

EXPLORING AN ALTERNATIVE TO NIGERIA'S DYSFUNCTIONAL DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

In the history of mankind, every society has worked hard to bring about the best form of government that will help in bringing about the needed development, happiness and human flourishing; hence, varied forms of government such as monarchy, theocracy, aristocracy, autocracy and democracy have all been practiced at one time or the other by different societies. In modern times, the most desired form of government which has been adopted by different countries is democracy. It is very popular because it is fundamentally based on the principles of freedom and equality. These principles are metaphysical human values which the human spirit desires for flourishing and fulfillment in life. Contrariwise, other forms of government can bring about economic, technological and infrastructural developments but cannot guarantee freedom and equality for all in the society. Worthy of note is the fact that democracy cannot bring about the needed values the people desire when its basic principles are not strictly followed. This is the case with Nigeria, where democracy is being practiced in theory but in actual fact totalitarian democracy which is characterized by expediency, transaction, thuggery, vote buying, a win it by all means syndrome, and a Machiavellian pragmatic politics that leaves less to be desired. Hence, this paper argues that Nigeria's form of democracy is dysfunctional and has failed in meeting up with the desires of Nigerians and there is an urgent need for a change to a new form of government which this paper calls Ohacracy. Ohacracy is a participatory and egalitarian form of government in Igbo political administration. Ohacracy will be based on the Igbo town union governance structure. The critical analytic method of philosophy was used in this paper.

Keywords Democracy, Ohacracy, Electoral Violence, Dysfunctional Democracy, Nigeria

Introduction

The fundamental goals of every society are the happiness of its citizens, the internal wellbeing of the society and its development. These goals cannot be achieved without a

government that is formed and sustained by the people. By implication, a representative democratic government which is formed on the basis of merit, capacity, and competence of its leaders rather than on the basis of ethnicity, religion and elitists whims and caprices. It should be a government that is responsive to the plights and challenges of the citizens of the state rather than a passive, reactionary and non-proactive government. A type of government that can bring about the human flourishing of its citizens must be a government that can be held accountable by a strong civil society and the general populace and not one that gags the press which is the fourth estate realm of the society. It should be a government that promotes strong and independent state institutions rather than a government that specializes in the destruction, weakening and capturing of state institutions. It should be a government that promotes the rule of law rather than the laws of strong men. It should be a government that promotes judicial independence and its efficiency. Unfortunately, Nigerian democratic government is only famous for all the bad things that work against the will and the common good of the people which democracy stands for and this has been the basic reasons for the monumental failure of democracy in Nigeria.

It is on the basis of this that *Ohacracy* which is an egalitarian and participatory political form of government of the Igbo people comes in as an alternative form of government to the Nigerian form of democracy. *Ohacracy* promotes consensus among members, mutual respect, dialogue, accountability, transparency, justice, peace, brotherhood, equity, fair play, oneness, love, and unity. These are ethical values and principles that are conspicuously absent in Nigerian democratic system.

Conceptualization of Democracy

The idea of democracy is one that has varied definitions and as such different political theorists in ancient and contemporary time have provided different definitions and descriptions of the concept in order to capture the essence of the concept democracy. One of the most popular definitions of the concept democracy is the one given by the former great American President, Abraham Lincoln, on November 19th, 1863 “Gettysburg Address”. He defines democracy as the “government of the people, by the people and for the people” Richard A. Epstein, p. 819.

Kolawole (2004) holds that democracy is not the lack of military rule nor is essentially the presence of civilian officers; rather it is the state of affairs whereby political actors and institutions of state are equipped with values and norms of democracy. It is on this note that the impact of democracy has seep into all the aspects of society and governance p. 49-60. According to Franceschet, democracy is characterized by three fundamental necessities absence of violence, political participation and control, and equality in the political sphere (Franceschet, 2009).

Diamond et al. 1990 define democracy as a form of government that meets three essential conditions meaningful and extensive competition among individual and groups, especially political parties, for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force, a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair election, such that no major (adult) social group is

excluded; and a level of civil and political liberties; freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations-sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation (p. 6-7).

Fundamentally, democracy is a system that aids public participation and basic human rights. For Baron de Montesquieu, democracy is a form of government by which the people are the sovereign and should have the power of choosing their senators, ministers as well as their judges. Furthermore, suffrage and voting laws are very essential Montesquieu, p. 53. According to Appodorai, democracy is the system either of government under which the people put into effect governmental power directly or indirectly via representatives elected by them (Appodorai, 1975). In arguing against this view, Schumpeter made a rare polemical attack on the latent implications of the eighteenth century definition of democracy which avers that “The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will”Schumpeter, p. 260. According to Schumpeter, this definition makes certain untenable assumptions: first, that there is a known “common good” that we all agree on which delimits good and bad. Schumpeter argues that there do not exist a common good that all can be brought to see through rational argument. Even those with good intentions can disagree on what is best for society. Second, even if we could agree on a common good (ends), we would be unable to agree on the means. “‘Health’ might be desired by all, yet people would still disagree on vaccination and vasectomy”Schumpeter, p. 252. Third, those using this definition tended to come from a utilitarian perspective, such that the common good is that which is best for each individual. However, this view does not allow the people to express its will about the common good, but rather makes an assumption about what form that “will” should “naturally” take.

In the second part of Schumpeter's arguments, he avers that letting go of the assumption of utilitarianism as the common good requires assuming that each citizen is independently rational, able to sort good facts from misleading impressions, and swiftly/exactly form opinions. The value set of every citizen would be fully formed, not a sheer set of “vague impulses.” In such a society, one person's opinion would be just as good as another's. Government by the people is not necessarily better at being government for the people than other forms of governance can be. Having rejected the eighteenth century definition of democracy, Schumpeter went ahead to give his Procedural Theory of democracy. According to Schumpeter in Part I of his effort to define his type of democracy pointed out clearly that in classical theory each citizen has a rational opinion about every issue. Each citizen votes for a representative to carry out his opinion. Consequently, choosing a representative is “secondary.” Schumpeter's new theory reverses these roles: “The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote”Schumpeter, p. 269.

History of Democracy in Nigeria

Democratic practice began formally in Nigeria in 1960 immediately after the independence of Nigeria. However, this democratic experience was cut short by the military coup that took place in 1966 and afterward civil war broke in 1967 and came to an end in 1970. The next opportunity for Nigerians to experience democratic government was in 1979. Unfortunately, in four years time the military struck again in 1983. The military rule was sustained till 1993 when there was an interim government that was meant to lead to a proper democratic government; after that a fatal cancellation of the democratic election that took place in 1993 happened. This time around the military took over power till 1993 when Nigeria transitioned from military rule to a democratic government. The current Nigerian constitution came into formal use at the beginning of the 4th republic democratic rule in 1999 Adelekan and Ashibi, 2020, p. 262. For twenty four years of continued democratic practice in Nigeria, from 1999 till date what are the significant impacts Has the democratic government brought about happiness, internal wellbeing, and needed development Can Nigeria be properly rated as successful democratic country An attempt will be made in the next paragraph to examine Nigerian brand of democracy and its failures so far.

Nigeria's Dysfunctional Brand of Democracy

The concept democracy has universal meaning and idea because it is founded fundamentally on the principles of freedom and equality but it is particular to every country that practices it due to their own peculiarities. This can be seen in terms of how political power is achieved and public institutions function. On this note, there are different forms of qualifications of each country's form of democracy such as Portuguese democracy, American democracy, French democracy, German Democracy, South African Democracy; Etc. Nigeria also has its form of democracy which is founded on religious and ethnic politics; incompetent and squanderer leadership; electoral fraud; and severe poverty and high level illiteracy Ajayi and Ojo, 2014, p. 107.

Some of these social ills have been responsible for the failure in our democratic system, for instance, corruption. Nigeria is one of the major countries in the world where politics is more profitable than private sector businesses. Hence, this, accounts for the rationale behind unhindered corruption that has become a dominating business in Nigeria's political system. It is a serious contribution to the failure of democracy in Nigeria.

Apart from corruption which is a major cause of democratic failure in Nigeria, electoral fraud and violence are contributing factors as well. For a democratic government to do well the process that brings political officers into power has to be good if not excellent. In other words, every democratic government is as good as the processes that brought it into power. In Nigeria, elections have been marred by serious election violence over time limiting the country from producing credible leaders. According to Enajo (2010) electoral violence has been part of Nigerian democratic process since independence (p. 89). Anifowose and Babawale (2003) aver that the 2003 general elections were rigged by the influential people in power (p. 64). Rawlence and Albin-Lacey (2007) depict Nigerian elections as stolen 'rights' based on the fact that they were marred by bizarre show of rigging and bullying of voters in several areas around the

country(p. 1-2). The situation was not better in 2023.

Describing the 2023 general elections, the renowned author Chimamanda Adichie 2023 calls it in her open letter, Nigeria's Hollow Democracy. In this letter to President Joe Biden of the United States of America, she described how electoral fraud and violence marred the 2023 general elections and asked Mr. Biden not to congratulate the president elect because if he does he would be validating the criminality termed free and fair elections that were held on the 25th of February 2023 Adichie.

To further explore the success or failure of Nigerian democratic system of government one has to evaluate the country's democratic practices based on the principles of equality and freedom. John Rawls' principle of equality clearly describes equality appropriately when he asserts that each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others John Rawls, 1971, p. 52. It is correct to emphasize that there is no country in the world where democracy is practiced that its citizens are literally equal, but one thing is clear, in serious democracies like the United States of America, equality before the law is taken seriously. For instance, the former President Donald J. Trump indictment on a 34 felony charge and subsequent trial shows that no one is above the law in the United States of America Jonah, Protes, et al., 2023. This kind of thing cannot happen in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the principle of egalitarianism is more theoretical and less practical and this can be seen in the monumental and dangerously disastrous socio-economic and political inequality that characterizes Nigerian form of democracy. This has led to an astronomical huge gap between those who have access to power and public funds and those who do not. Since democracy is said to be government of the people by the people and for the people, it is therefore generally assumed that democracy is the most suitable form of government Ajayi and Ojo, 2014.

This is based on the fact that it is not just a form of government that seeks to bring about the attainment of the will and common good of the people but it is the form of government that promises the achievement of the intangible and metaphysical values the human spirit desires in order for man to express, develop and be whatever he thinks or imagines is possible within the ambit of the law. These values are freedom and equality.

While this may be so in some democracies, the reverse is the case in others: while democracy is synonymous with holistic development and aggregated growth in some climes; it is the representation of betrayal and inhuman deprivation in others. Nigeria probably personifies the latter. While some countries aspire to and do indeed practise democracy for the socio-economic benefit of the generality of the people or at least as many people as possible; others, like Nigeria, make their own brand of democracy government of the few by the few and for the socio-economic benefit of the few. Indeed, the most outstanding feature of Nigerian democracy is mind boggling and unpardonable waste of public funds on the comfort of a few Nigerians. The democracy of waste practised in Nigeria invests, first and foremost, in the comfort of officials rather than in human and material resources Ajayi and Ojo, 2014.

This accounts for the widening gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria. The inequality gap is made worse due to the government failure to provide functional infrastructures, efficient healthcare system, functional educational sector, healthy economic sector, efficient and proactive security architecture and functional and independent public institutions. According to Ngozi et al. 2020, Nigeria still lags behind in development indices such as poverty reduction, employment generation, effective healthcare delivery and level of corruption. 72. The fact is that, the politicians and top ranking public servants who have access to public funds embezzle the general wealth of the nation which is meant to develop the country for the benefit of all rather than the benefit of the few rich ones Odey, et al 2022, p.7. They steal so much public fund to the extent that they weaponize poverty in the citizens in order to keep the poor people perpetually poor for their selfish gains which include depriving them the opportunity to hold public offices and for them to be used for all criminal activities such as election violence and rigging.

On the principle of freedom which is foundational to democracy, top democratic countries that practice democracy in its truest sense, take human freedom seriously alongside the responsibility that goes with it. People have what in the Nigerian constitution is referred to as fundamental human rights which includes the right to life, dignity of the human person, personal liberty, fair hearing, private and family life, freedom of expression, and free press, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of movement, peaceful assembly and association, freedom from discrimination, right to acquire and own immovable property *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*, 1999, Chapter IV, 33-40 and others.

These fundamental human rights pointed out above demonstrate clearly the principles of equality and freedom but these human rights cannot be implemented if the rule of law is not put into full operation in Nigeria. The question is, is the rule of law fully operational in Nigerian democratic system The answer is no. The reason is because, since the rule of law which is meant to maintain the observance of the principles of equality and freedom is not fully operational in the country where injustice and violation of the fundamental human rights have been made to reign supreme. This, clearly demonstrates that Nigerian brand of democracy is dysfunctional and has failed. Hence, there is urgent need for an alternative model or system of government which should be a participatory Igbo political model of government referred to as *Ohacracy*.

Ohacracy as an alternative model of Government and Leadership

The social political system of government of the Igbo people which is deeply rooted in their culture, sustained by their customs, norms, values and language is termed as *Ohacracy*. *Ohacracy* is people oriented government whereby power belongs to the people and the people are the sovereign. *Ohacracy as* defined by Iroegbu 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 (Iroegbu, 1997).

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 human in the society. *Ohacracy* is expressed as a process by which the collective will of the people determines their existence in the community. This form of government has the feature of the spirit of belongingness which is founded on African communalism; hence, there is need for a brief description of belongingness in order to deepen the meaning of *Ohacracy* as an Igbo political system of government.

The concept of belongingness is fundamental in the understanding of African communalism. It is a theory of justice that promotes the active role of the community and the individual in the society. As Ejenam, S. 2007 avers, *belongingness is a principle of membership applied to a given political community. It is what moulds a community's cultural, historical, and traditional values* (p. 391). Iroegbu asserts that it is both a *terminus ad quo* and a *terminus ad quem*. This 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 (Onebunne & Alike, 2017, p. 95). As a matter of fact, there is nothing that exists that is not part of reality, which by implication belongs to something or a particular reality. We are part of a group in order to be able to offer our own quota to the common good of all. Without this act of belonging particularly in a political community there will be no participation. Belongingness, however, outshines these existential facts of every communal function. This idea of belongingness is obvious 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 main. . . .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 (Onebunne & Alike, 2017, p. 95).

Onebunne and Alike 2017 aver that 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 (p. 95). Consequently, our identity lies in belonging to a group. 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 (Onebunne & Alike, 2017, p. 96).

The Political Value of *Ohacracy*

Ohacracy is characterized by belongingness and belongingness is founded in African communalism. And in African communalism everyone carries out actions that are tantamount to favouring everyone in the community. It is based on African communalism that the leadership model of *Ohacracy* is derived. *Ohacracy* works based on the customs, culture and values of the Igbo people. Igbo culture like any other African culture is full of symbols and symbolism. For instance, *Ofo* in Igbo culture is the symbol of authority, and it plays major roles in *Ohacracy*. *Ofo* does not only symbolize authority, it does symbolize truthfulness as well. Hence, anyone who upholds *Ofo* should as a matter

of necessity and duty promote justice at all times. Alike avers 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. Alike, 2016).

It is based on this importance of symbol that Njoku 2009 holds that Ofo is an authoritative emblem symbolizing justice, righteousness, and truth p. 37. Also, *Ohacracy* is a form of government of the people that is known for consensus for the good of everybody, which is embedded in unity, love and progress therefore “*Igwe-bu-ike*,” meaning unity is strength Onebunne & Alike, 2017, p. 97. This can also be seen in the work “*Njiko ka mma*” meaning staying together is better than being alone which is the theory of communalism as well Onebunne & Alike, 2017, p. 98.

Ohacracy is also characterized by promoting integrity and as such it is made up of people with proven integrity. It consists of representatives from every family, kindred or even village as far as the person is a man of honour, of good reputation, peace loving, articulate and clever. This makes representatives to be trust worthy to do their work. This is complete opposite of what obtains in the western form of democracy practiced in Nigeria whereby their representatives do not have the moral will to serve. Most of them lack the interiority and competence to function efficiently.

Ohacracy is a leadership model that promotes servant leadership style. That is, a bottom to the top leadership approach that makes everyone to consider themselves as servants and not leaders who are in government of their own people to serve the same people. In *Ohacracy*, the Igbo people hold that spirit beings such as *Chi- Ukwu* (Supreme God), *Alusi* (Deity), Earth goddess -*Ala* play outstanding roles as well. They function in the order of hierarchy in order to assist human beings or men in the community to attain their goals individually and collectively particularly in bringing about peace when there are challenges and disagreements in the society Onebunne & Alike, 2017, p. 98. *Ohacracy* as a leadership model promotes equal rights, respect of views of other people and encourages active participation of the people. This means it allows for collective participation whereby everyone freely and willingly participate in the decision making process and work as a team in order to attain a common goal for both themselves and the larger community.

As regards transparency, sustainability and accountability, *Ohacracy* is sustainable based on norms, morals, and laws of the land. All the members or representatives as a matter of obligation and duty are meant to obey the laws of the land and this determines who can be part of the *Ohacracy* government. Furthermore, *Ohacracy* is founded on justice for all and sundry. The word for justice in Igbo is *Nkedirionye* which is *giving one his or her due*. The Igbo concept of justice holds that in *Egbe bere Ugo bere, nke si ibeya ebena, nku kwaa ya*. This means let the Kite perch, and eagle perch, any that says let the other not perch, let its wing go into pieces Onebunne & Alike, 2017, p. 98. *Ohacracy* is an

Igbo social political form of government and leadership model which is an integral part of the Igbo culture and as such it is sustained using the Igbo language. The Igbo language is the fundamental means of communication and expressing themselves, and as such they define their culture through their language. Onebunne and Alike 2016 support this view when they assert that 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(p.3).

*Based on the characteristics of unity, brotherhood, consensus and communal life of belongingness possessed by Ohacracy as a system of government it is ranked high above Nigeria's brand of dysfunctional democracy because it is the most sincere and incorrupt form of participatory government*Onebunne & Alike, 2017, p. 99.

Furthermore, it promotes transparency and accountability. The selection processes of representatives in the government is based on character, competence and capacity of the individual and at any point the individual deviates from these ethics of good conducts that were considered before his selection, the person will immediately be withdrawn from the government. Based on this, members are committed, hardworking, principled and proactive in doing their jobs to avoid disgrace and expulsion. This is unlike the Nigerian Democratic Party primary processes of electing members that will represent the party. The later is transactional and after the contestants buy their way into becoming candidates of their parties they disarm the members from holding them accountable Adelekan and Ashibi, 2020. For this reason, *Ohacracy* is the best form of government that Nigeria needs to make efforts to adopt at this critical time in Nigeria's history since Nigeria's form of democracy is dysfunctional and has failed in every aspect of human life.

However, since *Ohacracy* was predominantly practiced in an era in traditional Igbo culture when population size was much less and the society was not as complex as it is now, it will be challenging to practice it completely as it was practiced then. For this reason, there is need for *Ohacracy* to adopt the current Igbo town union governance structures that are efficiently working in dealing with social and economic inequalities and infrastructural deficits in Igbo towns and communities. Put differently, notwithstanding the great qualities of *Ohacracy*, its biggest challenge in this contemporary society is population growth and size. The society is now bigger than what it used to be in the traditional Igbo society and has become more complex due to cross-cultural, political, religious, urbanization, migration, trade, and technological influences. It will be challenging to practice *Ohacracy* the way the Igbo people practiced it in traditional Igbo society. Consequently, there is need for it to be based on the modern town union governance structure in Igbo land.

Town Union Governance Structure in Igbo Land

The town union government is a principal element in community and rural development. It is an instrument of self help approach to community development in the post-colonial epoch. Membership is by birth, marriage, parental origin or adoption Obiakor and Okoreaffia, 2021, p.370. People who have resided in a particular town for 10 years or more and have accepted the norms and rules guiding the operation of the union and the town are eligible to become admitted into the union. This allows for inclusivity,

justice, participation, diversity, innovation, equity and farness. The union is a rational association of individuals who in spite of their class difference consider themselves as equals. The town union governance system is founded on the principles of the rule of law and not blinded by religious and ethnic sentiments. The interest of the group is both mutual and broad based. Members help their fellow members and at the same time they focus on the big issues of bridging the gap between the government and the people by identifying areas of failures in governance by solving social and economic problems of the community and town Obiakor and Okoreaffia, 2021, p. 369.

They also aid in rallying the people of the town for meaningful development of the town as regards infrastructures. The governance structure of town unions in Igbo land allows for transparency, accountability, serious punitive measures to put erring members in check Obiakor and Okoreaffia, 2021, p. 370. All these qualities which the Igbo town unions possess that make them effective rural and community development body in this contemporary era can help to fill in the gap of the laps of *Ohacracy* as an effective participatory governance model.

Conclusion

Ohacracy is a system of government organized in a systematic way by constituting membership of men of integrity, capacity and competence from families and kindred. It is maintained through the ethical values and norms of the society. It promotes high level of accountability from members. It is the most sincere, incorruptible and people centered participatory and representative form of government. *Ohacracy is characteristically peaceful, secure and non-violent form of representative government that is more efficient and better than the current Nigeria's form of democracy that has failed in all indices of a developing country. On this note, Nigeria's dysfunctional form of democracy needs to be immediately replaced with Ohacracy. It is peaceful and stable form of government that promotes the principles of justice, equity, fair play, oneness, brotherhood, love and unity Onebunne & Alike, 2017, p. 98 which will ensure that it does not fail like the Nigeria's form of democracy that is bedeviled by all forms of evil. Nigeria's brand of democracy creates class distinction and disunity which results in all forms of injustice, however, Ohacracy gives an individual the capacity to be a vital part of the community as well as a part of the political community which makes it better than Nigeria's form of democracy. All these important values inherent in the practice of Ohacracy make it the best form of government for Nigeria at this critical moment in our history that is bedeviled by bad form of government and leadership. Put differently, Ohacracy as a form of government which is devoid of wrangling and all other forms of evil associated with political activities in Nigerian democratic space remains the best form of government for Nigeria if adopted. It will be practiced by adopting the current Igbo town union governance system which has been very efficient and effective in bringing about social and economic development in Igbo towns and communities.*

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