

African Vicious Triangles

A Plea for « Ohacracy » : the socio-political Lee-Way ¹

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Introduction

I propose here an ethico-political theory called “Ohacracy” that will help to solve the long predicamental situation of African countries. The African general dilemma is here analysed into three vicious triangles that are interwoven. The way out must be “ohacratic,” i.e., community-centered.

1. The three vicious triangles

1.1 Why triangles, not circles

A circle creates an impossible situation: the inability to identify the starting or closing-point. Thus a vicious circle remains continuously embarrassing to resolve. A triangle is less entangling. There are visible joints. Its viciousness has thus an identifiable joint toward resolution. In Africa’s vicious triangles, points of take-off for solution are possible. We can make it. What now are these triangles?

1.2. The three triangles

From the figure on page 9 below, we have

(1) A macro-triangle : religious-moral-human (r-m-h)

(2) A meso-triangle : political-economic-social (p-e-s)

(3) A micro-triangle : ignorance-poverty-disease (i-p-d)

The micro-triangle (i-p-d) lies within the meso (p-e-s), which in turn lies within the macro (r-m-h). This is significant. For though they are separate triangles in terms of problematics, those that lie within others have rootedly causal influence from their mother-triangles. Seen *en globo*, the three triangles constitute one schema. One has the others as its context, both existentially and functionally. As the figures of their relationships will soon clarify, there is a general osmosis of influence of one triangle on the others.

1.3. Their relationships

1.3.1. Because we are religiously disintegrated, less astute and low visioned, we have moral inauthenticity. Because we have moral inauthenticity, we have little human integrity, both internally and externally. Our low human integrity includes the very low mentality we have of ourselves, both as individuals and as a people. There is a generalized inferiority complex that manifests at times in a look-down on our culture, language and general African life-style. The triangle is completed in a reflow into our religious wishy-washy vapour and never-satisfying proselytism.

1.3.2. Because we are politically jaundiced, unstable, and orchestrated, we are economically in servitude and flagrant disequilibrium. And because of our economic disorganizational malaise, we are in socio-cultural turmoil of a confused *mélange*. The latter re-translates itself

¹ This is the text of a lecture delivered on November 12, 1997 as Visiting Professor and Fellow to the Chaire Hoover, Catholic University of Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve.

into our political mumbo-jumbo irresponsibility. Thus political stupidity leads to economic morass that yields horizontally tragic social cannibalism.

1.3.3. Because we are ignorant, uneducated, and therefore culpably wanting on essential developmental knowledge, we are condemned to gruesome poverty: both of mind, body and materials. Our poverty joins with our ignorance to leave us helpless in the face of disease. We fall sick. We are unable to cure ourselves. We cannot work no thanks to our sickness. We remain poorer, more ignorant; and diseases multiply. The triangle is completed and the viciousness compounded². Each triangle has both internal (national) and external (international) aspects in terms of constraints and problematics.

1.4. Synthesis

In all, there is an evident chain-connection, both among the three contact-points of each triangle, and among the three triangles themselves. The global connection is the internal workings of each triangle. There is an intra-flow of

Religious-Moral-Human prongs,
Political-Economic-Social spheres, and the
Ignorance-Poverty-Sickness drama.

That triad of viciousness is a concrete situational condition that is cantankerously eating up the inmates of the African continent. The inter-relational communication is traceable equally in the obverse. One can proceed from the micro via the meso to the macro triangle. In all the cases, the same viciousness reigns.

1.5. Consequences

As schematized in the figure, the Religious with the Moral and the Human drama will lead to the inevitable death or demise of a people, the entire African people, if the viciousness is left unbroken. The Political cum the Economic and the Social will result in the death of the political entities called countries or generally nation-states. Social disintegration via revolutions, wars or other tragic events will be the logico-existential conclusion of an unbroken viciousness in this parlance. Finally, the addition of Ignorance, Poverty and Disease will systematically eliminate the individuals that exist in the area under consideration. Death—personal, familial, class and tribal—will be the eventual follow-up of the continuity of this triangle. In all and each of the vicious triangles, there is death. All three triangles combined will result in Total Death. Total Death, in this logic, is the end of the world—of the African world³.

2. The lee-way to resolution

2.1. **Ohacracy:** Definition and analysis

“Ohacracy” is the practical conception of societal order and governance in which the community determines the praxis of the socio-political life of the people, while taking into account basic individual and group peculiarities.

The term *Ohacracy* is derived from the Igbo stem *oha*, meaning, community, assembly; and the suffix, *-cracy*, (*kratêein*, to rule, govern, organize, as in democracy. Ohacracy etymologically defined means rulership by the *Oha*, the community members. Community is

² Among many who have graphically described the African (Nigerian) bad situation, see Amadi, *Ethics in Nigerian Culture*, Ibadan, Heinemann Press, 1982.

³ For more detailed developments, see P. Iroegbu, *The Kpim of Politics, Communalism, Toward Justice in Africa*, Owerri, IUP, 1996, ch. 12.

an *Oha-Umunna*, with one Father, God Himself, and one mother, a geo-cultural mother, Nigeria. They have one general destiny: the conviction and action as Umunna as foundation stone. This has a close nuance with Nyerere's Ujamaa. Ohacracy is democracy in an African context. In other words, it is the viable African species of contemporary institutional democracy.

In it, Followership is as important as Leadership. In it, leadership is neither a one-man show, nor a matter of hierarchical or aristocratic machination. In it there is the solidarity of decision and implementation of decisions by the members in matters that affect the members. In it the *Oha* is the central focus. For the individual is so, but in *Oha*. The *Oha* is a community of individuals and the individuals are individuals in *Oha*.

Oha nwe madu—"The community owns the individual." *Ohakwe*—"The community allows." Each nation in Africa forms the locus of an *Oha*. Thus *Oha-Nigeria* is the Nigerian nation understood as a political community.

The will or mandate of the people as a people is determinant. In relation to democracy in general, one can say that ohacracy is the African model of democracy. It is democracy in the African context. Specifically, it takes into account the African identity and values. It builds on African experience: its history, circumstances, and its contemporary situation. It is a realistic articulation in view of a positive future.

This is why Ohacracy defines the *modus operandi* of socio-political life: that the community sets out how we govern ourselves. All forms of dictatorship, military rule or dominion by a group, class or region is automatically ruled out. All will agree that it is only those we have chosen ohacratically who will govern us. Anybody that is not chosen by us must go. It also determines the *modus vivendi* of our communal life: that the basic individuality of the persons shall be respected. The basic individualities are those givens of each person (ends, duties and rights, e.g., choice of profession), that make a person flourish. Particular talents and group values like language, cultural artefacts and socio-moral values have to be integrated within the general run of communal development. These however must not threaten the existence of the community as community. The individual will grow and develop, but in community.

Nationhood

The above element of community brings to focus the fundamental question of nationhood. Fundamental because on it depends the viable participation of the members in the construction or re-construction of the political community. Example Nigeria: we must agree that we are (in spite of evident tensions), already a nation. We decide that we want to remain so for many obvious reasons. We consent that we can build it, and that our individual and corporate successes depend heavily on our success as a nation. If the nation as a nation fails, we as individuals (Nigerians), have obviously failed.

Ohacracy takes off from the thesis that we are one in nationhood, that a lot more unite us than separate us. It believes that to contribute to Nigeria's success is a vocation of each Nigerian: South, North, West or East. Its conviction is that our common pristine faith of the Belongingness of all to this nation takes an edge over any disintegrative ideology. The practical implication of this is that we must now set up measures to remain one, fraternal, and in reasonable solidum. Then come distribution and contribution.

In Ohacracy understood as a political theory, there must be a set-up that would guarantee the participation of individuals in the various aspects of socio-political life that is theirs as a people, a nation, or a region. Both in constructing via jobs and offices and in distributing (sharing) via wages and allocations. This is a condition of the possibility for a viable political structure that can succeed in the Africa of today. Dictatorships can never

succeed in building a just society. Nor can the western liberal models. Only Ohacracy can. By going back to our communal roots and building there-from for our contemporary world ⁴.

Pristine Roots

These are three:

(i) **Belongingness:** The arrangement of the foundational structure of society is to incarnate and manifest the commonness of origin, of history and of general destiny of all the members of the community.

(ii) **Equal Substantive Liberty:** The foundational structure of society is to be arranged so as to secure and promote the basic values of society for all the members of the community.

(iii) **Integrity:** To develop integrally each and sundry and the society itself (authentic development) is the *leitmotif* of the foundational structure.

These roots can be called the principles of a just ohacratic society ⁵. They are to be co-ordinatively operational in the efforts to organize society through the best practical means unto the best attainable ends. We shall now apply Ohacracy to the three vicious triangles identified in Africa.

2.2. First triangle

Because of our uncompromising religious attitudes, characterized by exclusivism and disintegration, our common moral stamina is abated and our human resources are scattered. Ohacracy would maintain that any religion in Africa today must see the neighbour as first and foremost a member of the community. This is pristine African faith. The religions that have come from the East (Muslim) and from the West (Christian) must be re-educated to accept the Belongingness of all to the community as prior to any religious fundamentalist proselytism. When all are accepted as members, all would be given a fair chance to develop in equal substantive liberty, and integral development would crown the efforts of the ohacratic arrangement. The result will be a moral authenticity that would issue in genuine human flourishing.

2.3. Second triangle

Political instability and immaturity lead us to economic mess that results inevitably to social disequilibrium. Ohacracy addresses this drama by insisting on a strong political will of the people to choose who will lead them. The power to choose is irretrievably with the people. None may usurp it. Having made their choice via a generally accepted ohacratic arrangement, that leadership must be given the co-operation it requires by the followership.. This includes reasonable patience, open dialogue and critical obedience in the backdrop of communal solidarity to forge ahead in building up an economy that will work.

When the economy is communally harnessed into growth and fair participation, the resultant social effect will be sane for the community. Social stability and participatory confidence will reflow to constitute a healthy political life which will banish the death of a nation under construction. A fair chance in the foundational structure for all to participate in both the productive and distributive aspects of justice will ensure a continuity of the good order

⁴ Those who have proposed political theories for Africa, eg K. Krafona in his *Peoplecracy*, V. Awosika in his *Theory of Ministries*, and W. Mbilizi in his *Individual and Community*, have all in the main failed to specify foundational principles on which a viable political structure can be built. We find these insufficient, and hence we proceed with a theoretical articulation that spells out the necessary foundations for our political life.

⁵ For explanatory details, see P. Iroegbu, *Communalism*, chs. 6-10.

obtained in economic and social life. The latter will in turn ensure an integrally developed political community.

This fair chance means neither pure egalitarianism nor communist anonymity. Nor does it fall to the other extremity of liberal individualism and social atomism. Our original links form the basis of our sharing. Yet our basic individualities give vent to our differences in job and office allocations. In the proper arrangement of the second triangle, equal opportunity will yield unequal resources and productivities. Yet in general, all will feel fairly treated as Belongingness will give to all a chance to live a fairly developed existence in community. The latter will be practicalized through the re-distribution of products by fair taxation.

2.4 Third **triangle**

The Ignorance-Poverty-Disease triangle is a clear sign of a battered people. It is the consequence of the viciousness of the first two triangles. We are brought to a nation on the verge to ruin. Ohacracy builds on the arrangement of the basic structure done from the first two triangles to address the third triangle. Ignorance is the mother of disease and the grandmother of poverty which latter is the great-grandmother of more ignorance that multiplies diseases and confounds a people in continued poverty.... That is the African dilemma today.

Ohacracy takes education, formation and training seriously. It is the rock on which the vessel of ignorance is shattered. From there we know how to avoid diseases and to cure inevitable ones. When we are healthy, we can work. When we work and work hard, we can get our means of livelihood, even become rich. Then can we develop other aspects of the universe confided on us to develop.

None may be left in ignorance that dumps the talents and thus swallows the personality of each. None may be left in abject deformative poverty. Education, basic health and other fundamental needs of life are a right for each member in Ohacracy. No other resources may be over-accumulated when these basic needs are not yet provided for all the members. Example, education on responsible parenthood that balances the number of children with the ability to rear them well. This is the value of a reasonable balance in population control. Other values to be fully integrated in an ohacratic arrangement include among others: the centrality of human person, respect for life, the extended family system, solidarity, hospitality, deep religiosity (or transcendence), the sacredness of nature, high moral standard, dialogue and communication, openness in political discussion and frankness in communal decisions. These are deep African values. Even if some of them are found elsewhere, they are still African. They must therefore be structurally built into the African society in view of reaching integral development in the ohacratic manner.

If Ohacracy breaks the chain of poverty, those of disease and ignorance will naturally collapse. Many may even think that we should urgently begin with this vicious chain-hook of poverty, as it is the most excruciatingly evident in our today African societies. This is possible. However the three African vicious triangles are urgent capital negative points that Ohacracy addresses equally and with full force. To the hurry of an SOS for the three. This is theoretical. There is however a practical axis.

3. In Practice: Macro- and micro-**waves**

The complete solution of the entire myriad of the African dilemma involves the totality of all the efforts that will dismantle each triangular joint. This will require the deconstruction of the three vicious triangles into a counter-construction toward virtuous triangles. In the concrete praxis, there are two waves.

3.1. Micro or individual wave

Each person must decidedly light a candle in the vast darkness. To light one candle is to undertake some concrete exemplary action that will promote the good religious, political and educational life of the people. Such a candle-light will lead to moral, economic and welfare survival of our people. Example the contractor must fully utilize the fund given him by the state or company and do the job contracted to him. It will also bring about the human, social and health welfare of all. Another example, the teacher must bend down and prepare his lessons and devotedly teach the candidates allotted to him or her. His or salary will only thus be justified. Several individual lights of devotedness to duty will bring a lip forward in the society. These will shine out more, and carry more substantive weight when co-ordinated with the positive efforts of others.

In the process, many candles lit together as members acting integrally, will blossom into a mighty light of life and success. One can put on one's light of effective concrete action from any of the triangular joints, beginning with either *a* or *p* or *x*. To this, there is the communal.

3.2 Macro or communal wave

Ohracacy here demands a concrete, massive and intensive conscientization process. This is to be a systematically organized education/formation programme. Such is to sharpen the public mind, create general awareness and thus dig the roots of our viciousness for all to see, judge and act.

Ohracatic groups could be formed to concretize this wave in view of giving it continued effectiveness. Eventually, these groups, call them movements will form the fulcrum of an internal revolution that will speedily transform general viciousness (like corruption, stupour carelessness and greed) into public virtuousness (like honesty; agility, respect and patriotism). Common goals will be set and pursued via the process and a leap will be made in the struggle for survival.

Education on the internal factors of our predicament like abuse of office, selfishness and impatience will be complemented by education on the external ones, e.g., competitiveness, power-politics and international cum racial egoisms. Clearly, the micro- and the macro-waves of effective actions are complementary as one must reinforce the other toward integral justice. One functional consequence of the dual waves (micro- and macro-) is the link between distribution and contribution. They are co-relative to each other. One cannot have the right to distribution, i.e., to share in the communal goods of society if one does not fulfil one's responsibility of contributing to societal good. Distribution is in principle consequent on contribution. Hence any wealth not based on fair wage or equitable exchange must be revisited in justice.

3.3. Integral justice

Generally conceived, Ohracacy is a theory of integral justice. The latter does not concern only the economic or social distribution of resources. It concerns equally all the major aspects of our societal life as far as these are contributable or distributable in the foundational structure of society. It also relates the political community inwardly and outwardly.

The pivot of ohracatic justice which is integral is the human person. He is the central focus of all societal provisions. The person lives in culture as both the creature and creator of culture or forms of life. In this focus-on-the-person perspective, cultural values like life, procreation, hospitality, solidarity and mutual communion are encouraged. Contrarily any forces that go to diminish these are discouraged even in institutional establishments. Above all, gross individualism that kills mutuality is discountenanced in educational structures.

Finally, integral justice cares for the whole person : body, mind and soul. Unnecessary dichotomies are avoided. Provisions are made both for the material, socio-economic and for the moral-spiritual sanity of the human person. For one without the other is incomplete. When

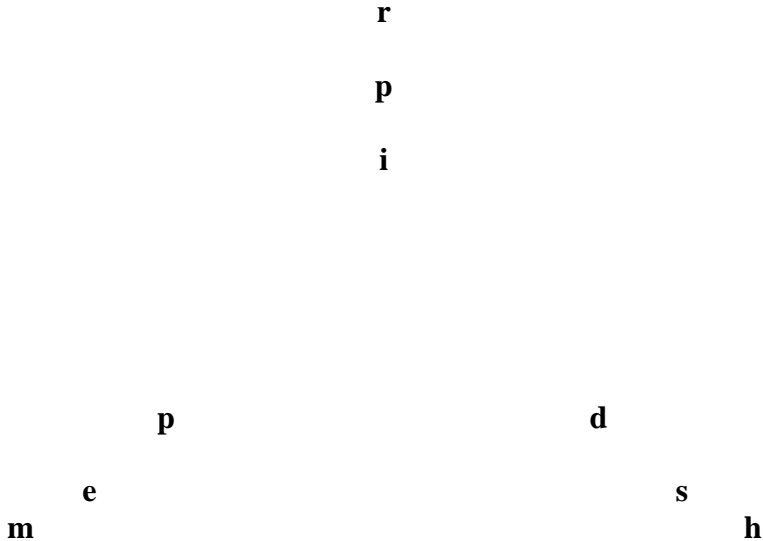
all is said and done as far as circumstances permit, we shall arrive at an ohacratia society of *Uwa-oma* (good-world). There, Ohacratia has passed from theory to practice, an articulation that yields a real existential society.

Conclusion

Theories, there have been several. But a relevant, constructive yet practicable articulation of a people’s situation for a better take-off we have lacked. This essay attempts to supply for this lacuna. It does not just go the African past nor copy from the east or from the west. It goes beyond these.

Ohacratia digs backward, to the African roots. It recovers our commonness. It then looks round and outward. It catches our contemporary situation. There is a heritage of various elements, e.g., international responsibilities. On these synthesis of values, Ohacratia is built. A society that will work today in Africa must be an ohacratia one. That means: one built on the community and its values, yet in constructive dialogue with other communities of our modern world.

Three principles we saw underlie Ohacratia: Belongingness, Equal Substantive Liberty, and Integrity. Put in practice, two waves are at work: micro and macro. Individuals are to start positive actions-in-solidum. And the community as a community must now set sail in *afro-xiology*-based formative action. With these we succeed in constructing a socio-political community where all will be members with the means to flourish as individuals-in-community.



Relationships : r-m-h <-----> p-e-s
 p-e-s <-----> i-p-d
 i-p-d <-----> r-m-h

Figure : African Vicious Triangles