves among others. This relation spells out a place, that is a place where people interact with each other, a place of social reality, a kind of integrated universe, in Donne's words, 'a piece of integrated universe is not a differential one but a fundamental or ontological integration. And for this particular being in itself, it is through this fact of belongingness that it integrates itself in reality.

Our identity, therefore, is in belonging. belongingness identifies realities as such. Our nature is in belonging. Its role is in belonging. Its mode and operations are in belonging. Belongingness, as such, is the ontological value of living. By belongingness, being is related to other beings by relationship of what it is or does. Hence, in this write-up, we shall concentrate on the hermeneutics of belongingness as an in depth quest for knowledge, and thus, an effective solution in understanding every reality on the onto-relational level. In this, there should be, as Iroegbu (1994: 374-380) opines, solidarity of belongingness in *whatever is* in the manner in which we exist and relate in the reality of living and interacting thus:

Belongingness holds that our existence as human beings, as well as our integral participation in the society in which we find ourselves, are to be defined by our being given the sense and substance of belonging.

Across the philosophical epochs, in line with the foregoing exposition, different meanings have been attributed to being. All these, nevertheless, are in effort to have a comprehensive grasp of what being is all about. Different proposals have been made. Globalizing belongingness, therefore, is necessitated while comprehending being as expressing itself, thereby rolling into belongingness in its general and fundamental character and attribute. Often, the question is: can being be without belonging? Echoing Jean-Paul Sartre, there is no being which is not the being of a certain mode-a certain mode of belonging, a certain mode of existence. We must admit that the general concept of being has been a problem which led Martin Heidegger to shift his position from pure

ontology to fundamental ontology with his hermeneutics of *Dasein*. And in African Metaphysics, there is no consensus on the actual definition and description of what reality is, what being actually is. However, an in-depth analysis of belongingness suffices. In the words of Iroegbu (2000), òBelongingness is an abstract term, an ontological one that specifies that a thing is, because it belongsö.

### **Political Significance of Ohazurume as Ohacracy**

However, because belongingness is rooted in communalism, everybody does things and decides in favour of the community for the common good of all. Communalism has its root in the spirit of Ujamaa of John Mbiti, which is *I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am*. Ohacracy is operated based on customs, culture and values of the igbo society. Igbo people have a lot of values and cultures which they are highly recognised with. The African culture is full of symbols and symbolism and Igbo culture is not an exception. *Ofo*, which is the symbol of authority, plays important roles in Ohacracy. *Ofo* symbolizes authority and truthfulness and anyone who upholds *Ofo* must let justice prevail in all case. Alike, (2016) posits that;

Symbolism derives its power from the fact that it speaks not only of reflective intelligence but to the entire human psyche. It arouses deep emotional experience, releases hidden energies in the soul, gives meaning and stability to the personality, establishes strong loyalties and disposes a man for consistent and committed actions. Symbols in Igbo land can be seen in *Igba-afa* (divination), morning kola ritual, *Ichiozo* (title taking), bride price ceremony, masquerade ceremonies, etc.

Moreover, *Ohazurume* is a total involvement of every member of the society in Ohacracy. *Ohacracy* is a form of government of the people that is characterised by common census for the good of everybody, which is embedded in unity, love and progress hence òIgwe-bu-ike,ö meaning unity is strength. This can also be seen in the work ò*Njiko ka mma*ö meaning staying together is better than being alone which is the

theory of communalism as well. *Ohacracy* is made up of people with integrity. Each representative member of a family, kindred or even village is a man of honour, reputation, peace, eloquent and intelligent unlike the western form of democracy where their representatives do not have the moral will to serve.

In *Ohacracy*, everybody is a servant and not a leader in the sense that they are in the government of their people to serve their people. This is evident in the famous dictum of Fulton Sheen that no one has to be a master unless he becomes a servant. Igbo people believe that in *Ohacracy* where everybody has equal rights, and people's views are being respected, other beings and forces also play a vital role in their decision. These other forces or beings can be *Chi-Ukwu* (Supreme God), *Alusi* (Deity), Earth goddess -*Ala*. All these participate in their hierarchical order as to help men in the community achieve their aims individually and collectively especially in times of trouble and dispute settlements in the society. *Ohacracy* is characterised by participation by all that is collective participation where everybody is free to participate willingly, work as a team and achieve a common goal for themselves and the community at large.

In addition, *Ohacracy* is sustainable due to norms, morals, and laws of the land. Everybody is expected to obey the rules of the land and only those who are obedient to the norms of the society enjoy being part of the *Ohacracy* government. Moreover, *Ohacracy* hinges on justice for all. Justice in Igbo which is known as *Nkedirionye* meaning *giving one his or her due*. Igbo concept of justice believes in *Egbebere Ugo bere, nke si ibeya ebena, nku kwaa ya*. This means let the Kite perch, eagle perch, any that says let the other not perch, let its wing go into pieces. *Ohacracy* is a part of culture of the Igbo people. Culture which is the people's way of life is imbedded in their language. In sustaining *Ohacracy*, Igbo people are defining their culture through Igbo language as their means of communication because according to Onebunne and Alike, (2016:3),

Language is culture specific and culture dependent that has social relevance. It facilitates inter-personal relationship in the community, it is spoken and that is why it is part of man, culture and the community in which he finds himself.

*Ohacracy* which was borne out of spirit of oneness, staying together, brotherhood, communal life is the most sincere and incorrupt form of participatory government that *Ndi Igbo* are proud of.

### **Conclusion**

*Ohazurume* as *Ohacracy* form of leadership in Igbo land is a collective form of representative participation that is unique and peculiar to our culture. *Ohacracy* which hinges on justice and practiced within the communal setting of the people helps them to be at liberty in expressing themselves. Laski (1980:142) sees liberty as the eager maintenance of that atmosphere in which men have the opportunity to be their best selves.

*Ohazurume* brings us together in *Ohacracy* and makes us to identify each person's problem and probably offer a solution and a helping hand as well settle disputes without fear or favour. *Ohacracy* is embedded by the values of the Igbo people which they respect a lot. These values that are hinged in the culture of the community help everyone to try to be upright as to avoid being punished if found guilty of an offence. *Ohacracy* is a form of government that is consciously arranged and entered into by the people. *Ohacracy* often expressed in *Ohazurume* is peaceful, stable and non-violent form of representative government that needs to be embraced by all. *Ohacracy* is a form of governance that is divinely endowed for the Igbo race because it is devoid of bickering and all other forms of evil that is associated with political activities. The principles of justice, equity, fair play, oneness, brotherhood, love and unity which are seen in *Ohacracy* could be emulated by other forms of government as it will be useful and relevant to them. *Ohazurume* as *Ohacracy* makes an individual an integral part of the community and more the political community.

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